

POLITICS OF CONFRONTATION

The Babri - Masjid Ramjanmabhoom
Controversy Runs - Riot

Edited With an Introduction By
ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER



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INTRODUCTION

Asghar Ali Engineer

Babri Masjid - Ram Janambhoomi controversy is very much alive and will remain alive for quite sometime to come. It should not be seen merely a mandir-masjid controversy; it is above all a political controversy and also involves much deeper questions of identity and power. To be more true, Babri Masjid and Ramjanambhoomi Temple are powerful symbols, more than historical artifacts or places of worship. This controversy, in my humble opinion, cannot be resolved only by proving through historical evidence either to be masjid or temple. It would take lot more to resolve it than mere historical evidence. Not that it can never be resolved or that no conclusive historical evidence can be presented. It can be resolved only if wider questions which are not of historical but of political and psychological nature, can be resolved. Also, rather than being resolved, it is possible that it might be relegated to background when issue of more pressing and urgent nature come to the fore.

It would be interesting to examine why this controversy assumed such unprecedented proportions and why did it exercise such influence over the minds of millions of Hindus and Muslims? Can it be explained only in the light of religious faith? Yes, but only partly. In order to understand it in its entire complexity, we will have to examine the political processes and economic developments in last few decades. It should also be remembered that religion exercises its influence over our minds in association with our social situation. Religion cannot be seen merely a theological and metaphysical force. It is also connected with the complex social web around us.

It has been seen that even purely theological controversies and metaphysical doctrines acquire much sharper edge, when they are used by groups of theologians for fighting their own battles for power and influence. Any religious controversy, argued on its own grounds, remains confined to few specialists and does not acquire social and political dimensions. It may create intellectual ripples but does not influence socio-political processes and does not warm the hearts of common people, let alone generating powerful emotions among them.

Babri Masjid-Ramjanambhoomi controversy should also be seen not merely a historical controversy but primarily a socio-political controversy. Its emotion-generating power can be understood only if it is seen in political and social context. I would try to explain this briefly by throwing some more light on socio-political developments in our country since independence. In fact the Hindus came in their own only after independence. Secularism and democracy did become political verbiage but never exercised deep intellectual, much less emotional influence. Before independence the upper caste Hindus always had a sense of deep hurt first due to political domination by Muslims and then by the British. For them the period of slavery was not confined to the British period but extended to the Muslim period as well the period of slavery was thus thousand year.

There was of course no such sense of hurt among the lower caste Hindus. Their period of slavery was much longer. They were always dominated and oppressed under the Hindu caste hierarchy. In fact many of them welcomed Muslim rule and even the British rule and embraced Islam and Christianity respectively to 'liberate' themselves from the caste slavery. Indian independence did not bring much relief to them at least initially. It only strengthened caste domination. Many leaders of untouchables were in fact more interested in improving their lot rather than outright independence. For them independence by itself would not ensure qualitative change in their condition though it might mean formal democracy which would strengthen the domination of upper caste Hindus.

In fact the upper caste Hindus celebrated Indian independence as their unchallenged domination. Democracy, they learned through short term experience, could be manipulated to perpetu-

ate their caste hegemony. Also, the Muslim minority did not remain a dominant force after the partition. It lost its legitimacy for share in power in India by demanding and accepting partition. They were thus expected to concede legitimacy to the Hindu hegemony. However, both these expectations did not work out the way it was expected. Manipulation of democracy had its limits and secularism, whatever its connotation in Indian context, did acquire dynamism of its own and both democracy and secularism became power tools of Indian polity. Soon, the upper caste hegemony came under serious challenge from lower castes on one hand, and from the minorities, on the other. Both the minorities as well as the low caste Hindus used democracy and secularism as their main tools to realise the goal of an egalitarian society and non-dominated status. This began to make serious inroads into upper caste hegemony.

For the first time the status quo was greatly disturbed in 1968 when Mrs. Indira Gandhi split the Congress and sought legitimacy for her leadership by wooing the Scheduled castes, Scheduled Tribes and the minorities. This was seen as danger signal by the upper caste Hindus and they hit back by exacerbating communal feelings. Thus a political challenge was cleverly converted into 'religious challenge'. Ahmedabad and Bhiwandi riots followed in its wake in 1969 and 1970 and these riots shook the nation. Thus it would be seen that in a changed political context and changing power equation, religion acquires a different meaning and dynamism. It is lifted from the domain of theological beliefs into political action.

However, it should be born in mind that whenever low caste Hindus and minorities assert themselves politically and challenge the status quo, caste and communal riots begin to erupt with great force. It is through religion that the upper caste Hindus seek to legitimise their domination. Also, in this struggle for power and hegemony, both sides use religion and thus reinforce each other's communalism. Minority communalism, even if defensive reinforces majority communalism and gives it ever more legitimacy in the eyes of the Hindu community. Thus communalism, whether of majority or minority, whether aggressive or defensive, is a category by itself and has its own dynamism. The religious aggressiveness shown by the Muslims during the Shah Bano movement had its direct repercussions on the Hindu mind and fuelled Hindu

communalism. Not only that, it gave the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy, much sought for legitimacy in the eyes of average Hindus.

In Indian context, castism and communalism play complementary role. In the Indian social relations, one cannot be completely segregated from the other. Let us not forget that it was caste oppression which brought about conversions to Islam and Christianity. In a feudal system such conversions were not taken seriously and were even thought as 'good riddance'. However, in a democratic polity such conversions could not be accepted with ease by the upper caste Hindus. The Meenakshipuram conversions in the early eighties raised a political storm. Mrs. Indira Gandhi who had sought legitimacy for her leadership through the low-caste and the Muslim support in late sixties, made a political turnabout in early eighties and used the Meenakshipuram conversions to mobilise the upper and middle-caste Hindu support for retaining political power.

This political turnabout on the part of Mrs. Indira Gandhi in the early eighties provided communalism not only a sharper edge but also a new legitimacy. It was not only the upper caste Hindus who needed communal politics to retain power but also the middle-caste Hindus who were in desperate need of it to catapult themselves into power. Whereas the traditional upper caste Hindus Brahmin-Kshatriyas-Bania combination were primarily urban based, the newly emerging middle castes were primarily rural. It is these upcoming castes which needed caste and communal politics to catapult themselves into power. It is this caste-dynamics which imparts sharper edge to modern day communalism and tempt politicians to make use of it with varying degree of aggressiveness depending on their situation.

Low caste Muslims, mostly from the artisan classes in smaller and middle-sized towns, are new entrants in the Muslim politics. To them too, religion provides more convenient channel to rise to power. Many entrants from this background among Muslims used religiously potent issues like the Shah Bano and Babri Masjid controversy to catapult themselves to power outmanoeuvring the old Muslim leaderships. Also, both among Hindus as well as Muslims, the newly emerging sections of people have strong urge to preserve and consolidate their respective identities. The politics

of identity provides aspiring politicians with a new and highly potent weapon to fight their political battles.

In a democratic polity and multi-religious, multi-ethnic society, question of identity assumes great importance both psychologically and politically. Every caste and community guards its identity. Ethnic and religious identity can play both reactionary or progressive, creative role depending on how and by whom it is used. Politicians often use it, in a most chauvinistic manner, to mobilise support for themselves and treat these castes and communities as their vote-banks. Such use of identity is most condemnable as it brings confrontation between various castes and communities. The politics of confrontation leads to inter-caste and inter-communal violence. Democratic polity should be based on dialogue. It is dialogue which represents true democratic spirit. But the politicians bring about confrontation between different communities to grab power in democracy. This is contradiction in terms but such contradictions abound in democracy in our country.

The feelings of identity becomes stronger and stronger in a democracy with passage of time in a developing country like India. As time passes, more and more people become conscious of their identity. In fact it would not be wrong to say that democratic consciousness brings identity consciousness with it. Also, identity consciousness in one community increases with identity consciousness in another community. Thus within democratic framework identity consciousness assumed competitive dimension. The minority exhibits identity consciousness more eagerly than the majority community as it is always fearful of being submerged in majority community identity.

The Muslims, and now Sikhs too, have been asserting their religious identity in various ways. The Punjab problem in a way is manifestation of Sikh religious identity. The Sikhs began manifesting their separate identity rather late but this manifestation has begun much more assertively and aggressively. They are compensating, as if, for loss of time by intensity of manifestation. However, due to past history and common joint struggles in history and closer cultural assimilation between the Sikhs and Hindus the aggressive assertion of identity by sikhs does not produce as violent a reaction among Hindus as in the case of Muslims. Even slight

assertion of identity on the part of Muslims produces strong reaction on the part of Hindus.

The reason for this is not far to seek. As pointed out at the outset of this article the Hindus saw independence not only a liberation from the British Raj but from a thousand year Muslim rule. Muslims were seen as alien rulers who never assimilated with Indian cultural ethos. It is of course over simplification of complex reality. Most of the Muslims were converts from low caste Hindus and naturally entered Islam with their pre-Islamic cultural paraphernalia. The change of faith did not radically alter their pattern of life and outlook except in a few cases. They remained closely associated with their pre-Islamic milieu. Only those converted Muslims who aspired for upward mobility in Muslim society tried to distance themselves from local Hindu milieu and came closer to upper class urban Islamic society. And such Muslims were few and they too found it very hard to find place among upper class Muslim society.

However, these facts are ignored and every Muslim is looked upon as essentially 'foreigner' and with Islamic ethos alien to Indian cultural milieu. It is in this sense that the BJP, VHP and other Hindu organisations raised the slogan *Babar Ki Santan, Jao Pakistan ya Qabrastan* (i.e. O Babar progeny, go to Pakistan or cemetery) during Ramjanambhoomi processions throughout India. All Muslims were perceived as progeny of Babar who was invader and a foreigner. This slogan should be taken seriously in psychological sense. It represents Hindu feelings towards Indian Muslims and is symbolic of their attitude towards them.

It shows that there is psychological sense of hurt in the Hindu psyche. The Muslims are not only seen as alien invaders but also demolishers of Hindu temples. The Babri Masjid-Ramjanambhoomi controversy and its emotional potential has to be seen in this perspective. History when transformed into myth acquires much greater emotional potential. The BJP raised this controversy not for nothing. Its leaders were well aware of its potential. It did stirr Hindu emotion and enabled the BJP leaders to touch Hindu sentiments at raw.

We are not really concerned here about historical truth regarding the Babri Majid and Ramjanambhoomi. We have done that in another article. Here we are more concerned about socio-

political background of this controversy. In order to understand this controversy in all its complexity, we have to understand socio-political developments in India. In a pluralist society like India such controversies are inevitable, in a way. It is in essence not so much historical controversy as socio-political in nature. Also it is less religious and more political. It is in fact born of competitive assertion of two identities.

The Muslim identity in contemporary India asserted as its aggressivemost during the Shah Bano controversy. This controversy should also be seen less religious and more of political nature. In fact the assertion of Muslim identity during the Shah Bano controversy was also result of years of sense of insecurity the Muslims suffered in India specially since early eighties when Mrs. Indira Gandhi began to rely more on Hindu votes. There were a series of major riots since then in which hundreds of Muslims were killed and their properties burnt and looted. It was this suffocation which expressed itself through the Shah Bano movement. The Muslim leadership, both religious as well as political, also exploited this controversy for their own ends. Many religious demagogues rose to eminence in the Muslim esteem using it. Some of them sought to out do their political rivals.

This aggressive reassertion of Muslim identity had very adverse effect on the average Hindu psyche. Not only communal Hindus but even secular Hindus were baffled. Communal Hindus of course saw another proof of Muslim fanaticism in this controversy. They were alarmed, so to say. It was perceived politically as a danger signal. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, like his mother in the last phase of her political career, used the Hindu card and agreed to open the doors of Babri Masjid in order to placate the Hindu sentiments ruffled by the Shah Bano controversy. Earlier, he surrendered to the Muslim fundamentalists by agreeing to put the Muslim Women's Bill in parliament to exempt the Muslim men from paying alimony to their divorced wives after the period of iddah.

Thus during this phase there was increasing assertion of identities by both Hindus as well as Muslims. It was dangerous situation of confrontation. It strained to utmost the pluralist fabric of Indian society. The Hindu aggressiveness also reached such limits that many saw in it rise of Hindu fascism. It was also a serious bid on the part of BJP to capture political power at the centre. How-

ever, the character of Indian diversity is such that no religious party, whatever its religious label, can come to power in the centre. However, the BJP did add to its strength in the parliament in 1989 elections and also managed to come to power in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, largely on its own. It was possible to enhance its political strength by exploiting this controversy.

As pointed out elsewhere in this article caste and communal problem have become intertwined in Indian politics. Caste conflict is often sought to be deflected into communal conflict. It has happened repeatedly in many places in India. The caste riots in Gujrat in February 1985 were converted mysteriously into communal riots which lasted for more than one year and took very high toll of life. Caste is posing a great dilemma for the modern Hindu society. It has become both strength as well as its weakness. The main stream Hindu culture is defined by the high caste Hindus and is considered to be its main strength. The glory of the past is also ascribed to this high caste culture. The low caste Hindu culture finds its place at best as folk culture. It has nothing to do with classical Hindu culture.

Caste system constitutes its weakness as it comes in the way of Hindu unity. The modern democratic society has its own logic of numbers. Greater the number, more the chances of winning political power. However, the caste system becomes greatest hurdle in the way of unity among Hindus. The conversion of few Dalit families in Meenakshipuram in Tamil Nadu to Islam shook the upper caste Hindus precisely because it was seen as adding to the numbers of Muslims. The Meenakshipuram conversions came as a political challenge to the upper caste Hindus and the VHP assumed political reincarnation and began reconverting converted Hindus to Islam back to Hinduism. The VHP also took out Ekamata Yatra in 1985 to preach Hindu unity. The yatra, needless to say, became active vehicle of spreading communalism. It would thus be seen that purely a caste problem was converted into a communal, problem. The VHP hand could also be seen in many riots in the Hindi belt during that period. It played very active role in the Meerut riot of 1983 which was investigated by this writer.

It was therefore not very surprising when the implementation of Mandal Commission Report by the V.P. Singh Government

was also converted into communal question by L.K. Advani, the then president of BJP, by announcing his Rath Yatra which in fact became rakt yatra (journey of blood) as many major riots took place in different parts of India when it was being undertaken though not exactly on its route. Perhaps enough care was taken to see that riots do not take place on the route of the Toyota truck converted into legendary rath to avoid charge of spreading communal violence by undertaking this yatra. But it could deceive hardly anyone. All politically conscious people knew what was the cause of those major communal conflagration which broke out in various parts of the country in the month of October 1990.

Why the Rath Yatra was announced after implementation of Mandal Commission Report in August, 1990? Again it was an attempt to turn caste conflict into communal conflict. The BJP, for its own electoral gain, was aggressively projecting image of Hindu unity and Hindu unity, as everyone knows, is a sort of contradictory term mainly because of caste division. However, if the BJP has to capture power at the centre it must create some sort of Hindu unity so that Hindus, like Muslims, Sikhs and Christians could unite in the interest of Hindu rashtra and vote it to power. The BJP thought it had succeeded in creating some sort of Hindu unity by aggressively propagating about the construction of Ramjanambhoomi temple at the site of Babri Mosque and it was further trying to consolidate this unity for its own political benefit.

However, Mr. V.P. Singh threw spanner in the work by announcing implementation of Mandal Commission Report on 5th August, 1991 and thus brought to naught all the efforts to create Hindu unity, howsoever fragile. Thus after announcement of implementation of Mandal Commission the BJP became desperate and wanted to once again induce sense of Hindu unity by attracting backward class Hindus once again to the BJP fold. It seems to be the real purpose for taking out Rath Yatra from all nooks and corners of India. Thus it was proved once again that Hindu communalists try to achieve Hindu unity in a negative way - by pitting them against Muslims or other minorities. The Dalits of course would not fall in this trap easily but it was easier to attract middle caste Hindus who are seeking ways and means of achieving upward social mobility.

It also shows that the upper caste Hindus try to bring about

Hindu unity not only for their purpose but also on their own terms. These upper caste Hindus do not desire caste distinctions to go as it would mean obliteration of their own privileges. Thus, to create a sense of Hindu unity for their own political purpose they would need an issue which can arouse emotions of almost all the Hindus whether they belong to upper caste, middle caste or lower caste. Ramjanambhoomi, BJP thought, certainly provided them with such an issue and they tried to exploit it to the hilt.

The VHP and BJP had decided to begin construction of Ramjanambhoomi temple in Ayodhya from 30th October, 1990. On that day they could manage to collect a huge crowd. The fact that among those collected for Kar Seva in Ayodhya on 30th October there were large number of backward class Hindus shows that Ram has great religious appeal. There is also no doubt that all those who collected in Ayodhya were fired by religious fervour. Even the policemen on duty were actively helping the kar sevaks to defy ban and enter Ayodhya. Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Chief Minister of U.P. had decided to take the bull by its horns and had thrown strictest possible security around Faizabad and Ayodhya so that kar sevaks could not enter these towns to begin construction of Ramjanambhoomi temple. However, the policemen, themselves devotees of Ram, thought it their religious duty to help kar sevaks enter Ayodhya through alternate routes.

It is difficult to say how many devotees exactly could enter the town as there are varying estimates by onlookers. It can be safely assumed that there were at least 20,000 people inside the town. This speaks volumes about enforcement of security measures by state agencies when religious passions are aroused. The Chief Minister had boasted that security measures would be so tight that even a bird cannot wing its way and we saw that more than 20,000 persons found their way into Ayodhya. Some of the kar sevaks even found entry into the Babri Masjid enclosure and climbed over the dome and chipped it with hammer to show symbolic demolition of mosque. All this was extensively covered by the press.

Here few words about the role of the press would be in order. The English press was somewhat restrained but the Hindi press certainly abdicated its role of objective reporting. Many of these press reporters went to Ayodhya not as reporters but devo-

tees of Ram. Their reporting was highly biased and clearly depicted their religious fervour rather than journalistic objectivity. For example one Hindu daily from Lucknow Swatantra Chetna headlined the happenings on 30th October and 2nd November, 1990 as "Aurangzeb ke Atyacharon ko bhi piche chod diya sarkar ne" (i.e. the Government has left even Aurangzeb behind in oppression) in its publication on 3rd November, 1990. The use of Aurangzeb's name itself evokes great hostility in the Hindu mind and the Mulayam Singh Government was described as a shed worse by the paper.

Another paper Swatantra Bharat from Lucknow in its edition of 3rd Nov. 1990 gave headlines 'Nihatte Kar Sevakaon ko Bhun dala' (i.e. unarmed kar sevaks killed by firing). It gave an estimate of 100 dead and thousands injured in firing on 2nd November, 1990. In the text of news it says between 50 and 100 are feared dead but in head lines it put the figure at 100. It is really difficult to get authentic figure of those dead in firing on 2nd November in Ayodhya. The Government claimed no more than 11 dead but certainly the figure must have been higher. Some sources put it at 20 to 22. But the Hindi papers no doubt highly exaggerated the figure.

One Hindi paper Dainik Aaj from Lucknow in its publication of October 24 went to the extent of saying that "Mirzapur Jail men Rambhakton ko Ghode ki Leed Khilayee jarahi hai" (In Mirzapur Jail devotees of Ram are being fed horse droppings). It is highly provocative headline for the Hindu readers but this is how the Hindi press was reporting the events in those days.

It can thus be said that a section of media played substantial role in communalising the situation on the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid issue. No wonder then that on 30th October the Hindus displayed fire-works like Diwali to celebrate kar sevaks' symbolic attack on the Babri Masjid.

Here I would also like to draw attention of the readers to the fact that it is not Ramjanambhoomi which has really communalised the Hindus or Babri Masjid which has communalised the Muslims. Ramjanambhoomi and Babri Masjid are mere religious symbols for the two major communities. What has communalised them is their socio-economic and political situation. The Hindus feel in this situation that minorities are becoming more and more assertive (Muslims manifested their assertiveness during the Shah Bano

movement and the Sikhs too became very assertive, even violent, in Punjab) and that the Hindus are least united whereas minorities are quite homogenous and monolithic. It is, therefore, time that the Hindus should also unite and hit back. The Muslims and Sikhs on the other hand feel that the Hindus monopolise political and economic power and that they have been completely left out. This feeling is particularly stronger among the Muslims. The conscious middle class (which is slowly emerging among Muslims) section among middle class feels that they are not getting justice at the hands of Hindus and, therefore, must assert themselves. They are also putting more pressure on the ruling parties which is getting them certain concessions and this is projected by the BJP as 'appeasement of Muslims', 'minorityism' etc. to increase its appeal amongst Hindus.

Thus we see that both majority and minority communities are becoming assertive and thus sharpening the sense of confrontation among them and powerful religious symbols like Ramjan-ambhoomi-Babri Masjid etc. are used to fight their secular battles. While we should undoubtedly condemn increasing communalisation of our polity and the game which the communalists play, we should not despair as this communal conflict is also indicative of assertiveness of the oppressed sections of our society. As the oppressed sections belonging to minorities, Dalits, backward castes etc. become more conscious of their rights and increasingly assert themselves, communal and caste conflict will also sharpen. Thus caste and communal conflicts are also indicative of changes in society.

However, one should not try to simplify. There are elements in the minority communities who are communal and use the sense of grievances among their communities to play games of power politics. Such elements among minority communities should also

be exposed and condemned. On the whole minority communalism may be defensive but in certain phases it does tend to be aggressive and intensifies communalism in the majority community. This is what is behind Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy also. Some Muslim politicians not only over-reacted to this controversy but tried to be aggressive on the question and thus created strong reaction among the Hindus. Thus while fighting communalism one will have to take this aspect also into account. One will have to be hard on communalism of any variety.

We should also realise in this phase that state organs have also been greatly communalised and in such a situation state also finds it difficult to curb communal violence even if it desires to do so. Mulayam Singh Yadav's helplessness in curbing communal violence in U.P. in October, November is indicative of this. One must draw right lessons from this. The excessive use of religion in politics can be highly dangerous both for state as well as civil society.

SECTION I

ARTICLES

SECTION I

ARTICLES

RAMA IN HISTORY

How Avadh's Secular Polity Changed

by Sushil Srivastava

In the 19th century, the British attitude towards India and its society was greatly influenced by the views of James Stuart Mill in his voluminous History of India. His ideas were disseminated by the Utilitarians and the Evangelists in Britain. British administrators posted in India were generally products of Cambridge University where the teaching faculty was dominated by these schools of thought.

Thus, most of the administrators in the early part of the 19th century came to India with a mission to ameliorate the conditions of the uncivilized Indians. They believed that only Christianity and Westernisation could uplift the Indians from the morass of backwardness.

The colonial authorities believed Mill's assumption that Indian society was divided into Hindus and Muslims, who were strictly separate in both religion and society. To accentuate the differences between the two communities, Mill demarcated historical development in India into two periods - the Hindu period and the Mohammedan period. Both Hindus and Muslims were declared non-political and lacking in a secular outlook. Hindus were allegedly not concerned with politics because they were ab-

sorbed in spiritual matters. A Hindu could hardly conceive of, and would definitely shun, a way of life that postulated a distinction between the sacred and the secular. For a Muslim, all non-Islamic governments were immoral in general. Islam was said to have a tradition of bigotry and intolerance, while Hinduism had a degree of respect for all religions.

Thus, the British were surprised to find that despite Muslim rule in Avadh, Hindus had been living peacefully and Hinduism had not been undermined in the area. They reasoned that the comparatively few conversions in this area of Muslim political dominance was an eloquent testimony to the organic, protean and vital character of Hinduism, which had met the Muslim challenge by absorbing the most attractive (albeit heterodox) elements of Islam. This it had done without breaking its own essential spirit.

Islam itself survived as a hot-house religion in Avadh, as in most of India. The British could not explain why else, outside the somewhat false atmosphere of the newer towns and garrisons, it never really established itself. Even the few significant conversions that it did achieve were confined to the Rajput elite class, and these, since they generally had political motives, were skin deep. Somehow, the British refused to appreciate the Cosmopolitan nature of society in Avadh.

TOLERANCE

The British were surprised to observe complete religious tolerance in the general behaviour of the people. But, a British medical officer posted in Sultanpur during the nawabi regime, observed that there existed great communal amity between the Hindus and Muslims. Elliot, one of the first British settlement officer in Avadh, made critical observations of the life-styles of the converted Rajputs. He wrote:

“In matters of eating and drinking, they are as particular about their caste as any Brahman. Many of them wear the dhoti and will greet a Hindu with the idolatrous salutation of “Ram, Ram”. Almost all keep a pundit to fix the auspicious moment of commencing any enterprise, or foretell the nature of its results and they believe in predictions”.

W.C. Benet, another British officer stationed in Avadh in the 1870's, observed: “Between the Khanzadas (Rajput converts) and

Hindus almost no distinction can be drawn further than that the former say their prayers in a mosque and cut their coats to open from the right. The Khanzadas refuse to eat beef; they plaster their fireplaces before cooking, and very generally use brazen vessels". There was no major divide between the two religious groups. However, there did occur minor incidents of conflict, particularly in the two cities of Faizabad and Lucknow during the nawabi period. These incidents were the natural outcome of a highly fractured society.

SUBDIVISIONS

Avadh society broadly comprised of Muslims and Hindus, but they were subdivided into Shia and Sunni Muslims and several sects of Hindus, the major ones being the Shaivas and Vaishnavas. After 1765 the position of the Sunni Muslims continued to deteriorate further. This was natural as it coincided with the decline in the influence of the Mughal Empire in Avadh.

The legal, fiscal and the administrative systems of Avadh came to accept the lower position of inequality of the Sunni Muslims and the Hindus in the Kingdom. Conflicts came into the open during Muharram when both communities interpreted differently the sacrifice of Ali. Religious conflicts between Hindus and Muslims were generally unknown. This was more so because, in Avadh, Hindus were treated with greater favour and sympathy than Sunni Muslims.

The Shias, Sunnis and Hindus often worshipped together at the "mazaar" of a famous saint. It was this that had maintained general amity between the Hindus and Muslims for a long time. The first major religious dispute between the two communities arose during the years 1853 and 1855.

Long before the occurrence of the first bloody conflict between the Hindus and Muslims, Hindu revivalist activity in Ayodhya had increased. It seems that the Shia Nawabs of Avadh gave their implicit support to this activity. In September, 1722, Mir Muhammad Khan was appointed the Governor by the Mughal emperor, Muhammad Shah. He adopted the title of Saadat Khan Bahadur and consolidated the territories of Avadh by asserting vigilant control over the refractory local chieftains. In Ayodhya, he

rebuilt the old fort on the banks of the river Ghagra and called it the Qila Mubarak.

During his rule, Hindu buildings, such as temples and ashrams, were erected and a few Ramanandi akharas (sects) made their appearance. This coincided with the attempt of the Vaishnava sects to take back from the Shaivas some of the important religious places in Ayodhya. One of the last strongholds of the Shaivas, the Hanuman hill, was reconquered by Abhayram, a sadhu belonging to the Nirbani akhara of the Ramanandi order, in the days of Saadat Khan's successor, Abu-i-Mansoor Khan Safdar Jang (1739-1754).

The second Nawab moved his court from Ayodhya to Faizabad. In 1750 Ayodhya was virtually placed under the control of Naval Rai, a powerful Minister of Nawab Safdar Jang. Naval Rai was Hindu Kayastha and was sympathetic towards the Ramanandi sect. He erected several buildings along the Swargadwar ghat, prominent among which was the temple of Nageshwara. The British official version believe that in the absence of the Nawab's court and under the patronage of naval Rai, Ayodhya was transformed from a Muslim to a Hindu town.

This version cannot be accepted; Ayodhya never belonged to any particular religion. The shifting of the court from Ayodhya did not mean the creation of a favourable climate for Hindu activities, because the latter was the consequence of a new temper that had arisen with the Ramanandi sects. However, it is true that after this time Vaishnava activity in Ayodhya became extensive and several settlements of sadhus sprang up. Carnegie himself observes that during this period the foundations of several religious institutions were laid down. He gives a list of 209 Hindu religious institutions that came up in Ayodhya after 1750.

Nawab Asaf-ud-daulah provided a regular income to the several akharas in Ayodhya through state patronage and bestowed liberal grants on them. However, it was during his time that the political situation in Ayodhya started undergoing a significant change. The Nawab had allowed his mother, popularly known as the Bahu Begam, to suspect his intentions towards herself. After the death of Shuja-ud-daulah in 1775, his widow, the Bahu Begam, had received several mahals for her maintenance. Soon after he was established as the Nawab, Asaf-ud-daulah

shifted his capital to Lucknow. His mother, the Bahu Begam, and his grandmother, the Nawab Begam, stayed back in Faizabad and the Begams retained charge of the royal wealth left there.

SPENDTHRIFT

Asaf-ud-daulah is well-known for having been a poor administrator and a spendthrift Nawab, and he was always in search of ways to accumulate wealth. Aware of the huge wealth in store at Faizabad, he wanted to acquire it. His relations with the Begams soured over this. The Bahu Begam feared that, after her death, Nawab Asaf-ud-daulah would neither maintain the mausoleum of her husband nor retain her several servants. In order to forestall this, she signed an agreement with the British Resident in 1816. The Bahu Begam received the assurance that after her death, the mausoleum of her husband and the servants would be cared for by the British. In exchange, she transferred the mahals assigned to her to the Resident.

AYODHYA AS 'TIRTHSTHAN'

The agreement of 1816 between the Bahu Begam and the Resident transferred the mahal of Haveli Avadh, which included Ayodhya, to the British. they became responsible for the collection of revenue and the maintenance of peace in ayodhya.

The takeover of the mahals coincided with the rise in the intensity of Hindu activity in Ayodhya. It was during these years what the Ramanandi sects succeeded in suppressing the Shaivas. Simultaneously, several new akharas were founded. The British Resident had no reason to stop these activities. In fact they served the interests of the British who found more reason, after 1860, to support the rise of Hindu fundamentalism.

The British had been profoundly disturbed by both the uprising of 1857 and the Wahabi movement. Both had convinced them of the need for Hindu support. They reasoned that, Hindus being in the majority, their support was vital to the empire. The Muslims were aggrieved because they had lost political power to the British; the Wahabi movement was also directed against them. It

was natural for them to support Hindu revivalism.

DISTANT ROOTS

Hindu revivalism had distant roots in the revisionism of the Bhakti movement, whose leaders had been the Sants (saints). The role of the Hindu sect became important because of the changed political and religious situation in north India after the 12th century.

The spread of Sufism and the egalitarianism of Islam induced a democratization of Brahminical institutions. The Sufi missionaries seemed to have had great influence among the rather ill-defined group, the Jogis. The Jogis, particularly the Gorakhpathanthis, popularized the concept of the Sadguru, which mingled with the Sant movement.

The interaction of Sufi doctrines with Brahminism led to the evolution of a simple and more emotional type of bhakti (devotion) that was directed either towards Krishna or Rama. It also gave rise to a movement that could break away from traditional orthodox Hinduism without surrendering its Hindu identity. Dr Badri Narayan Srivastava observes that, by 1100, Krishna bhakti had received general acceptance in several parts of India, but the tradition of Rama bhakti may be observed only in some parts of north India. He emphasizes that Rama bhakti seems to have grown only after the emergence of Swami Ramananda in Benares. Dr. Srivastava adds further that, before Ramananda, the Ramanuja sect was extremely popular in north India and at the time, Lakshminarayan was the chief deity.

It was during the life time of Swami Ramananda that the other incarnations of Vishnu became popular. These included Rama, Krishna, Narasingh and others. However, no fixed rules and rituals had yet evolved for the worship of these deities which were incarnations of Vishnu. It may also be added that during this time, Shaivism started declining in significance and influence in north India.

The late growth of the tradition of Rama bhakti is supported by the late evolution of Ayodhya as an important centre of Hindu pilgrimage. W.C. Benet, who compiled the first Gazetteer of the Province of Avadh, remarked in 1877.

“Hindu revival in Ayodhya is one of the most remarkable things in modern times. In Buddhist times the place had no peculiar sanctity, although there were doubtless temples and shrines. Long afterwards, during many centuries. Gaya, Benares, Puri and Mathura kept their reputation, while Ayodhya became a wilderness and a famous hunting ground”.

The importance of Ayodhya as a place of pilgrimage for Hindus rose during the 17th century, when it came to be considered one of the more important religious places in north India.

The several treatises compiled on “tirth yatra” (pilgrimages) lend support to the view that Ayodhya developed late as a place of Hindu pilgrimage. The Vividha-tirthakalpa, a Jain text compiled in the eighth century, mentions Ayodhya as the place where the Jain tirthankars lived. Although it also refers to Ayodhya as the birthplace of Rama, it does not single it out as an important place of worship for Brahmins.

THEORY RESTATED

The first attempt to restate the theory of pilgrimage was made by Lakshmidhara. He indicated the benefits of visiting the tirthas, and compiled a book *Tirtha-vivechana-kanda* on the various religious places mentioned in the Hindu epics and Puranic literature. This was the eighth volume of Lakshmidhara’s great digest, *Kritya-kalpataru*, written circa 1125. In the *Dharamashastra Nibanda*, he emphasized the place of pilgrimage in the recognised scheme of Hindu’s life. In the *Tirtha-Kalpataru* every practice supposedly grounded on Puranic or Smrity authority was justified. The most important places of pilgrimage listed by him include Kashi, Prayag, the River Ganga, and Gaya. Although Ayodhya has been mentioned as one of the several secondary places of worship, it has not been associated with Rama. *Goprataru*, a place associated with Vishnu, is marked out as the sacred place in Ayodhya.

In fact, Lakshmidhara is extremely reluctant to accept that Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu. In *Brahmachari-Kanda*, the first volume of the *Kritya-kalpataru*, he illustrates the distinction between dharma and adharma with the killing of Vali by Rama. He says Vali, who had abducted the wife of his younger brother who should have been like a daughter to him committed an act of

adhama. On the other hand, Rama committed an act of dharma by killing Vali.

He justifies Rama's action on the ground that he was the "viceroy" of Bharat, the ruler of the domain, and therefore had the right to punish wrongdoers. He also argues that any criticism of Rama's action would have been completely null and justification been used that Rama was the incarnation of Vishnu, the ruler of the universe. It seems that Lakshmidhara himself was not convinced of the reincarnation theory and therefore refrained from using that particular justification.

In the treatise *Tirtha-chintamani*, compiled by Vachaspati Mishra, in 1420, the chief places of Hindu pilgrimage mentioned by him included Gaya, Purshottam (Puri), Prayag, Kashi and the river Ganga, Vachaspati Mishra also referred to the Adhyatma Ramayana and pointed out that bathing in the rivers Saryu washed away one's sins. He added that after having a bath in the river, a pilgrim must worship Lord Vishnu at the Goprataru (Guptar Ghat) in Ayodhya. However, he does not refer to Ayodhya as a "punyasthan" for its association with Rama.

TODAR MAL

It is extremely surprising that a religious treatise almost contemporaneous with Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* does not refer either to Rama or Ayodhya. Todar Mal, a noble at the court of the Emperor Akbar, was a regular visitor to the city of Kashi. He commissioned a number of pandits of Benares to compile an encyclopaedia religious treatise, which came to be called the *Todar-nandam*. Apparently completed in 1585, the *Todar-nandam* refers to neither Rama nor Ayodhya. Todar Mal is said to have met Tulsidas in Kashi and also to having had the Kashi Viswanath temple repaired, but he refrains from giving us any impressions of Ayodhya.

It was in the 17th century that Ayodhya began to be mentioned in the treatise on "tirthsthans" as a place of pilgrimage for Hindus. Mitra-Mishra in the *Tirth-prakash* (Volume X of the *Viramitrodaya* compiled in 1620) mentions Ayodhya as an important place of pilgrimage.

Mitra-Mishra gives a detailed list of all the "tirthsthans" of

India. He calls the river Saryu a punya-nadi (holy river). Some of the very important places of worship in his order of significance are : Kashi, Prayag, Ganga-Sagar-Sangam, Ganga-Saryu-Sangam, Ganga, Kurukshetra, Prabhas, Pushkar, Lokagrah, Kedar, Salag-yagram (Nepal), Ayodhya, Mathura, Ujjaini, Dwaraka, Tapi, Godavari, Krishikandhitti, Shahmalak, Gokaran, Purshottam, Konarak-Kamrup.

We may note that, although Mitra-Mishra included Ayodhya as a significant place of worship, he does not name it as the most important centre of pilgrimage in north India. Although the notion that Rama was the avatar of Vishnu was as old as the Ramayana, it did not receive general acceptance till the rise of the Sants.

Courtesy: The Statesman

1A

BABRI MASJID CONTROVERSY: A NEW TWIST

**The VHP bases its claim on a forged
inscription**

by Sher Singh

The VHP claim on the Babari Masjid is based on the last three words of a Persian inscription, quoted by Mrs. A.S. Beveridge in her translation of Babur-Nama which read: "Buyad khair Baqi". By following the Abjad method, the numerical value of all these letters comes to 935 Hijri (September 15, 1528-September 4, 1529 AD). Mrs. Beveridge even did not compare it with the Babri Masjid inscriptions recorded by Director General (ASI). A. Fuhrer in 1889 in *The Sharqi Architecture of Jaunpur*, (ASI New Series, Vol. 1). The inscription relied upon by her to allege the substitution of an ancient Hindu shrine by a mosque under orders from Babur, perhaps issued in 934 Hijri (September 27, 1527-September 14, 1528 AD), was simply not available on the walls of the Babri Masjid in 1889 and is a forged inscription of a later date.

The first person to record the Babri Masjid inscriptions was Dr. Buchanan (1762- 1829). He was employed by Marquess Wellesely, Governor General, to undertake the Survey of India in 1807 which he completed in 1814. He surveyed Ayodhya as part of the then, Gorakhpur district in 1813-14, and the manuscript of his report entitled, "Survey of Gorakhpur District" is lying in the British

Library, London (under No: MSS, Eur. E91). Pages 113-122 of the first volume relate to his findings about the Babri Masjid and Ayodhya. Dr. Buchanan writes, "The story relating to King Vikrama and the temples built by him is exceedingly doubtful. It is probable that the pillars were taken from the ruins of the palace. They are 6 feet high."

Dr. Buchanan has done a yeoman's service by recording the Persian and Arabic inscriptions seen in Babri Masjid in 1813 which are now kept in the British Library in London (under No. MSS. Eur. E73). I have in my possession the copy of these inscriptions. But for these, the forged inscription relied upon by Mrs. Beveridge would have never been exposed.

Dr. Buchanan has recorded six inscriptions, out of which three have been written twice, in Persian and Arabic scripts. Two small inscriptions written in Persian (Nastaliq) and calligraphy in Arabic only praise God:

* "There is no God but Allah; and Muhammad is the prophet of God."

* "Say, that God is one, God is holy, unbecgetting and unbegotten, and has no equal."

Another inscription, after praising God, gives the name of its inscriber as Muhammad Fatahulla. It mentions, "Benae Tarikh maimoon" - but does not mention the exact date. The last sentence reads: "On the propitious date of its construction, this was engraved by the weak and lazy slave Muhaammad Fatahulla." From this I conclude that the exact date or year of construction has not been given in any inscription, though I find another reference, "Basal-i-Banayast," that is, the 'year of its construction,' in the original Arabic inscription, later forged.

In this Arabic inscription, the inscriber has tried to give the genealogy of the Mughal emperors of India, starting from Taimur. But the writer does not seem to have a good command over Arabic. He has used the Arabic word *ibn* which means 'son of.' What he actually wanted to say was *valad* a Persian word meaning 'father.' As a result, the genealogy given by him is preposterous. It reads: "Saheb-Karan Ameer Taimur son of Meeran Shah,

son of Sultan Abu Sayeed Shah son of Omar Seikh Shah, son of Babur, son of Humayun, son of Akbar, son of Jahangir, son of Shah Jahan, son of Abdul Muzzaffar Mohiuddin Alamgir Badsha Ghazi."

This inscription seems to have been inscribed and fitted inside the babri Masjid either during or after Aurangzeb's time. It had been removed after it was recorded by Dr. Buchanan in 1814 as neither A. Fuhrer in 1889, nor Mrs. Beveridge in 1922 have recorded it.

After February 1, 1986, Ayodhya pandas like Ram Gopal Pandey, have tried to sell the story that it was Faqir Jalal Shah who had persuaded Babur to substitute the Janmasthan temple with a mosque, (Rakta Ranjit Itihás, pg 13-16). He has given the name of another Muslim faqir of Ayodhya -Khwaja Kazal Abbas Moosee Ashikan. Ram Raksha Tripathi, the famous author of Rakta Ranjit Itihas, has split the name of of Khwaja (pg 38-40). He says, "Babur did not go to Shah Jalal Moosee Ashikan. Rather, he went to Kazal abbas Qalandar, who persuaded Babur to substitute Janmasthan temple with a mosque." Qalandar means faqir. Thus both these Janmasthan temple exponents admit that Moosee Ashikan had no role in the mandir-masjid controversy.

But an eight-line prose inscription in Persian recorded by Dr. Buchanan tells an altogether different tale. "His Highness the king Saifkhan had a Vazir whose daughter was betrothed to Moosee-i-Ashikan. The Vazir died after some time. His would-be son-in-law Moosee Ashikan could not tolerate this loss. He became a Durwesh. Babur called on him who said. "Thou shalt be king. I am surprised at the Hindus who are constantly blowing their conches. When thou becomest king, thou shalt build a masjid here.' After some time Babur became king, but forgot to build the masjid. Moosee Ashikan reminded him by sending a person. Babur ordered his Subadar Meer Baqeeulla Khan who built this masjid."

I ascertained the period of Saifkhan from An Oriental Bibliographic Dictionary, by Thomas William Beale 1894, (pg. 344-45). He was a nobleman during the reign of emperor Alamgir, who was appointed governor of the suba of Agra in september 1659. Another Saifkhan was the son of Ibrahim Khan, Fatha Jang, governor of Bengal, by a sister of the empress Nur Jahan, named Malika Bano Begum. His aunt, the empress, having no son by

Jahangir, adopted Saifkhan as her son. He was subsequently made governor of Burdwan. I think this inscription was fitted inside the Babri Masjid either during Jahangir or Aurangzeb's time. It was removed after 1814 from the walls.

Believing in the story of Moosee Ashikan blessing Babur, it will have to be historically proved that Saifkhan was king or governor before Babur. Babur met Moosee Ashikan long before he was king of Hindusthan. But we have no historical evidence establishing Babur's visit to Ayodhya before winning the battle of Panipat in 1526. Moosee Ashikan literally means "the comforter of lovers".

The name of the Ayodhya governor given in this inscription is Meer Baqeeulla Khan, which is not recorded in the forged inscription given by Mrs. Beveridge. This inscription establishes beyond doubt that the story regarding Jalal Shah or Kazal Abbas, was concocted after 1814.

The most important inscription mentioning the name of Meer Baqi has been recorded by Dr. Buchanan in Nastaliq script in Persian, in one and half lines, and Arabic (Khufi) script in six lines. In the Arabic and Persian scripts, the mere putting of a dot or a small dash above or below some letters completely changes its meaning. Nastaliq means direct. The British Library, London, has been kind enough to allow me to publish these inscriptions. I hereby reproduce the Persian inscription, written in Nastaliq script.

*Ba farmuda Shaha Babur ke adlash
Benayast ba kakhe kardoon mulaqi,
Been kard een mahbate fudsiyan-ra
Ame-bar saadat nishan-e-Meer Baqi,
Buvad khabar mafi basal-e-benayasht
Ayan shukar me kunum buvad khabar Baqi."*

It is by forging the last line as "*Ayan shud ki guftam buvad khair Baqi,*" that this masjid was constructed in 935 Hijri. Thus the original meaning, "Openly I thank to hear the news of Mir Baqi," has been changed into, "The year of building it was made clear when I said-buvad khair Baqi," i.e. 935 H. "*Buvad khabar Baqi*" has

also been repeated in the Arabic script. thus it is seen that the expression, "buvad khabar" has been used three times; only once it has been written as, "buvad khair" which can be treated as a mistake.

By following the abjad method, "*buvad khabar Baqi*" gives us 927 H. (December 12, 1520-November 30, 1521). Similarly "*buvad khabar mafi*" will give us 925 H. (3 January 1519-22 December 1519). "*Buvad khabir Baqi*" will giive us 935 H. The fact is that the writer has not at all mentioned its year of construction.

The term "*basal-e-benayast*" i.e. "the year of its construction," has been used, like another term, "*benae tarikh mainoon*," i.e. "the auspicious date of its construction," without mentioning the date or year of its construction.

On comparing the inscriptions recorded by Dr. Buchanan (1813-14) and Mrs. Beveridge (1922) I noted the following forgeries:

ba has been forged as ta.

khardoon - gardoon.

fudsiyan - qudsian.

basal-e - chusal-e.

shukr - shud.

khabar - khair.

mafi - Baqi.

Two words, "*ki guftam*", have been added in the last line which were not there previously. the word "*Ayan*" with two zabars on it, means nothing. Mrs. Beveridge has removed these zabars. In short, the whole claim of VHP is based on the last three forged words, "*buvad khair Baqi*," which in the original inscription read as "*buvad khabar Baqi*".

Courtesy: The Telegraph

AYODHYA DISPUTE

Historical Evidence and BJP's Aim

by Harbans Mukhia

For the discipline of history three kinds of evidence are of vital significance: archaeology, written texts and inscriptions, and popular tradition. It should therefore be fair to examine the status of the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute in terms of the historical evidence derived from these sources.

That Ram was a mythological, rather than a historical, figure is hardly a matter of dispute; it is possible, however, that some, or many, of the characters portrayed in the Ramayana did actually exist and some of the events described there did actually take place, though their scale and historical significance may have differed from the one mythology came to attach to them at some stage. For argument we shall assume Ram to be a historical figure.

The first epic woven around the story of Ram is of course the Ramayana of Valmiki. According to this text, Ram the king of Ayodhya, was born in the Treta Yuga, that is several thousand years before the Kali Yuga which began in 3102 BC. However, the archaeological excavations, undertaken by the former Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India, Professor B.B. Lal, have established that there was no evidence of any kind of habitation in modern day Ayodhya before the eighth century BC when the first signs of settlement of a rudimentary nature appear. This

is in sharp contrast to the highly sophisticated urban setting against which the events described in the Ramayana are supposed to have taken place. Clearly then Valmiki could not have had this Ayodhya in mind where Ram was born.

Indeed, it is not even clear where the Ayodhya of Ram is located, for several texts place it at the banks of the river Ganga rather than Saryu where the present one stands. Against this extremely uncertain background the claim of absolute certainty of the exact place of Ram's birth appears more than little suspect.

It is possible of course that popular tradition has for long established the particular spot where Babur is said to have built his mosque as Ram's birth-place and where a temple is supposed to have been erected, (though when and by whom this was done is entirely unknown): I shall return to the question of this tradition later.

Meanwhile let us look at the evidence about the construction of the mosque at the site of the temple. The structure known as Babri mosque was built by Mir Baqi, a noble of the Mughal emperor, on the latter's express instruction. This is known from the Persian verses inscribed on the inner as well as the outer faces of the mosque door. The verses, however, merely state that Mir Baqi had built the mosque but do not refer to the destruction of any temple nor to any sanctity attached to that site by any group of people. Babur himself records in 1528 his visit to Ayodhya twice on the same page in his Memoirs and states that he undertook some administrative tasks there, but makes no mention of building the mosque, much less to the destruction of any temple.

Abul Fazl, the courtier of Akbar and author of the great work, *Ain-i-Akbari*, refers to Ayodhya as the city where Ram was born, but does not locate any site of his birth; nor does he record the destruction of a temple to make way for the mosque. Indeed no historical or any other work written in medieval India, often by fundamentalist Muslim authors, mentions the construction of this mosque at the site of a temple; and no imperial descendant of emperor Babur, not even the fanatic Aurangzeb — himself responsible for the destruction of several Hindu temples and construction of mosques at their site — makes any reference to it.

If this is surprising, even more surprising is the absence of

any mention of it in the works of Goswami Tulsi Das, author of the second great epic of the theme of Ram's life, the Ramcharitamanas. Tulsi Das was an inhabitant of Ayodhya and wrote the epic in his native Awadhi dialect. A lifelong devotion to Ram had given him a rare boldness, such that he curtly turned down an invitation by emperor Akbar himself to visit the imperial court. If the temple built to commemorate Ram's own birth-place at Ayodhya had indeed been demolished just 60 or 70 years before he was composing his epic, the memory of it would surely have driven him hopping mad. And yet, all we have from him is dead silence! Nor do we get any reference to it in any of the medieval historical or literary works, whether the author was Hindu or Muslim, orthodox or liberal.

It is only in the nineteenth century that the legend of the demolition of the temple and construction of the mosque begins to get into the records. In 1822 Hafizullah, an official of the Faizabad law-court: "The mosque founded by emperor Babur is situated at the birth-place of Ram, son of Raja Dashrath, (and is) adjacent to the kitchen of Sita, wife of Ram." Indeed, during the nineteenth century there is a spurt in disputes over the issue and tradition seems to have grown that the mosque had displaced the temple. The story then gets into the records like P. Carnegie's historical sketch of Faizabad (1870), H.R. Nevill's Faizabad District Gazetteer, and as a footnote of Mrs. A.S. Beveridge's English translation of Babur's Memoirs (1922).

Clearly, therefore, the belief or tradition, which is today the basis of the VHP-BJP claim that a particular spot was the exact place of Ram's birth so many thousand years ago cannot be pushed beyond the eighteenth century at the most, after leaving a margin for the origin of the tradition and its incorporation into recorded history. The BJP is aware of this weakness and therefore refuses to summon history to its defence and would not abide even by the Supreme Court's judgement; its claim rests on what it seeks to represent as the "beliefs" of millions of Hindus.

Incidentally there are at least a dozen temples at Ayodhya each claiming to be the birth-place of Ram and each adducing popular tradition for legitimising the claim! The Hindus of Ayodhya do not seem to think much of the VHP-BJP's self-confident assertions considering that their constituency has elected a CPI candi-

date who had made the falsity of this dispute his main issue in the last Lok Sabha elections.

Anyway, since the nineteenth century, despite occasional disputes, Hindus and Muslims had been saying their prayers at the open platform and the adjacent built-up mosque respectively. It was on December 22, 1949 at midnight that, according to an FIR lodged by police Sub-Inspector Ram Dube of the Ayodhya Police Station, a group of 50 or 60 persons entered the Babari mosque and 'established therein an idol of Shri Bhagwan and painted Sita Ram' on the walls. Akshay Brahmachari, a Gandhian and Secretary, DCC, Ayodhya, went on a hunger strike in protest. The gates to the temple and mosque were then locked by the administration and the dispute lay dormant until Rajiv Gandhi had the locks opened in 1986 to balance the Muslim Women's Bill.

It would therefore appear that BJP has latched itself on to an issue which had remained a non-issue ever since its origin at the most two centuries ago. In a way this too calls for some explanation, which I believe lies in the working of our polity.

Since independence India has experimented with a very modern political system, namely parliamentary democracy based on universal adult franchise and multi-party elections. Its modernity can be appreciated from the fact that universal adult franchise came to the UK and the US only in the thirties, to Canada in 1940, to France in 1944 and to Switzerland in 1973 when women in these countries got the voting right; it came to India in 1950. And it is only now in the nineties that the former socialist block is going in for multiparty elections. Yet this breathtakingly modern political process operates in India mostly with pre-modern units of mobilisation.

IN the liberal, Nehruvian vision, the underlying assumption was that the very modernity of industrialisation as an economic experience and of parliamentary democracy as a political process would gradually force a retreat on the backward consciousness of the Indian people generated and sustained by centuries of economic, political, educational backwardness. What has happened in real life is the contrary. The "backward" or pre-modern units of mobilisation such as community, caste, regional and linguistic affinities have been put to use for working this very modern political system.

On the one hand, this form of mobilisation has helped draw those groups into the political process, which would otherwise have got left out or whose integration with the working of the polity would have been long delayed: the various minority groups, the women, the strata at the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder; on the other, the very success of such mobilisation has tended to reinforce those very primordial identities which it had sought to erode. Thus the space for such identities in our political process has tended to grow with the passage of time.

The BJP, conscious of this, is seeking to enlarge its own space by embarking upon the project of consolidating the largest of such constituencies, namely Hindus. In that context it is unimportant for it whether or not historical evidence supports the claim on Ram Janmabhoomi, so long as it serves as an instrument of mobilisation.

However, the working of our polity has also shown that given the choice between this form of mobilisation and the one based on secular economic and political issues, the illiterate but politically extremely astute Indian electorate has always overcome its primordial identities and voted for the secular choice; this happened in 1967, 1971, 1977 and to an extent in 1980. The BJP might be able to turn the temple issue into an electorate vote-bank only if the other parties fail to face it with a clearcut secular choice. That only the future can tell. But the people of India are capable of producing great surprises!

Courtesy: The Hindu

VHP CAMPAIGN OF LIES: GOEBBELS IS ALREADY HERE

by Praful Bidwai

The BJP-VHP-RSS Bajrang Dal combine has opened yet another front in its war against secularism, of which the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation is part. It has now unleashed a huge, well-orchestrated and energetic campaign of lies, distortion, innuendo, perversion and outright falsification of history.

The campaign consist of:

*** concocting archaeological "evidence" that a Ram temple existed at the disputed site in Ayodhya in the 16th century, if not earlier.

*** "proving" that the temple was destroyed by "invaders" who used parts of it to construct the Babri mosque in 1528 AD,

*** claiming that the only recompense for this act of sacrilege is the demolition of the mosque.

*** sedulously propagating the lie that the mosque has not been used since 1936 as a place of worship, and therefore the dispute is between a (real) temple and a "non-existent" mosque about which the Muslims are being mean and unreasonable (unlike the Hindus).

*** fabricating documents to show that major leaders of the freedom movement, such as Gandhiji and Sardar Pael, were

for a "just" solution to the dispute which would involve the Muslims handing over the entire site to Hindus.

*** counterposing "faith" to "facts" and constructing specious arguments in favour of the former against the latter, whenever that is convenient, ie, contending that even if it cannot be proved that a Ram temple existed at the site in question, we must respect the majority community's belief that it did.

This campaign has been carefully orchestrated through planted stories in the media, through pamphlets, and cassettes, through statements issued by their office-bearers, and last but not least, in the kind of visual displays organised in the VHP's Ayodhya showroom (The Times of India, December 4 by a group of scholars). For example, a national daily carried on December 2, an article by Dr. S.P. Gupta who, it claimed, was associated with the team which undertook the Ayodhya excavation under Prof B.B.Lal in 1975-80. The article claimed that there was irrefutable proof that a temple existed at the site, as testified by the excavation of some stone pillars.

The author fails to show that the pillars actually belong to the site, that they had actually performed a load-bearing function, that they were necessarily part of a religious structure as distinct from a secular construction. However, the article "concluded" that a temple did exist until demolished by Mir Baqui. The conclusion is based on a series of non sequiturs and that other fallacy known as *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. The issue has been adequately dealt with by eminent JNU historians both in their larger pamphlet on the subject and in their more recent reply to Dr. Gupta on December 5.

Dr. Gupta's name does not appear in any of the relevant publications of the Archaeological Survey of (India, although it is customary to list the entire team, even the technical personnel. The Express's attempt to balance this distortion by Dr. Gupta — an academic distinguished mainly by his association with the RSS, who gained notoriety for his pleas for rewriting history text-books in the Janata period — was equally unbalanced. The paper did carry the JNU historians' reply, but as only one of three articles, the other two being pro-Gupta. The author of one of these did not go beyond the mere and brief assertion that a temple existed.. The

author of the other based himself on the wholly false promise that Dr. B.B. Lal had reported finding a temple (or evidence of one) at the site. Dr. Lal has in his published academic writings reported no such thing.

The second author Mr. Mahadevan was introduced as an Indologist. This is unconvincing if only because that claim on behalf of a former bureaucrat, a manager in the Express group and latterly editor of that group's Tamil publication (*Dinamani*), is based on little more than an effort to decipher the Indus valley script — something that professionals linguists, lexicographers, semioticians, hieroglyphics expert, mathematicians, symbolic logicians, curious laypersons and just plain cranks have attempted. All this blunts, by purely repetitive affirmation, the edge of the argument that even if a temple did exist — and no Ram temples are to be found in the north older than the 16th century at the earliest — and was indeed demolished, there is still no case for destroying the mosque; and that a 16th century temple, and therefore worth preserving.

A 16th century Mosque is as much a part of the Indian heritage as a 16th century Temple and therefore worth preserving.

More important, it is calculated to promote the idea of desecration of a Hindu monument by "Muslims" (who mysteriously remain the same, continuous subject in history — the present generation being responsible for its ancestors' deeds), which can only be avenged by the demolition of the Babri masjid.

The Express campaign, reprehensible for moral and academic reasons, is the most sophisticated effort with pretensions to literacy and academic respectability so far. A cruder example is the attempt by the BJP national general secretary, Mr. K.L. Sharma, to involve Gandhiji's sanction for the same deplorable cause — based this time on a pure falsification: an article Gandhiji never wrote in the *Harijan Sevak*.

Even more disgusting is a whole range of the VHP's official publications in Hindi, which quote at length and at will from numerous documents and references that are wholly non-existent, e.g. "p. 603 of the *Alamgir-nama*." Revenge and retribution are the recurring themes in all this. Their specific function is to obscure logic and rationality, reduce "justice" to the act of getting even (by

doing that very thing that constitutes injustice), and to find justification for the worst forms of prejudice and bigotry.

What is at work here is a closed system of thought. Why do so many outstanding Indian historians, among the world's best practitioners of the craft, reject the theory of the existence of a Ram temple? Because they have secular prejudices, or because they are bad, modern, westernised Hindus? Why did Prof. B.B. Lal, who is now cited in support of the pre-existent temple theory, not publish those findings for 15 years in academic journals? Because he was under pressure (from an education ministry headed by a Muslim?) not to do so.

This is a no-win situation. That is precisely what is wrong with Muslim religious leaders being asked to produce archaeological and historical evidence to counter their Hindu counterparts, claims. How do you prove that something did not exist, where the proof is itself dependent on the fact of existence and otherwise unavailable?

But this raises two larger questions. First, why should we accept the authority and the (claimed) representative character of the Hindu and Muslim religious leaders? In what way do they speak for the citizenry as a whole? Are they not merely self-appointed leaders whose claims to such representation is suspect in the first place? What if their mutual agreement is and rejected as immoral and invalid by the political representatives of these same communities that they claim to speak for? Is it not possible that communal Muslims and Hindus will find mutual accommodation with each other convenient especially at the cost of secularism which both want to weaken? And in any case with what authority or sanction do semi-literate mullahs and sadhus, many of them repugnantly obscurantist, speak on subjects which demand erudition and understanding?

Secondly, there is the larger question of the state giving legitimacy to unprincipled mutual accommodation, in violation of and supersession of the law of the land, considerations of decency and public morality. We are not here dealing with a private or domestic contention which can be settled out of court if the contending parties agree to do so. We are not even dealing with give and take on a property dispute. Nor are we faced with the question of settling just one dispute pertaining to Ayodhya.

What we are dealing with is a set of issues that has got inflamed beyond all proportions, which has gone well beyond questions of faith, and this or that site — indeed all such sites, which the VHP claims, number 3,000. We are dealing here with a grave threat of the secular-democratic constitutional order, to the Indian state as it is now constituted, and is the very definition of a citizenry (The polis) which is not based on religion. The entire project to create a modern, open, forward-looking society in which the political community is not coterminous with membership of a particular religion, will be put in jeopardy if we accept the dishonourable and anti-democratic compromise that is now being suggested by the combine of the VHP-BJP and promoted by insecure political leaders out to appease it.

There is simply no way that the Indian state can make such a compromise without giving up its claim to exclusive sovereign authority over the public domain, without abdicating its responsibility towards society, without lowering itself to the level of, and dissolving itself, in society without losing its claim to being neutral, non-partisan and objective — and thus without undermining its very foundations.

And yet that is what the VHP-BJP-RSS-Bajrang dal have reduced the state to, or very nearly, but unleashing their campaign of hate, revenge and retribution. This campaign, no doubt with some “popular” appeal among sections of Hindus — but then, did Nazism and Fascism not have “popular” appeal too? — has shaken the political establishment.

In other words, the VHP has succeeded in inflicting its terms of reference upon the rest of society by the sheer force of numbers and hysterical fervour. One source of this success is their propaganda. Thus today the worst forms of Double speak and Fascist-style dissimulation tend to go largely uncommented. How else can one explain the relatively mild reaction to the truly chilling statement by Mr. L.K. Advani that the Muslims’ best guarantee of safety is “Hindu Rashtra”, a blatantly communal society run on majoritarian terror and reduction of perhaps 120 to 150 million people to the status of second-class citizens, in which bigotry, violence and intolerance rule?

The danger should be obvious. The Indian intelligentsia, the thinking people of this country, citizens who cherish the values of

democracy, secularism, tolerance of dissent and human rights, have all been rather too passive in their tolerance of the hate campaign and propaganda drive launched by the VHP-BJP. By not nipping it in the bud, they can only expose themselves and this society to victimisation, attack and brutalisation by communal and majoritarian forces. It is imperative that they expose the propaganda campaign, repudiate the viciously sectarian arguments advanced by its votaries and apologists, and launch an energetic public education counter-campaign to explain the issues involved and to urge that their resolution can only take place on a principles, legally sound, dignified, constructive basis that is firmly within the secular-democratic framework.

Courtesy: The Economic Times

ATTENTION PLEASE, MR. ADVANI !

by Ramachandra Gandhi

"Ayodhya" literally means "a place of peace. Is that the place you are going to reach at the end of your Rathyatra? It is possible that exasperation and fear of bloodshed may cause Muslim opinion in the country to yield to your demand for the relocation of the Babri Masjid at the safe distance of mutual untouchability from the Ram Mandir sought to be constructed at the masjid's present site. But even if this extravagant eccentricity can be perpetrated without the massacre of innocents and disciplinary brutality, against all odds, will the outcome be a victory for Hinduism? Will the upheaval symbolise the victory of Rama over Ravana, of light over darkness, which we have just recently celebrated?

The structure known as the Babri Masjid bears the inscription "Sita ki raso" or "Sita's kitchen" above its main arch, i.e. in some sense it represents Sita herself to the spiritually literate heart of Hinduism. Will not the sky jacking of this structure for relocation elsewhere suggest not the victory of illumination over ignorance, but the abduction of Sita by Ravana in his flying rath? Does this not embarrass you?

RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

Television cameras will unsparingly document for baffled viewers around the world the technological gimmickry of the masjid's relocation and the moral horror of religious intolerance. Hindu intransigence in Ayodhya will provide Islamic fundamentalism everywhere with an excuse for preventing liberal Muslims from establishing social and political relationships of trust with non-Islamic states and societies. Theocratic and separatist ambitions in Kashmir and Punjab will become totally liberated from guilt or self-doubt, releasing imitative Hindu fanaticism from similar restraints. Are these to be the spiritual gains of our pilgrimage, Advaniji?

There are several alternatives to vandalism in Ayodhya which you would do well to consider for the sake of India and Hinduism, morality and spirituality, Islam and the secular world. You could, for instance, withdraw your demand for the masjid's relocation if Muslim opinion were to withdraw its demand for the removal from the mosque's precincts of the murtis were installed inside the masjid by zealots in the communally surcharged atmosphere of the years immediately following the traumatic partition of India. Likewise, blame for Babar's medieval barbarism cannot be laid at the door of contemporary Muslim devotees.

The masjid structure also acquires a sacred status of indisplaceability in the context of the claim that murtis of Sri Rama and other deities had miraculously manifested inside it; for how an enclosure chosen by divinity for manifestation be separated from the manifestation? Reason and spiritual sensibility, no less than historical perspective, demand a serious exploration of the option of leaving the masjid edifice as it is and where it is; also the murtis. Will you not consider this option and invite Muslim opinion to do likewise?

A glorious Ram Mandir can be constructed in front of the masjid structure. The murtis housed by the masjid could be replicated and installed with due ceremony in the mandir. Hindu iconography does not attribute a diminished sacred status to replicated murtis of deities. A pair of shrine will be the result, a story of time and transformation and trusteeship.

A slightly modified form of this option would involve the transfer from the masjid to the mandir of the existing murtis, leav-

ing the masjid edifice as it is, a witness of history to contemporary Rama bhakti, in this way in which Islam's presence in India has always been a witness and catalyst to Hindu self-definition. Do you not see, Advaniji, that with or without the murtis of deities inside it, Hinduism needs the presence of the masjid structure as witness and testimony much more than its relocations?

Unfortunately for Muslim devotees, namaz cannot be offered inside the Babri structure any longer, for the place has been used as a temple for image worship. Far from justifying relocation, this facilitates the retention of the structure. Not relocation of the Babri Masjid, but the construction by Hindu hands and hearts of a glorious new masjid representing Islam's unique opportunities in secular and spiritually catholic India is the offer you should be making to our Muslim compatriots.

HINDU CONSCIOUSNESS

Advaniji, the Babri Masjid and Muslim and Muslim chroniclers have preserved for Hindu consciousness the mantra "Janmasthan Sita ki rasoi." This is an age of global awakening to the significance of spirituality. Let us create in Ayodhya a contemporary "Sita ki rasoi" grove of sacred creativity around and beyond the Babri testament of history and self-knowledge. Such a grove would simultaneously also be a Ram Janambhoomi temple, because where else but in the alchemical laboratory of the earth mother did Rama manifest? So here is yet another alternative to the abduction of Sita which, if realised, will quickly transform Ayodhya into a major pilgrim centre of the modern world which longs to anchor its ecological anxiety in suitable symbolism and appropriate spirituality.

A concluding thought for you on the road to Ayodhya. If you could show magnanimity and wisdom on the Ayodhya question, you will demonstrate the possibility of a new quality of leadership to an India which is today disillusioned to the point of suicidal despair by the opportunism and superficiality of contemporary politics of all hues of persuasion. Do not put us through tests of fire prematurely. Unlike Sita, modern India is not pure enough and may not survive such testing.

Courtesy: The Times of India

BJP MISCALCULATES ON MANDIR ISSUE

by Amrik Singh

Never since 1947 has the situation in the country been so grim. This is partly due to the way politics has evolved over the years and partly a case of miscalculation and misjudgement.

While every political party is theoretically opposed to the mixing of religion with politics, in practice most of them do so. Even the Left parties, despite expressing strong reservations, are not above, flirting with religious group and parties. All these years they have hardly ever put up a candidate for election unless the communal equation was favourable to him or her.

There is no doubt that our society is organised along sectional lines whether it is on caste or communal differentiation. While caste has been in the news after the recent decision on the Mandal report, communal conflicts have resulted in killings and rioting for years.

When Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee was asked by a television interviewer recently as to how the BJP, which used to criticise the Akalis for mixing religion with politics, was doing the same in Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue, his answer was evasive at best. He said that this was not a communal issue but one of the legacy of Indian tradition and culture and so on. It would be both instructive and interesting to see if he can expand on this theme

and build up an argument in favour of what is happening.

OBJECTIVE REALITY

There can be no denying that what happened on October 30 at Ayodhya was the peak of a process which has been going on for a long time. To say that the crisis is now blowing over would be more than the objective reality can support. Communal incidents are taking place every day and the government machinery is hard pressed to contain the situation.

If the majority community becomes communal, there is no way the government can ensure the protection of the minorities. The BJP chose to ignore the law when it decided to use the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy to its advantage. Its argument that this was a matter of faith and not for the courts to decide is clearly an attempt to elevate a partisan point of view into a state principle.

While there are several precedents that can be recalled to rebut this argument, the one that comes to mind readily is the controversy about Gurdwara Shaheed Ganj in Lahore in the mid-30s. The Muslims claimed it to be a mosque though it had been a gurdwara for about two centuries. The court turned down the Muslim prolonged confrontation in which, as in the present case, a large number of valuable lives were lost. The British government however did not budge from the position upheld by the court.

SUPREMACY OF LAW

The interesting thing is that even after 1947, when there is hardly anyone to visit the gurdwara, the character of that building has not been changed and it has not been converted into a mosque. If this can happen in Pakistan, which according to its Constitution is described as an Islamic state, can India which describes itself as a secular state act differently?

How does one deal with an issue when faith is put forward as the governing principle in place of reason? If that contention were to be accepted, it would be the end of civilised governance. One could well ask whether the mosque would be demolished where the government to be run by the BJP. It is reasonable to assume that the BJP would feel committed to the supremacy of law in such an event, something it can disregard today because it has

only been supporting the government, from outside.

By taking advantage of the mass sentiment for Lord Ram, the BJP clearly made a bid to capture political power. That this would inflame communal passions and lead to so many deaths was cynically disregarded. But then that is the stuff politics is made of. For any one to think otherwise would be politically naive. Politicians almost always play on sentiments or prejudices.

PUBLIC OPINION

But the BJP appears to have erred in its calculations. It assumed that the mobilisation in the name of Ram would give it such overwhelming support that it would be able to capture power for itself. It is difficult to say to what extent the BJP will eventually gain by what has happened. However, the animus between the Hindus and Muslims is so intense today that it will take fears for tempers to cool down. Opinion, even in the Hindi-speaking belt, which is the principal base of the BJP, is not in favour of the Babri Masjid being demolished. Nobody disagrees with the idea that an impressive temple in memory of Lord Ram should be built in Ayodhya — even the Muslims favour this proposition. But except for a small and militant section of people, no one favours the mosque being pulled down.

The BJP's insistence on building the temple precisely where the mosque is situated is based on the argument that is a question of faith. Not everybody is convinced by it. On October 30, there was hardly any evidence of the construction of the temple being undertaken. All one witnessed was an attempt to pull down the mosque.

DISPUTED LAND

Had the BJP insisted on building the temple where the shilanyas had been conducted, the opposition would have been marginal. The only point of contention would have been that the site on which the shilanyas has been organised is under dispute. The VHP does not have clear title to that land. But one good argument, which neither the VHP nor the BJP chose to make use of was that the shilanyas had been performed in consultation with the state and Central governments at that time. That the decision was

resented by the Muslims is another question.

The Congress which was in power then could not have opposed the temple being built where the foundation-stone had been laid now. While the National Front might or might not have dissented, the Congress could not but have taken a position which suited the BJP.

The issuing of the ordinance, which was later withdrawn, seems to suggest that the government did not seriously consider acquisition of the disputed land. Had this been done, the Muslims would have certainly felt offended, but the confrontation that obtains today in several states could have been avoided. It is now clear that the BJP was determined to have a confrontation, but it is also clear that it misjudged the situation. The distinction between miscalculation and misjudgement is not very great. By clearing such a tragic and ugly situation, the BJP has only hurt itself and to that extent become further marginalised in Indian politics.

Courtesy: The Times of India

A MOSQUE WHERE RAM LIVES

by Abu Nadeem

In quintessence the precepts of Islam are the same everywhere. Nonetheless, the influence of the local customs, traditions and cultures on peoples of Islamic faith has been profound. India and Indonesia are two good examples. Notwithstanding it being the largest Islamic country, Indonesia has retained its age old cultural traditions and for many in India it would be a revelation to know how the Indonesians celebrate the birthday of the Prophet. It has remarkable similarities with the Ram Naomi procession. The Indonesians have not discarded their pre-Islamic traditions; even their names retain the vernacular flavour of their culture.

The Indian Islam too has own peculiarities. Moreover, the culture diversities of India has made its own impacts and there are perceptible differences between say a Kashmir Muslim and the one living in Assam or Kerala. It is remarkable to notice how local customs have effectuated indelible impressions on the lifestyles of the Muslims. The Indian Muslims are a heterogeneous community and speak languages of the States where they have been living for centuries. The influence of the predominant culture has been all-pervasive. It is to be observed specially on the more important occasions in their family life and social observances.

This is not to say that there are no differences; because indeed there are quite a few. Yet the points of congruence and affinity are far more than the points of divergence. To illustrate: at a Muslim

wedding, at the time of Nikah, binding the couple in matrimony, verses are recited from the Holy Quran in Arabiic and a brief citation is made of the Prophet's sayings followed by a du'a, generally said in Arabic. yet very few of those present (and often even the Qazi) do not know the literal meanings of the Arabic recitations. I vividly remember when I was married years ago, our small party included my Hindu and Sikh friends; and when I requested the Qazi Saheb to give an Urdu translation, he was taken aback! Upset, the Qazi was rather irked and said that if a translation was required, he should have been given prior notice! In somewhat a similar sort of way, when the Hindus get married, notwithstanding the prescribed ceremonies and rituals and the seven pheras around the sacred fire, verses from the Holy scriptures are read and, here too, except for the few well-versed in Sanskrit, the majority of those present do not know the meanings of what is recited.

FOR the common people, the recitations, whether in Sanskrit or in Arabic, are but mystical secret mantras. There are other customs and traditions too which have become pervasive in our lives, even though their origins are embedded in the local traditions and belief. Insofar as Islam is concerned, one cannot find these in the land of its original enunciation. A very large number of Muslims keep the Holy Quran up and above everything else in their homes — safe and secure at the highest level in the room and encased in a velvet ghilaf; and because the Book is held in awful esteem, we touch the Holy Book with reverence and many do only after having a *Wadu*.

It is on rare occasions that the Holy Book is taken out from its encasing for recitation except by the devout and the elderly. And if per chance the Book falls on the ground, one is expected to give in alms its weight in rice or atta to the poor. When somebody is too sick or almost dying, the Holy Book is opened, its air given and recitation is made of *Sura Yaseen* which only a few can understand. Then take the *taberuck* given to the visitors at any dargah: Isn't it similar to the prasad given in temples? And, kara prasad in the gurudwaras? Another extremely widespread custom of getting certain Holy verses transcribed in numerical form as a tawiz given by the mullahs. Quite often the tawiz has certain mystical diagrams not too different from the ones drawn for a horoscope! Of course, a tawiz is to be provided to provide solace and consolation to the

disturbed souls. In my considered view, if not abuse, this is an outright misuse of the Holy verses because Quran is meant to be read and understood and followed, not to be 'used' as a tawiz. However, we have forgotten all this and made it into a thing of symbolic reverence, part of the accepted ritual. No wonder then, if people do not understand Quran and, therefore, are unable to follow it in their daily lives.

Not known to many, the Quran was translated into Urdu only in year 1803, that is less than 200 years ago. And, when it was translated, it created quite a sensation because the mullahs were opposed to translating the Quran in any language. They thought they due to inadequate knowledge of Arabia its translation could easily lead to wrong interpretations and many would take the translation itself to be the Holy Book much like the various versions of the Bible. As of today, the Quran has been translated into almost all the major languages of India including Assamese, Bengali, Malayali, Tamil and Telugu and, perhaps, also in Kashmiri. I am told that the first Bengali translation was done in the early part of this century and that too by a Bengali Pundit?

Another example of mutual respect and regard for the feeling of others: for decades the Quran was printed in India in printing presses owned by the Hindus. Like any form of printing, this resulted in considerable wastage of imperfectly printed pages and the problem was how to dispose of the waste papers on which verses of the Quran were printed. My uncle, Sayed Murtaza Ali, told me all such waste papers are carefully collected, then solemnly burnt and the ashes consigned into a well or in the nearby stream or river.

Again would you believe that much before Mohammad Bin Qasim set his foot on the soil of Sind, the message of Islam had reached the Malabar coast, it is said, during the lifetime of the Prophet. And, if the Keralites are to be believed, it is claimed that the first Mosque in India was built in Kerala, not in Sind.

The historical facts indicate that hardly any one of the invader kings was interested in spreading the message of Islam. In fact, they fought each other to establish their own dynasties. Though they may have been exploiting the religion, much like their modern counterparts, their interests were precisely political aggrandisement. And how many of us know as to who invited

Babur into India? It was Rana Sangram Singh, popularly known as Rana Sanga, who wanted the Lodi Kings to be subdued and thought to have the conquered land and people distributed among themselves. It is another thing that like most such deals, it too did not work out.

It was much later through the influence of the Sufi saints, a form of Bhakti developed; when persons like Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya, etc. were able to bring their people together. And saints like Moinuddin chisti of Ajmer, Sheikh Saleem of Sikri, Bākhtiar Kaki of Qutab and Nizamuddin Aulia and Emir Khusro of Delhi and Baba Farid of Ganj Shukker believed that ultimate enlightenment can be attained only through the selfless service of the people irrespective of religion, caste and creed. While hardly anyone pays homage to the pretentious tombs and the kings (except as tourists), millions throng to the mazaars and dargahs of the Sufi saints from Karnataka to Kashmir. That is how the foundation of Harminder Sahib, the Golden Temple was laid by Sufi saint, Mian Mir. For did't Sheikh Saadi Say:

Tariquat be'juz Khidmat'e Khalq neest,
Be'tasbih o'sajjada o' dalq neest.

Literally translated it would be:

Devotion sans service of the people is nothing; Notwithstanding the rosary beads, the prayer matt and the cloak.

Recently I received a present — a most elegant rendering of Shrimad Bhagwad Gita in Urdu by Professor Dil Mohammad of Lahore. Most lovingly he has called it: Dil ki Gita. The more knowledgeable have told me that this translation, in essence and spirit, is in close correspondence to the original and indeed many have learnt their Gita from this remarkable but less-known book. I will only cite two verses:

Idhar se' chalein yaa udher se' chalein
Mere' sub hein raast'ey jidhar se' chalein.

One could start from this direction or that All the paths come to Me eventually.

The second verse is:

Jise' a'ey kassrat mein wehdat nazar
ke' har rang mein hey wohi Jalwagar.

meaning:

Whoever can see the One amidst the many,
For He's present in every colour of the rainbow.

Mahatma Gandhi said the same thing in a simpler language:

Religions are different roads converging at the same point. What
does it matter if we take different roads, so long as we reach the same
goal.

Our own Bhule Shah said:

Vedo'Quran'a parh parh thakke'
Sijjde 'kar-diyān ghissgayē' matthe,
Na Rab Tirath, na Rab Makke'
Jis paya Ti s Noor Anwar
Ishq di navyin navyien b'haar.

It means:

Been exhausted reading Quran and the Vedas,
And had impression left on forehead in obeisance, Found the Rab
is neither thru' Tirath (Yatra) nor in Makkah,
For His light is illuminating everything,
It's love being revealed in myriad springs.

It is tragic that a dispute over the so-called Babri Masjid, mischievously created and deliberately designed to cause distress and bad blood among the major communities, has now assumed absurd proportions. It is a pity that in the name of Ram and Rahim our politicians have brought our people at each other's throats and the nation seems to be lost in a quagmire of misplaced sentiments and fanaticism, reaching a frightening abyss, a point of no-return. It is not a religious issue; it is political and has been deliberately distorted into a horrendous political controversy the like of which

has not been encountered in this country before, at least not since independence. The object is to blame the Muslims for the deeds of the ancient arrogant rulers for which, under no stretch of imagination and logic, the present generation of Indian Muslims can be held responsible.

Not many in India know that the Janmabhoomi of Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon Himn) in Makkah (Mecca) has been totally erased; instead a "maktab" has been built on that particular site. It is as it should be because in the true spirit of Islam, not spot or place has any inherent sanctity; rather it is the message delivered by the earlier Prophets and its ultimate version transmitted to the Prophet of Islam.

Ram Chandra Gandhi once stated in a meeting at the India International Centre that it is a matter of deep spiritual significance that a mosque at Ayodhya is the one considered by the Muslims to be sacrosanct, even worth giving their lives; which place also happens to be the one held dear and holy by the Hindus; for they believe (or have been made to believe) it to be the birth place of Ram. "But, thanks to our spiritual illiteracy and selfishness to garner vote-banks, this magnificent aspect has been completely lost sight of." To me, as it is to Ram Chandra Gandhi, in this edifice reposes a deep and significant spiritual message. It is more than ironic that what is being claimed to be the Janmabhoomi of Shri Rama has acquired sanctity and sacredness for the Muslims, a matter of remarkable significance for the Indian Islam. And, therefore, the agitation mounted in the name of Ram and Rahim marks an unprecedented level of spiritual degradation.

Did'nt the poet say:

Ba'bien Karamat e' butkhana ma ai'e Sheikh
Ke chun Kharab Shavad Khana e' Khuda gard'dud.

The essence of which is:

See with your inner eye O'Sheikh,
the miracle of my temple,
Where (now) you bow your head in
prayer is the
very place where I made obeisance
to the Almighty.

(Persian couplet by Chandra Bhan Kashmiri)

archaeologist, Dr. B.K. Thapar of INATACH, that this can be accomplished; but in the first place, detailed measured drawings will have to be prepared and each stone, each piece of calligraphy, etc. will have to be photographed and coded. Fortunately, the computers can greatly facilitate this operation as also save time. Except for the domes, practically the entire structure can be rebuilt piece by piece. And the domes can now be replicated in a similar form with the phenials and minarets, if any. Most calligraphy can be saved or recast. Nothing, however, can be accomplished in haste or under threat and duress.

It may be that within India, a mosque once consecrated and used for centuries has never been demolished or shifted before. Nonetheless, in due deference to the sentiments of our Hindu brothers, a one-time exception can and should be made. I am sure that Islam would not suffer any humiliation or defeat; in fact, it would be in conformity with the noble traditions set up by the Prophet (peace be upon Him) who made significant sacrifices to win the goodwill and friendship of his adversaries. Hopefully, the goodwill of our Hindu brethren can be gained for I am sure they will appreciate the gesture. As Ram Jethmalani recently stated: "Co-existence is not possible without a strong bond of love and affection." Unless our Hindu brothers themselves feel and realise that it their sacred duty to protect their Muslim brothers, it would not be possible for the Hindus and Muslim to live in harmony and peace. A positive gesture by the Indian Muslims would thus be providing and abiding testimony to the noble teachings of the Prophet whom the Muslims claim to be guide not only for their own Umma, but Rehmat Al Aalmieen, mercy to all the people of the world. Let the Indian Muslims show a path by taking the first step.

It may be worthwhile to note that there are several examples indeed when mosques have been demolished and rebuilt. In Delhi the example of a small mosque adjacent to the mazaar of Baba Tousi (Matka Pir) near the International Trade Fair Grounds is one. My Hindu friends helped to design the new mosque and my colleague, M.N. Buch, not only contributed towards its construction, he even laid the corner-stone! Likewise, a mosque was shifted in Bhopal and later rebuilt to save the city from floods.

A number of mosques have been demolished, relocate and

rebuilt, of all places, in Saudi Arabia in Makkah, the fountain-head of Islam from where the message of Islam went to all corners of the world. The last one to go has been the Masjid'e Billal that used to over the Holy Haram in Makkah. When one looks to the larger interest of the people and the country which is the motherland to all of us, it would be in the true spirit of Islam to reconcile and compromise through a positive gesture to kindle the flame of live and goodwill. For a muslim any price of our dharti, provided it is neat and clean, is good enough to offer prayers.

As the Quran states:

To Allah belong the East and West: withersoever

Ye turn, there is the Presence of Allah;

For Allah is All-Pervading and All-Knowing

(Quran, Sura 2:115)

Under the circumstances, a court verdict is not an ideal solution because whichever party loses will nurture a permanent grievance against the other: "A sullen resentment would in time turn to hatred, even disloyalty." Only mutual reconciliation can help create a sea-change in attitude and, insh a'Allah (God willing), earn Muslims permanent love and goodwill and friendship of all. Minorities cannot exist without care and compassion of the majority. And, while the fanatic and the lunatic fringe on both sides would regard such an accord as an expression of weakness or defeat, let it be so. We should be more concerned without winning the goodwill of the reasonable and the rational, the silent majority because such a gesture is bound to evoke far-reaching repercussions, a victory for reason and sanity. A new hope for the future.

BUT then there are certain genuine apprehensions of the Muslims which must be recognised and removed. Muslims fear that if they concede and agree to the shifting of the mosque in Ayodhya, this will make a precedent leading to the destruction or demolition of many more mosque throughout the country. The lists vary from three to 3000! The self-appointed guardians, the merchants of dharm and iman are spewing poison at each other while the rath yatra (an air-conditioned DCM Toyota) has done its bit to spread fear, hatred and ill-will. Reportedly more than one

hundred people have already been killed. It is, therefore, all the more imperative to take a bold step and defuse the crisis. Given the goodwill and understanding of the majority, an amicable settlement must be worked out between the two major communities of our country, so that a one-time exception could be made. But it is not to be replicated or repeated elsewhere. It may be desirable that such an agreement should be guaranteed with an appropriate Resolution or legislation safeguarding other mosques, monuments and edifices as they stood on the Independence Day, August 15, 1947. An unanimous Resolution of the Parliament of India could be made to this effect. Otherwise, as has been pointed out: "India that is not secular would not be India."

Basically, all the places of prayer and worship, whether mosques, temples, gurdwaras or churches, are constructed by human beings to quench their inner spiritual urge. For God, whatever name one may give, does not need any formal places of worship. For Muslims, only three places are considered sacred and sacrosanct and these have been mentioned in the Quran: Al Aqsa in Jerusalem, Haram Sharif of Makkah and the Prophet's Mosque in Madina.

The human lives are far more sacred and precious than any building because a building can be rebuilt, but when human hearts are hurt, the damage to humanity is permanent. As the Sufi poet said:

Dil b'dast a'var ke Hajj e' Akbar ast
 Is hazaara'n Ka'ba, ek dil behtar ast
 Ka'ba buniyad e' Khalil Azar ast
 Dil guzar gah e' Jaleel e' Akbar Ast.

Which literally means:

Winning the heart of someone (your opponent) is like performing the Grand Hajj,

For clean heart is better than a thousand Ka'bas, ('Cause) Ka'be was built by Khalil Azar (to quench the spiritual thirst),

But, the heart of man is where the Almighty dwells.

And as Roshan Bhandari recently reminded:

No Life is meaningless and every life serves a purpose: it has a mission; therefore, let us do our bit.

Courtesy: Mainstream

MILITANT IMAGES OF A TRANQUIL GOD

by Anuradka Kapur

ONE of the the less noticed features of the new devotion to religious epics in the media and to Rambhakti in politics is the emergence of a new iconography of Ram, perhaps the most popular deity in Northern India. This indicates the many subtle and not so subtle ways in which the traditions of Ram and consequently the meaning of Hinduism are being altered.

Iconographical images, as we know, represent what are believed to be essential features of the figure depicted. The posture, gestures face and eyes are styled to transmit the meanings of God. Traditional iconography generally tended to present Ram, Janaki and Lakshman standing shoulder to shoulder, gazing outward, smiling serenely. Hanuman was in profile, sitting at their feet. It was usual for Ram to have a *dhanush* (bow) but unusual for Ram to be shown using the *dhanush*. The figures represented emblematically, tranquility and benevolence, the *shanta rasa*.

However, some of the images now in circulation show Ram pulling his bowstring, the arrow ready for flight. He wears a armour or a breastplate and is pictured above a *diya* — in fact, we find him in the centre of the Sri Ram Jyoti has a picture of a temple on it, presumably the temple that is sought to be built. The postcard says: *Ghar ghar se Ayodhya jayange, ham mandir vahin*

banayenge (from each home we'll go to Ayodhya, we will build the temple there).

POSSIBLE MEANINGS

This new image might seem merely curious at first sight, but what possible meanings does it transmit? Is this flame a sign of victory (diwali)? A new kind of halo? A sign of a fiery temper or fire?

In contrast to traditional iconographical messages, Ram here is *ugra* (angry), not *shanta*. Again, in contrast to traditional iconography, he is shown here as being "contained" by the *diya's* flame. Such containment seems to go against the conception of Ram's omnipresence.

There is another poster with the banner *Saugandh Rama ki khaten hain, ham mandir vahin banayenge* (we swear by Ram, we'll build the temple there). In this Ram is shown alone alongside the model of a temple. He is again, far more heavily armed than in any traditional representation, carrying a *dhanush*, a trishul, an axe and a sword in the manner of a pre-industrial warrior. He even has something like *mojris* (shoes) on his feet.

MARTIAL GEAR

Traditionally, the arms that Gods and Goddesses carry are not called weapons at all, they are called *chinha* (signs or markers) and represent the direct energies of the Gods, their function and their temperaments. Mahishasurmardini is usually represented carrying a *khada*, a broad sword, with which to annihilate her assailant. Vishnu, on the other hand, carries *padma* (lotus), *shankha* (conch), *chakra* (discus) and *gada* (mace). Each of these symbolically represents his temperament as a preserver.

Therefore, the transformation of the Rama image from that of a serene, omnipresent, eternally forgiving God to that of an angry, punishing one, armed with numerous weapons, wearing armour and even shoes, is truly remarkable. Where does this new Ram, laden with all manner of martial gear, come from?

He appears to come from television epics — Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayana* and B.R. Chopra's *Mahabharata*, especially, feeds

upon the escalating notions of a militaristic and virile Hinduism, In the process, the long accepted vision of Ram as *maryada purshot-tam* (exemplary man) is itself being transformed. And the warrior heroes of the *Mahabharata*, fighting for land, lineage, love and rights come to contribute to a new Ram iconography. This warrior Rama has little to do with Tulsi's Ramacharitmanasa or his Vinaypa-trika.

Tulsi's verbal icons produce a Ram who is delicate. The forest-dwellers remark upon Ram's lotus feet and on the harsh roads he has to travel. Tulsi's Ram, weeps easily. He weeps for his beloved and asks everywhere for Sita. As a warrior he fights sportingly because he is all powerful, and necessarily, more complete than all his adversaries. He is never any-thing but tranquil, never angry. It is Lakshman who gives way to emotions like anger. In this tradition, it cannot be otherwise, for Ram is the lord of the universe.

ANGRY CRUSADER

Contrast this to the recent images of Ram, dhoti flying; chest and legs bared, hair unrolling in the wind, striding in the clouds above the roof of a temple. this makes him a crusader, a hero rather than the compassionate, divine figure of the miniature traditions. Ram is, in the process, reduced. He needs to crusade, and he needs crusaders.:

The force of the concept of Ram as axiomatically complete is also diminished because of another move. In Rambhakti, access to Ram, the supreme lord, is by a different route than the access found even in Krishnabhakti. Even when the supreme lord takes human form, he is best approached through his *sevaks*, especially Hanuman. That is why Hanuman temples are plentiful in Northern India. These are dominated by the flying or leaping Hanuman, ever ready in the service of his lord.

ANCIENT TRADITIONS

Ancient temples dedicated to Ram alone are few. Panels depicting episodes from his life are to be found, for instance in Ellora; but the temple itself is not in Ram's name. This clearly, is not because Ram is not an important enough diety, but precisely be-

case he is, in this tradition, the most important. Hence representations of him must attempt to convey his all-pervading powers. It is, possibly, for this reason that Ram is represented so often by his *khadaon* (wooden sandals) alone. He can be approached only tangentially, as it were through his *sevaks*, through Janaki, through his companions.

While that is not to say that Ram, Lakshaman, Janaki and Hanuman do not find a place in many shrines, their power and benevolence has never been measure by the size of their images or of the temple within which they are lodged. Size, whatever else it might be, can obviously never be a marker for the greatness of deities.

It is important to note, then, that it is no long-standing body of ancient traditions that are sought to be continued in today's Rambhakti. In the name of tradition and ancient heritage new traditions and images are being manufactured. These new traditions have transformed Ram from a tranquil, tender figure to an interventionist warrior, God. This interventionist deity needs a grand temple for his home, we are told — a temple that the world will marvel at. Instead of marvelling at his divinity, we shall marvell at his temple. It is not enough, indeed perhaps it is no longer thought, that Ram is meant to be everywhere, and wherever he is, there is Ayodhya (*avadh tahan jahan Rama nivasu*). Hinduism is being reduced to a travesty of itself by its advocates.

Courtesy: The Times of India

HOW MAHATMA GANDHI'S PLAN CAN SOLVE TEMPLE ISSUE

by *Ajai and Shakuntala Singh*

The Times of India reports that the BJP General Secretary, Krishan Lal Sharma has urged the Prime Minister to accept Gandhiji's formula to resolve the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute (TOI, December 4, 1990, p. 7). Gandhiji is also reported to have suggested that all sacred places of the Hindus demolished by the Muslims should be restored to the Hindus voluntarily and vice versa.

In an article in the *Harijan Sevak* of July 27, 1937 he is reported to have said that it was a very heinous sin to forcibly take over any place of religious worship. During the Moghul times many places of worship, which were sacred to the Hindus, were looted and destroyed. And many of them were converted into masjids: "From the religious point of view," he says further, according to the said article, "a Muslim will never tolerate a Hindu placing an idol in a masjid where he has been praying for long. Similarly, a Hindu will never permit a place where he has been worshipping Ram, Krishna, Shankar and Devi to be converted into a masjid. As a matter of fact such events, wherever they occur, are a symbol of religious slavery". Gandhiji is further quoted as saying:

Both Hindus and Muslims should try to settle disputes among themselves. Places of Muslim worship which are under the control of the Hindus should be returned to Muslims. Similarly, Hindu religious places which have been taken over by the Muslims should be handed over to Hindus voluntarily. In this way, differences will end and it will strengthen Hindu - Muslim unity.

Now we have searched through *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, all the ninety volumes, as also the supplementary Volume I published in 1989 to look for this passage. We looked through all the index entries under the heading of Masjid, Mandir, Mosque, Temple, Religion. We also looked through every page of Volume Sixtyfive of *The Collected Works* which covers all that Gandhiji wrote between March 15 - July 31, 1937. We have not been able to trace the article in *Harijan Sevak* of July 27, 1937 which Sharma has referred to. On that date the entries are from pages 436-441 and consist of *Letter to M. N. Roy* (p. 436), *Letter to Lord Linlithgow* (p. 437), *Letter to Mirabeen* (pp. 437-438), *Letter to K. F. Nariman* (pp. 438-439), *Letter to Mahadev Desai* (p. 439), *Letter to Amtussalaam* (p. 440), *Letter to Sampurnanand* (pp. 440-441). There is no mention of *Harijan Sevak* or of temples, mosques, or the Hindu - Muslim problem in any of these letters.

However, we must state that the quotation appears couched in typical Gandian language. We are sure the problem could be solved if Sharma or any of the Gandhian scholars could enlighten us all on the matter.

Let us now look at the definite entries that are there in *The Collected Works*. They present a point of view which those interested in resolving the Ram Janmabhoomi - Babri Masjid dispute may be well advised to read. Volume Ninety (the last volume in the series, but before the Supplementary) which covers the period November 11, 1947 - January 30, 1948 (the date of his death) has his speeches at the prayer meetings of November 21, 1947 (pp. 77-80) and November 30, 1947 (pp. 140-145). Let us take the first speech wherein Gandhiji says (pp. 79-80):

I cannot help mentioning the fact that according to the information received by me 137 mosques have been destroyed in

Delhi during the riots. Some of them have been converted into temples. There is one such mosque near Connaught Place. which can never remain unnoticed by anyone. Today there is a tr-colour flying over it. It has been changed into a temple by installing an idol in it. Desecrating the mosques in this manner is a blot on Hinduism and Sikhism. It is gross *adharm*a in my view. The blot which I have mentioned cannot be wiped out by saying that even the Muslims in Pakistan have desecrated the Hindu temples or changed them into mosques. In my view, any such act can only destroy religion, whether it is Hinduism, Sikhism or Islam.

In the Second speech of November 30, 1947 he said:

The Sardar (that is, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel) has made some arrangements and he is going to protect all the mosques we have here (that is, Kathiawar). You must have read the notice sent by him in the newspapers that the occupied premises of the mosques should be vacated in a week's time, otherwise they will be vacated with the help of the police. But I ask you what will we gain by sending the police? If some Hindus have installed an idol in some mosque — the idol may be of gold or silver or brass or earth or stone — but it is said, and I also believe, that so long as it has not been sanctified and not worshipped by pure hands, in my view it is not an idol but a mere piece of stone or gold. Such idols have been installed in the mosque at the corner of the Connaught Place. In my view, there is no Hanuman in those idols. To me it is mere piece of stone which has been shaped like Hanuman and to which some sindoor has also been applied. It can be worshipped only if it islegitimatelyinstalled and sanctified. But all this has not been done. Hence it is the duty of those who have installed the idols to remove them from there at daybreak and then keep them wherever they choose. By thus installing idols in the mosques they are desecrating the mosques and also insulting the idols. As followers of Hinduism we are idol worshippers, but worshipping any idol in this manner is not religion but the opposite of it. So, why should the Sardar send the police there? Those who are Hindus among you should become watchmen and remove

the idols so installed. We should offer to repair the mosques which have been damaged. But the Sardar says that the government should bear the expenses of the repairs of those mosques. Why should the government do it? Is it not because we are not doing it ourselves? The government has to protect everybody. But it would be a matter of shame for us all — Sikhs and Hindus — today. Of course I have not heard about any Sikh having installed the idols, for the Sikhs have only one idol, or, say, the holy treatise, that is, the *Granthsaheb*. I have not known of any Sikh having kept the *Granthsaheb* in any mosque. Even if any of them has done so he has insulted the *Granthsaheb*.

The *Granthsaheb* can be kept only in a *gurudwara*. Only the holy Sikhs keep it on a high pedestal after nicely decorating it. Somebody like me would wrap it in a nice khadi cloth. But today, even though people do not think in terms of swadeshi or foreign things we do manufacture beautiful woollens and silk by hand. If we spread such silk cloth and keep the *Granthsaheb* on it, it would be worthy of worship. And if any Sikh goes and keeps it in a mosque, he insults the *Granthsaheb* and then it cannot be worthy of worship.

A Muslim gentleman came to see me today. I could not make out what he wanted to say. But he was holding a copy of the Koran which was half burnt. Even that was sacred for him and so he had wrapped it in a very clean cloth. He opened the cloth and showed the burnt Koran to me. He did not say anything but looked at me with fearful eyes and then went away.

In his speech at the Kathiawar Patidar Conference (September 28, 1919, *The Collected Works* Vol. 16, pp. 186-190), Gandhiji talks of the flag over the temple on one side, and the mosque, the garden and the Parsi temple on the other. Elsewhere people would not permit this, but in India religion breathes a liberal spirit (p. 188).

Writing on what is a temple, he said (speech at Vartej, January 24, 1928, *The Collected Works*, Vol. 15, pp. 485-486):

A temple is not merely an edifice of brick or marble, nor does it become a temple by the installation of the image of a deity. It can be called a temple only if life has been breathed into the image. There may be hypocrisy in calling the priest and making sacrificial offering at the time of laying the foundation of the temple. The truth is that those who made a pious resolve to build a temple should, from that very moment, spend their life in deeds of penance and should surrender to the temple the fruits of all their good deeds. The manager and the priests of the temple should be leading a life of austerity so that one's heart is moved as soon as one enters the temple. If this is not going to be that type of a temple, if sufficient purity of heart and mind is not behind it, it is merely a building and, take it, it is a burden on the earth. Since it would be called a temple, the area occupied by it would go waste; it can be put to no use and it may turn out to be a pernicious institution and even a haunt of many sins. To lay the foundation stone as soon as the idea of constructing a temple occurs and then to live in the hope of erecting a temple is not good. Nothing is achieved in haste, the plants of religion do not grow fast. True faith, industry and patience are the prerequisites for this.

A similar thought is echoed in his speech at Selu (November 7, 1933, Vol. 56, *The Collected Works*, p. 193):

The idol in the temple is not God. But since God resides in every atom, He resides in an idol. When rites of consecration are performed, special sanctity is attributed to the idol, and those who believe in temples perform worship by visiting them.

A few conclusions could be drawn from these quotations, even if to state the obvious:

- 1) An idol in a temple is to be worshipped only if it is legitimately installed and sanctified. The legitimacy cannot be vouchsafed if it is, for example, installed in a mosque, or

for that matter a *Granthaheb* is kept in a mosque. Further, it has to be sanctified and that requires that it be worshipped by pure hands. Can hands which stealthily or forcibly instal idols be considered pure?

- 2) The person who instals an idol in a mosque desecrates the mosque and, equally important, insults the idol. It is his duty to remove it as soon as possible. In this not the government but the Hindus themselves should take the lead and even bear the expenses of the damage to a mosque so affected.
- 3) The building of a temple must be done by those who take a pious resolve. But they must from that very moment spend their life in deeds of penance and surrender to the temple the fruits of their good deeds. They should do *penance*, mind you, and surrender their good deeds. Those who wish to manage such temples should also lead a life of *austerity*. There should be in them a purity of heart that moves those who enter it. True faith, industry and patience are needed for there is no place for haste in religion. Where there has to be penance, austerity, good deeds and patience, could there be aggressive taking overs, violent *kar sevaks* and *frenzied shilanyas* even if the government in power abetted it?

No, Sharmaji. We have got our Gandhi quite wrong. The patience of Gandhi could hardly be countered by saying that the Hindus have waited enough. The patience that Gandhi would want is that of the pure and truthful person who waits for his purity and truthfulness to percolate and influence the impure and the untruthful. Not by violence, but by good deeds, by waiting for the results rather than snatching it from the pages of history.

And even if we for a moment grant authenticity to the *Harijan Sevak* article, it is difficult to believe from it that Gandhiji has suggested that the misdeeds of the remote past be undone by takeovers today. When he states many places of worship sacred to the Hindus were forcibly taken over in Moghul times, he does not suggest that they be converted into temples today. On the contrary, he has repeatedly said that whenever such takeovers were attempted the priest and others faithful should have laid down

their lives protecting the idol and the temple rather than running away from their duty.

When he says (if he does) that Hindu religious places which have been taken over by the Muslims should be handed over to the Hindus voluntarily, he means not the religious places taken over during Moghul times but during the present times. And that would be a perfectly legitimate advice to both the communities. On that basis, the Babri Masjid which was occupied by the Ram Janmabhoomi people sometimes in the recent past could not be justifiably occupied today.

Whether we like it or not, if Gandhiji is to be accepted, and his plan approved, we can hardly escape these conclusions.

Courtesy: Mainstream

MAHATMA GANDHI'S FORMULA ON MANDIR - MASJID

by Vishnu Nagar

In the beginning of last month the General Secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Krishan Lal Sharma, had put forward Mahatma Gandhi's formula to resolve the Ram Janmabhoomi - Babri Masjid dispute. According to it, Gandhi had advised that the Hindus should return to the Muslims those places (worship) which were under their occupation. Similarly, an appeal was made to the Muslims that they too return to the Hindus their religious shrines. But later it was proved that Mahatma Gandhi had never put forward any such formula, neither in *Navjeevan* nor in *Harijan Sevak*.

Although during Mahatma Gandhi's lifetime the Ram Janmabhoomi - Babri Masjid dispute had cropped up (does it not prove that this had not been bothering the 'Hindus' for centuries?), many incidents of placing idols in mosques had taken place in his lifetime from 1924 to 1948; and, therefore, Mahatma Gandhi had advanced a 'formula'. Briefly this 'formula' advised the Hindus that they should not act with a feeling of vengeance. Under no circumstances should they demolish mosques and declare them as temples by forcibly placing idols in them.

So much so that during the communal frenzy of 1947-48 when some Hindus rioters damaged the Durgah of Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Kaki Chishti Saheb located at Mehrauli in Delhi, on receiving reports of temple demolition in Pakistan, and some incidents of placing idols in mosques occurred, Mahatma Gandhi was not satisfied with just the government driving out the non-Muslims from those Muslim shrines, repairing the damage and getting the idols removed from those places, but he also laid emphasis on the point that the Hindus should do all that themselves. He even went on a fast and persuaded them to do so.

INTERESTINGLY, Mahatma Gandhi's advice not to take revenge on the Muslims and not to demolish mosques came at a time when the incident of a temple having been desecrated by the Muslims in Gulbargawas fresh in the people's mind. Earlier, two other similar incidents had taken place at Amethi and Shambhar as well. Saddened by these incidents Mahatma Gandhi commented on them in *Young India* on August 28, 1924. Even while describing the desecration of the temples as a wrong act and suspecting the hand of some organisation behind the Gulbarga incident, he had written:

The law of retaliation we have been trying since the day of Adam and we know from experience that it has hopelessly failed - Even though a thousand temples may be reduced to bits, I would not touch a single mosque and expect thus to prove the superiority of my faith to the so-called faith of fanatics. Hindus will not defend their religion or their temples by seeking to destroy mosques and thus proving themselves as fanatical as the fanatics who have been desecrating temples.

In the same article Mahatma Gandhi had admonished the 'unknown' Muslims who had desecrated temples and said: "Remember that Islam is being judged by your conduct". Thereafter he added:

You will not enhance the reputation of Islam by the acts reported about Amethi, Shambhar and Gulbarga. If you will

permit me to say so, I feel about the honour of Islam as much as I feel about my own religion. This I do because I desire to live in perfect, open and hearty friendship with Mussalmans. I cannot help saying that these desecrations are cutting a deep wound in my heart.

Twentythree years after this Gulbarga incident Mahatma Gandhi had, while speaking in the prevailing communal atmosphere at an all-religion prayer meeting in Patna on March 12, repeated his old faith:

If a misdirected individual took into his head to desecrate a temple or break idols, should a Hindu in return desecrate a mosque on that account? Does it in anyway help to protect the temple or to save the cause of Hinduism?

And in the same year when Hindus damaged a mosque in Bola village in Bihar and later celebrated Holi there, an anguished Gandhi visited the place. After that on March 28 he again spoke at a prayer meeting in Patna:

If this reported desecration (of mosque) on the *Holi* day is a fact, it is bad omen for the Hindus, for Bihar and for the whole country.

And later when in November 1947 he received information that mosques were being proclaimed as temples after idols were forcibly placed in those mosques, he said at the prayer meeting in Delhi on November, 30:

An idol has no value unless it is duly installed in a consecrated place by duly qualified devotees. Forcible possession of a mosque disgraces Hinduism and Sikhism. It is the duty of the Hindus to remove the idols from the mosques and repair the damage.

WHEN despite his appeal incidents of demolishing *Dargah-*

mosques and installing idols in them continued, and Muslims could not live peacefully even in a city like Delhi, Mahatma Gandhi sat on a fast at Birla Bhawan on January 13, 1948. All his demands were related to the life and property of the Muslims and the safety of their places of worship. On January 17, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad went to meet him and asked him on what conditions he would end his fast, Gandhiji laid down 'seven tests' and promised to end his fast if they were met. These were:

- (1) Khwaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiar Kaki's tomb at Mehrauli should be repaired. Muslims should have full freedom to visit it and there should be no interference of any kind in this.
- (2) All non-Muslims should voluntarily withdraw from those mosques in the city that are being used for residential purposes or have been converted into temples.
- (3) Muslims should have the freedom to live in those areas where they had been living before riots broke out.
- (4) Muslims should have full freedom to travel by trains.
- (5) Economic boycott of Muslims should end.
- (6) Muslims should have full freedom to invite non-Muslims to live in their areas.
- (7) Those Muslims who want to migrate from Pakistan (to India) should have the freedom to do so.
- (8) Pakistan should be given Rs. 25 crores as promised.

According to the narration by Mahatma Gandhi's secretary Pyare Lal in his book, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Last Phase*, in that period several mosques in the capital had been damaged and some had been occupied by Hindu refugees from Pakistan. In some, the refugees had installed idols and turned them into temples. Mahatma Gandhi's attention was drawn to one such mosque in Connaught Place and he had drawn the attention of the then Home Minister Sardar Patel towards this. But initially Sardar Patel paid no heed to Mahatma Gandhi because the Home Ministry officials had given him a different report.

Mahatma Gandhi got the assurances from the government

but he was not satisfied with them. He used to say that the Hindus themselves should restore the mosques and remove idols. "Restoration of a religious place by Army or police is an irony — not restoration", he used to say.

When this did not happen despite his pleadings, Mahatma Gandhi, in the midst of allegations of "appeasing Muslims and Pakistan" flung at him, immediately announced the payment of Rs. 55 crores to Pakistan, a promise that the government was refusing to keep till then.

On the fourth day conditions in Delhi had improved. Hindu, Muslim and Sikh leaders went and appealed to him to break his fast. Pandit Nehru too arrived with the same purpose. But Mahatma Gandhi was not satisfied so he did not get persuaded. At night about 1000 refugees announced that they would vacate the houses belonging to the Muslims and bring back the Muslims into them. In sabzi Mandi the Hindu traders were boycotting the Muslim traders. They too immediately announced the end of the boycott. In the end, after the combined efforts of the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and the Congress, Pandit Nehru's appeals and the return to normalcy, Mahatma Gandhi finally broke his fast on January 18, 1948.

He had been hurt most by the damage done to the *Dargah* at Mehrauli. At last having broken his fast he went to this *Dargah*. There the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs all got together to welcome him. Manu and Sushila were also with him. Among the Muslims women are not allowed to enter religious places. But the Nazim described the two women as Gandhi's daughters and permitted them to enter. There Gandhiji gave a touching speech, some important parts of which are :

I am also distressed to see the costly marble trellis damaged. It is not answer to say that similar or worse things have happened in Pakistan. Have we fallen so low as to stoop to such acts of vandalism? Granting that such incidents have occurred on a larger scale in Pakistan, it will be improper to institute comparisons in evil doing. Even if the whole world did wrong, should we do likewise? If today I take to evil courses, will it not distress you? For me it will be worse than death. Similarly, we have reason to feel ashamed at the damage done to the *Dargah*.....

The million rupee question is: Is this 'Gandhi formula' acceptable to the BJP? Would Krishna Lal Sharma propose it to the Prime Minister, Chandra Shekhar, so that he seek the help of different sides to resolve the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi dispute in its light?

Courtesy: Navbharat Times

RESOLVING THE AYODHYA TANGLE THROUGH HISTORY

by A. G. Noorani

"History is the most dangerous product evolved from the chemistry of the intellect. Its properties are well known. It causes dreams, it intoxicates whole people, gives them false memories, quickens their reflexes, keeps their old wounds open, torments them in their repose, leads them into delusions, either of grandeur or persecution, and makes nations bitter, arrogant, insufferable and vain". The death dance being enacted at enormous cost of human life in several cities in the country is not a natural result of the "dangerous product" history can be as described by Paul Valery in his classes *History and Politics*. The death dance has been set afoot by a calculated exploitation of history to achieve political power. The history that is commissioned in the service of power is as distorted as the ends are sordid.

Chandra Shekhar showed keen insight into the dangers of exploitation of history on the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi question at Ayodhya in the statement he made as the President of the Janata Party on November 9, 1987. He said:

About Ram Janmabhoomi, just three days after the locks were opened, I said that a grave mistake was being committed. One Amritsar (that is, 'Operation Bluestar') was enough

and there should be no repetition of that in regard to the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid question... You know that there has been a mosque at that place for five hundred years. Are you going to revise history? (*The Telegraph*, November 11, 1987)

The VHP and the Babri Masjid Action Committee submitted historical, archaeological and legal proof of their respective cases in writing to the government on December 23, 1990. The VHP had submitted some archaeological evidence of the Prime Minister on December 3, based largely on the writings of Dr. S.P. Gupta which first appeared in the RSS journal *Manthan* in February and March 1990 and later in October 1990. They received their just deserts at the hands of Professors Romila Thapar, S. Gopal and K.N. Panikkar. (*Indian Express*, December 5, 1990):

One wonders why if there was such evidence Prof B.B. Lal (under whom Dr. Gupta claimed to have participated in the excavation of a site adjoining the mosque fifteen years ago) is only revealing it now? Could it be that because of the politics of the Ram Janmabhoomi it is being claimed as fresh evidence?

Prof. S.R. Sharma delivered the *coup de grace* to Dr. Gupta in an interview in *The Times of India* of December 6 (vide Dr. Gupta's articles in the *Indian Express* of December 3 and his rebuttal in the paper on December 6).

On December 4 representatives of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Babri Masjid Action Committee met under the auspices of the government represented by Subodh Kant Sahay, the Minister of State for Home, and the Chief Ministers of UP, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. They agreed to meet again for further talks on January 10, 1991 and in the meanwhile to submit evidence in support of their respective cases to the government as well as rejoinders to each other's case. The government must publish them *in full* in a White paper for public comments.

IT may be recalled that in 1988 the VHP had submitted to the

then Home Minister, Buta Singh, 13 "legal/ historical documents" in support of its case. Inasmuch as this pre-eminently rational approach — appeal to reason instead of use of brute force — is being adopted once again, one feels encouraged to think that is rational solution cannot be far away. However, on December 3, the VHP's General Secretary, Ashok Singhal, said that the talks between the VHP and the BMAC were not likely to yield any result and the only acceptable solution was agreement by Muslims "to erase the signs of aggression" and hand over the Babri Masjid as well as the mosques in Mathura and Kashi. (*Indian Express*, December 4, 1990)

Clearly the recourse to evidence and argument is not in substitution of recourse to force but in aid of it in order to beguile public opinion. How low the VHP-BJP combine is prepared to stoop became disgustingly evident when *The Times of India's* Research Bureau showed up the BJP General Secretary, K.L. Sharma's falsehood in the paper on December 4. He had claimed in a letter to the Prime Minister that Gandhiji had proposed a formula on Ayodhya in an article in the *Harijan Sevak* of July 27, 1937 a copy of which *he himself had seen* years before. Jivanji Desai had in the *Harijan Sevak* of July 13, 1950 exposed the falsehood of the claim made then by an outfit akin to the VHP. Now, "despite repeated requests from *The Times of India's* Research Bureau, the BJP Central Office was unable to produce a copy of the original *Harijan Sevak* or *Navjivan* which, according to them, carried the dubious article". (vide *People's Democracy* of December 9 for the text of Jivanji Desai's angry rebuttal).

It betrays a profound contempt for the truth altogether and this is evident particularly in the BJP President, L.K. Advani's utterances on Ayodhya (vide "Ayodhya and Advani", *Mainstream*, October 13, 1990). Recently when a correspondent asked him why he did not convene "a national seminar of renowned archaeologist" to prove the "historical authenticity of the temple", he breezily answered: "Plenty of the seminars have already been held." Which? And where? Any of the kind the correspondent mentioned, of national significance? He proceeded:

A few months ago I released a well-documented book on this subject by Belgian scholar, Koenraad Elst. The book is called

Ram Janmabhoomi verses Babri Masjid. (*The Statesman*, December 16, 1990)

So he had indeed on August 13, along with a significant companion volume entitled *Hindu Temples: What happened to Them* which contained essays on the theme by Arun Shourie, Harsh Narain, Jay Dubashi, Ram Swarup and Sita Ram Goel. It purports to be only "preliminary survey", Goel providing a list of "around 2000 Muslim monuments" which allegedly stand on the sites of "deliberately demolished temples or in the construction of which temple materials have been used".

It was on this occasion that Advani made his famous offer to intercede with the VHP to drop their plans for mathura and Kashi if the Muslims agreed to give up the Babri Masjid. One would expect a foreigner to be detached, especially if he is a "scholar". But this "scholar" writes with an acerbity typical of RSS writings. If Khushwant Singh is an 'anti-Hindu intellectual' why did Advani invite him to be the proposer of his candidacy for the Lok Sabha in 1989? Dilip Padgaonkar is called "Hindu-baiter", the only one to be singled out for abuse in the Index; besides, of course, a snide comment in the text. There are sneering references to the late Kamlapathi Tripathi. Sample this:

While Mahatma Gandhi was a devout Hindu, and a lucid polemist against Christian Missionary vilification of Hinduism, he was strongly influenced by Christian Scripture, especially by the *Sermon on the Mount*, and by Christian writers like Tolstoy.

Hence his "denial of the principle of legitimate self-defence". The blurb tells us that Elst "comes from a Catholic background". His present commitments are not mentioned, significantly.

If Gandhiji is treated thus, Nehru is denounced roundly on every count, including his foreign polity. Its connection with the subject is not very evident. As for Muslims, "the healthy and natural assimilation process (with Hindus) took place because they were human beings, and only in spite of their being Muslims..."

The RSS boss of the past, S. Golwalkar, had in his magnum opus *Bunch of Thoughts* listed three "Internal threats" in chapter XII. They were: the Muslims, the Christians, the Communists. Is it a mere coincidence that Elst also writes of "anti-Hindu propagandists of the Christian, Muslim and Marxist variety"? Elst reveals a lot more of himself than he or the blurb of his book would have liked. In sponsoring such a book, Advani reveals a lot more of himself than he suspects.

FOR all his froth Elst blows sky high three important bits of the VHP case which Advani tirelessly keeps harping on. This is what happens to those who seek aid from an over-zealous and foolish friend.

1. Setting out to explain why the classic guide book (*Ayodhya Mahatmya* (fourteenth-sixteenth centuries) did not mention the Ram Temple, Elst writes:

Well, that could be explained. First of all, the *Ayodhya Mahatmya* may have left unmentioned what it considered self-evident. Otherwise, it is possible that a temple on that very spot, archaeologically attested by the pillar-bases mentioned by Dr. Gupta, and dated to roughly 1100 AD, was demolished during the Ghori Campaign in 1192, and not replaced by any new building. Perhaps the Muslims rulers didn't allow rebuilding it, but as soon as possible, the Hindu worshippers came back and made do with *worship in the open air* (as had been customary in pre-Buddhist times). In that case, *Babar's men would not have demolished a Janmabhoomi temple* (and the black pillars would have been taken from another demolished or decayed temple), since the Birthplace worshippers didn't use any temple.

However, that wouldn't make a difference to the essence of this episode, that is, that the Babri Masjid was built as as to replace an existing place of worship. What matters is not whether the roof over the Janmbhoomi was made of stone or of sky, but whether the Muslims imposed an islamic presence on an existing Hindu place of worship or not.

This totally demolishes the very foundation of the VHP case of the demolition of a temple for the construction of a mosque.

Since Advani relies on this book, he cannot escape from this admission or others.

2. It is disputed whether after 1936 the mosque was, if not regularly, at least occasionally used for offering *namaz*. Some people deny it, but Babri-Masjid campaigner Syed Shahbuddin claims to have witnesses who themselves have participated in *namaz* at the Babri Masjid in the 1940s. That the mosque was not being totally abandoned in 1936 is certainly plausible.

So much for Advani's theory of an abandoned mosque.

3. In February, 1986, the Faizabad District Judge ordered opening of the building for Hindu worship. In March, Muslim leaders set up the Babri Masjid Coordination Committee (BMCC). It immediately organised a nation-wide Muslim 'mourning'.

Note that Elst links Muslim protest directly to the offence, the opening of the locks of the mosque on February 1, 1986. He does not draw the Advani red herring of the Muslim Women's Bill across the trail. (It was moved in Parliament on February 25, and passed by it on May 5, 1986.)

In the very last para of his book the "scholar" tells us most revealingly:

It is quite certain that the VHP efforts to make Hinduism into a politically conscious unity, has met with considerable success. *It is equally certain that the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign has been instrumental in this development.* The question is whether the VHP will prove right in predicting: 'Make no mistake. We will build a *Hindu Rashtra* and we have taken a start on November 9, 1989.

Thus, the object of the BJP-VHP movement is not to correct a "wrong" or even "rewrite history". It is to transform a secular

polity into a *Hindu Rashtra*. Advani has belatedly admitted that his *rath yatra* had a "political purpose". (*The Times of India*, November 21, 1990) In this quest the "history" that he finds handy is of the Elst variety.

KALHANA'S *Rajatarangani* records that Harsh (1089-1101) destroyed all the idols in the temples of Kashmir save four:

There was not one temple in a village, town or a city which was not despoiled by King Harsh.

Temple demolition was not a feature of the Muslim period alone. There was large scale destruction of temples in the ancient period as well. What of the destruction of Buddhist temples and the persecution of Buddhists and Jains in our country?

Dr. Rifaqat Ali Khan rightly pointed out:

As historiography began in India during the Muslim period, there are inevitably more records of the demolition of temples by Muslim Kings. But if Kalhana could record so many instances of intolerance towards the Buddhist and others in Kashmir, surely the debacle of Buddhism with the Hindu revival in the rest of India could have been by no means peaceful. Therefore, the destruction of temples in India is a longer tradition which predates the Muslims. And to focus on the Muslim alone is communal historiography. (*Indian Express*, January 26, 1989)

The famous historian Prof. R.S. Sharma makes another pertinent observation in his M.Venkataramayya Memorial Lecture on "Communalism and India's Past" delivered on February 10, 1990. It has been published in an enlarged form in a pamphlet entitled *Communal History and Ram's Ayodhya*. Those who speak of the outrages of Mohammad of Ghazni, Muhammad of Ghor and Timur of Samarkand "completely ignored the havoc" there three "caused to the Muslim masses and rulers of Central Asia. Their main objective was to plunder.... there was practically no Muslim population in the areas they invaded.":

There has now appeared a work of excellent quality which puts paid to the myths being fostered by the BJP-VHP-RSS combine on the Ayodhya question. No serious student of the subject can ignore Dr. Sushil Srivastava's book *The Disputed Mosque: A Historical Enquiry* (Vistaar Publication, a division of SAGE, New Delhi, Rs. 58). He is reader in the Department of Medieval and Modern History, Allahabad University and has laboured on the work, despite open discouragement by many, for three years. He visited Ayodhya several times.

He narrates briefly, but on the basis of authentic documents, how the idols were planted in the Babri Masjid on December 22-23, 1949, Muslims were excluded from it, and the restrictions imposed on Hindus in worshipping the idols so planted were removed by an order of the Court on February 1, 1986. This order was made on the application of a person (a local lawyer) in the civil cases to which he was *not* a party and without impleading the Muslims who *were* parties. The file in the main civil suit was in the High Court. The order was made without hearing the Muslims. An application by one Mohammed Hashim, who came to know of the proceedings, was refused. In forty minutes flat the District Judge, K.M. Pandey, ordered the locks to be opened. Doordarshan was at hand conveniently to telecast it.

It is those who rely on proceedings like these at the interim yet fateful stage — so reminiscent of those in the Bofors case before Justice K.M. Chawla — who refuse to submit to a final judicial verdict. They do not flinch from relying on a forcible occupation of a mosque in support of their spurious claims.

The book not only sets out in full the FIR but records how the Districts Magistrate, K.K. Nayar, "came and asked the Imam of Babri Masjid to leave the precincts immediately" instead of securing to him the possession from which he was being dishonestly, Illegally, forcibly ousted. The Chief Secretary, Bhagwan Sahay, and the IGP, V.N. Lahiri, ordered the immediate removal of the idols but Nayar refused. In the civil suit the *State of Uttar Pradesh* made a statement of fact through J.N. Ugra, the District Magistrate of Faizbad, on April 24, 1950 which binds it still in law:

The property in suit is known as Babri Masjid and *it has been for long period in use as a mosque for the purpose of worship by the Muslims*. It has not been in use as a temple of Shri Ram Chandrajī.

No person with any sense of decency or shame can take advantage of the forcible conversion of a house of worship of one community by another. Whether a Ram Temple was at all demolished is debatable. So indeed is the very existence of such a temple. What is *incontestable* is that a mosque did exist on December 22, 1949 when it was occupied in the night and its character sought to be changed from the day onwards. It is clear offence under SS. 295 of the Penal Code. Yet, as the author writes, "the state has openly supported the cause of one community".

Dr. Srivastava's discussion of the genesis of the conflict proves to the hilt that it was a British creation.

Dr. Srivastava writes:

The earliest mention that the Moghul emperors defiled Hindu places of worship in Ayodhya is found in the writings of British officials in the first half of the nineteenth century. Till this time, no Indian or foreign traveller, observer or historian had made any mention of the Janmasthan temple in Ayodhya. It is certain that if there had been a temple commemorating the birthplace of Ram, it would have been extremely famous. Yet the Chinese and Arab travellers who came to Ayodhya up to the fifteenth century make no mention of it.

British writers projected the Moghuls as bigots and the British as "liberators" from Muslim "persecution".

Neither William Finch, the first European visitor to Ayodhya (1608-11), nor the famous Bishop Heber mentioned anything about the temple or the mosque; though the former wrote in detail of the place where Ram's ashes were believed to have been buried and the latter of religious affairs in Varanasi.

Dr. Srivastava adds:

The local myths are associated with the widespread belief that Babur came to Ayodhya on 28th March, 1528. It was the British scholars and administrators who strengthened the idea. John Leyden said so in his 1813 translation of Babur's memoirs. He made direct reference to the fact that the activities of Babur in Ayodhya are unknown as the pages of the diary relating to the emperor's activities between 2 April and 18 September, 1528 are missing. The revelation by Leyden was followed by the claim of Martin in 1834 that he had been to the Babri Masjid and found black stone pillars in the mosque. They were un-Islamic and therefore must have been taken from a Hindu temple. In 1854, William Erskine also published a translation of the memoirs and he too contended that Babur was in Ayodhya on 28th March, 1528. In 1873, H.M. Elliot repeated this view. In 1860, Carnegie made a direct reference to Babur having destroyed the Ramjanmabhoomi temple. He contended that Babur constructed the mosque on the spot of the fallen temple. Consequently, archaeologists adopted the same thinking. Cunningham in 1865 and Fuhrer in 1891 repeated the local traditions. All the British scholars and administrators who have been quoted above wrote in the nineteenth century. They were convinced that Babur visited Ayodhya and had been involved in some mysterious activity there. It appears that the local myths were granted respectability by John Leyden in 1813, even though Annette Susannah Beveridge corrected the Fallacy in 1921. She wrote that Babur was stationed some distance north of Ayodhya on 28 March, 1528.

Lady Beveridge found that Babar camped 72 miles north of Ayodhya on March 28, 1528. But it is these "authorities" the VHP relies on.

WHAT of the *Indian* tradition? First, Ayodhya was *not* regarded as a place of pilgrimage for Hindus before the seventeenth century. Secondly, as Prof. R.S. Sharma points out, "no temple of Ram is found in any part of Uttar Pradesh until the sixteenth century". Dr. Srivastava cites several treatises on *tirtha yatra*s (pilgrimages) which show that only in the seventeenth century

did Ayodhya develop as a place of Hindu pilgrimage. Thirdly, even "the deification of Ram started gaining acceptance in the thirteenth century". Where do these three incontrovertible facts leave the VHP case of the very existence of a Ram Temple built in the fourth century AD by Vikramaditya, let alone its demolition in 1528?

In the treatise *Tirth-chinatamani* compiled by Vachaspati Mishra in 1420, the chief places of Hindu pilgrimages mentioned by him included Gaya, Purshottama (Puri), Prayag, Kashi and the river Ganga. He also referred to the *Adhyatma Ramayana* and pointed out that bathing in the river Saryu washed away one's sins and that after a bath in the river, a pilgrim must worship Lord Vishnu at the Goprataru (Guptar Ghat) in Ayodhya. But he does not refer to Ayodhya as a *punyasthan* for its association with Shri Ram:

It is extremely surprising that a religious treatise almost contemporaneous with Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* does refer either to Ram or Ayodhya. Todar Mal, a noble in the court of Emperor Akbar, was a regular visitor to the city of Kashi. He commissioned a number of Pandits of Benares to compile an encyclopaedic religious treatise, which came to be called the *Todar-nandam*. Apparently completed in 1585, the *Todar-nandam* refers to neither Ram nor Ayodhya. Todar Mal is said to have met Tulsidas in Kashi and also to having had the Kashi Viswanath temple repaired, but he refrains from giving us any impression of Ayodhya.

The mosque was built 1528. If a temple had been demolished too, it would have been mentioned.

A number of treatise mentioned Ram's birth in Ayodhya. Yet they do not mention a temple commemorating his birth. If one never existed, it would have been too famous for anyone to ignore it. But, to go no further, *Vishnu Smriti*, attributed to AD 300, lists as many as 52 places of pilgrimage. Ayodhya is not among them.

Myths, whether believed by Hindus or Muslims, cannot supply want of proof. Bigoted Muslims found the myth of destruction of the Ram Temple as pleasing as credulous Hindus found it

insulting. Dr. Srivastava's treatment of the archaeological evidence is most informative. That very much included Prof. B.B. Lal's report which totally fails to prove that a temple was pulled down to build the mosque.

THIS brings us to the pillars. Dr. Srivastava is not a partisan. He writes:

The presence of un-Islamic columns inside the mosque and the image of *Varaha* on the outer wall of the mosque confirm that material from a destroyed non-Islamic structure has been used in its construction.

But discussing the totality of the circumstances, he concludes that "even if we grant that material from the previously destroyed temples was used in the construction of the Babri mosque, it is difficult to say, in the absence of any evidence, that the material was of the *Ramjanmabhoomi temple*". Realising this, Elst and his mentors have shifted ground. They argue that even if a temple was not demolished in order to build the mosque, the mere use of material, even if it be from nearby temples destroyed in the past, is warrant enough for the demolition of the 1528 mosques today.

By now even BJP leaders like Vajpayee and Advani concede that it is impossible to pinpoint the birthplace of Ram. After the sixteenth century guidebooks known as *Mahatmya* were produced for pilgrims. According to the oldest Ayodhya *Mahatmya*, Ram birthplace would be Kaushalya Bhavan.

It is a peculiar that after it was assumed and believed for a long time that Kaushalya Bhavan was the very place where it is today, the claim was made that Shri Ram was born at the site where the Babri Masjid stands today.

The Mahant of the Ram Janmasthan sued in 1885 claiming the *chabutra* outside the mosque but within as compound as the birthplace.

Dr. Srivastava demonstrates show the myth was fostered by

the British and describes the social and political conditions in the last century which helped them divide the Hindus and the Muslims. Ayodhya flared up in 1853. The Bairagis of Hanuman Garhi claimed Babri Masjid. The Muslims claimed that Hanuman Garhi was raised on the ruins of a mosque built in the reign of Aurangzeb. The Bairagis occupied the mosque in 1853 but were evicted in 1855. Muslims tried to take over Hanuman Garhi in 1855 forcibly but the Nawab of Avadh protected it. What followed is very relevant today:

The repeated bloody conflict disturbed the Nawab and the local population. There was a general demand for the restoration of peace in Ayodhya. *The elders of the two warring communities decided to sit together and work out a compromise.* They even invited the British Resident to preside over the discussions. The British held that the Resident had been requested to attend because the people had greater faith and respect for British authority. Actually, by the treaty of 1819, Ayodhya had been transferred to the British Resident. Although Ayodhya continued to be a part of the sovereign state of Avadh, for administrative and revenue matters it was under the control of the British Resident. *It was decided by the elders that the members of the two communities had to be allowed to worship at the same place.* The building itself was to be used as a mosque where prayers were to be offered by the Muslims and the Hindus were to worship in front of the mosque.

That is, on the *chabutra*. *This compromise binds both the communities today and can provide a basis of accord* — the mosque and a temple standing side by side. This, interestingly, is what even Dr. S.P. Gupta suggested at Guntur on December 23, 1989 — a temple on the *chabutra*.

In a passage of striking boldness Dr. Srivastava writes.

The state seems to have played a significant role in supporting the cause of the Hindus. The British Government openly encouraged the Bairagis. They were allowed occupation

over *nazul* land and were encouraged in their building activity. Although in 1885 the Bairagis were not allowed to physically occupy the land in front of the Babri Masjid, in 1901 the government was a party to the demarcation of the religious places in Ayodhya. It is significant that the local committee formed by the District Magistrate chose to mark out only Hindu places of worship. Clearly, the Magistrate believed that Ayodhya was an exclusively Hindu city. In 1949, the state again came to the support of the Hindu cause.

EVEN after independence, till 1949, the Babri Masjid survived as a mosque. The record since then has been a sorry one. The author of the mischief that was set afoot in 1986, for which the country has paid heavily in blood, Rajiv Gandhi, proposed a formula for peace on December 1. Its key provision is a Commission of Inquiry "to determine the question of fact as to whether, at the site in dispute, a Ram Mandir was in fact destroyed to build a Masjid in its place". It would consist of five sitting Judges of the Supreme Court selected by the Chief Justice of India.

A well-informed correspondent, Amita Gupta, reported in *The Independent* of December 8 of efforts by "the Chandra Shekhar-Congress combine" to find "a device through which the disputed structure and land in Ayodhya can be handed over to the Hindus". Exchange of evidence and Rajiv Gandhi's Commission of Inquiry were seen as efforts "in the same direction."

On December 22, Chandra Shekhar publicly declared that he would ask the Chief Justice to select a panel to go into the matter. He has thus plumped for his supporter's formula.

The National Front Government's formula of October 20 envisaged reference of "the disputes" — that is, all the issues pending before the Allahabad High Court — to the Supreme Court for an advisory opinion "under Article 143 for *expeditious disposal*". In an interview with the *Illustrated Weekly of India* (December 15), Advani complained of this implying that one issue of the destruction of the temple should have been referred. "That is judicially determinable." There is a world of difference between five Judges deciding the matter in court *and* considering it as a Commission of Inquiry.

Neither the National Front nor the Rajiv Gandhi formula is

free from legal hurdles. Advani might well accept Chandra Shekhar's plan. But the thrust of his programme is not in doubt. In a rare moment of candour he said on November 21 that "the interests of the minority communities could be safe only under a BJP Government". History distorted and warped, is pressed in the service of this political blackmail.

The government must take the people into confidence and publish in full the statement of the cases submitted by the VHP and the BMAC as well as their rejoinders.

Courtesy: Mainstream

AIN-I-AKBARI AND AYODHYA

by *Sher Singh*

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad writes in *Atit Ki Ahutian, Vartman Ke Sankalp*:

Diwan-i-Akbari mein Akbar likhta hai—

Janmabhoomi ko wapis lene ke liye Hinduon ne bees hamle kiye. Apni Hindu riyaya ki dil shikni na ho, is liye Badshahen Hind Shah Jalaluddin Akbar ne Raja Birbal aur Todar Mal ki rai se Babri Masjid ke samne chabutra bana kar us par chhota sa Ram-Mandir tamil hone ke izazat baksh di, aur hukam diya ke koi shaks inke puja path men kisi tareh ki rok-tok na kare.¹

(Akbar writes in *Diwan-i-Akbari—*

Hindus made twenty attacks to recapture Janmabhoomi, In order to ensure that his Hindu subjects' sentiments are not hurt, Hindustan Emperor Jalaluddin Akbar on the advice of Todar Mal and Birbal allowed the construction of small Rama Mandir after raising a platform in front of the Babri Masjid, and ordered that nobody should interfere in anyway in the performance of religious rites of the Hindus.)

Ram Gopal Pande 'Sharad' also reproduces it verbatim in *Rakat Ranjit Itihas*.²

Ram Raksha Tripathi tells the same story without quoting verbatim from the so-called *Diwani-i-Akbari*

He says:

In order to keep Hindu subjects happy Akbar allowed the construction of a raised platform (chabutra) in the compound of the Masjid, and the idols of Rama family were placed there and the hut was given the shape of a temple.³

The first thing which strikes the inquisitive reader and creates doubt about its being genuine, is Akbar writing in his book that Akbar gave the order. In the genuine book Akbar should have written: "I gave the order." This doubt compelled us to have a careful look at *Ain-i-Akbari* written by Abul fazl Allami, the Prime Minister of Akbar, and published in 1897 AD with a preface by Francis Gladwin in its English translation.

Akbar could not read and write. This is corroborated by Abul Fazal in *Ain-i-Akbari* when he writes about Akbar:

Everyday some capable person reads to his Majesty, who hears every book from beginning to end. He always marks with the date of the month the place where he leaves off, and the reader is paid according to the number of pages.⁴

So there is no question of Akbar writing in *Diwan-i-Akbari* about his giving permission to the Hindus.

Diwan-i means complete works. When Akbar did not know how to read and write, there is no question of *Diwan-i-Akbari* or the complete works of Akbar.

We did consult *Mughals in India* by D.N. Marshal (1967) which is a bibliographical survey of all works written during the Mughal period. We found the following two titles only-

i. *Diwan-i-Ali Akbar*

Poems in Sufic strain composed in the year 1198 H (1784 AD) by Ali Akbar bin Asad Allah. Its manuscript is kept in Asiatic Society, Calcutta, under MS-IVC 301.

ii. *Diwan-i-Ali Akbar*

Poems in Suffic strain compiled at the end of XII H (eighteenth century AD) by Muhyial-Din Ali Akbar Mawdudi Chisti. Its manuscript is also kept in Asiatic Society, Calcutta, under MS-IVC-301.

No other work known as *Diwan-i-Akbari* is recorded in this bibliographical survey. Hence the so-called *Diwan-i-Akbari* said to be written by Akbar himself is nothing but a piece of forgery,

Abul Fazl has recorded faithfully all the myths and superstitious beliefs of the Hindus concerning Ayodhya and Ram. Under the heading "Avataras or Incarnations of Deity" he writes about Ram *avatara*:

Ram was born in the tertya Jowg, in the month of Cheyte Suckulputch, in the Ninth tith, in the city of Owdh. His father was Rajah Jesserut (Dasaratha) and his mother Kooshelya. In his youth he acquired every art and science and afterwards despising worldly enjoyments traversed the deserts and made pilgrimages to all the holy places. At length he became the king of the earth and destroyed Rawen and introduced many laws.⁵

Similarly he writes about Ayodhya:

Ajewdheya (Ayodhya) vulgar Owdh. It is held sacred ground, to the distance of forty *Cose* North and twenty *Cose* South. It is a place of great resort on the nineth Suckhulputch of Cheyte."⁶

Under the heading "Hindu Festivals", he writes about Ram-nomean that makes the birth of Ram and falls on ninth tith of Cheyte month. But Abul Fazl has mentioned nowhere *Janmasthan* janmabhoomi temple, nor has he pinpointed the site of Ram's birth. Writing about the presence of Historians in Akbar's *darbar*, Abul Fazl notes:

There are also present at these assemblies learned historians, who relate the annals of past times, just as the events occurred without addition of diminution.⁷

Akbar got *Ramayana* translated into Persian. Abul Fazl writes:

By the command of his Majesty, the following; translations have been made from the Sanskrit. (i) *The Mohabharat*, (ii) *The Ramayon*, an ancient Hindu work, into Persian. It contains the history of Ramchondra at full length, with many philosophical reflections interspread.⁸

Abul Fazl gives details how Babar got objective history of one thousand years written under the title, *Tareekh Alfy*.⁹

None of these historians, who related the annals of the past just as the events occurred without addition, or diminution, has alleged the destruction of any temple at Ayodhya by Babar. Had there been any Hindu-Muslim tension in Ayodhya over a disputed place of worship Abul Fazl would have definitely recorded it. Had any even like the destruction of temple by Babar taken place, Abul Fazl would have definitely recorded it as he has recorded the Hindu myths and superstitious beliefs regarding Ayodhya. Naturally, what had not happened in the past during Babar or Akbar's times cannot be substantiated by forged documents like Diwan-i-Akbari.

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3. *Rakatanjit Itihas of Janmabhoomi*, Ram Raksha Tripathi 'Nirbhik', p. 46-47.
4. *Ayeen Akbery*, Abul Fazl Allami, preface by Francis, 1897, Calcutta, p. 85.
5. *Ibid*, p. 772.
6. *Ibid*, p. 786.
7. *Ibid*, p. 134.
8. *Ibid*, p. 85.
9. *Ibid*, p. 86.

Courtesy: Mainstream

BATTLE OF THE ACADEMICS

The Ayodhya Controversy : Digging into the Past to Change the Present

by *Jyoti Malhotra and Rashme Sehgal*

Soon after B.B. Lal, former director-general of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) conducted excavations on the *Janmasthan* site (or what is now commonly known as the Babri Masjid area), he gave a lecture in New Delhi where he presented his papers. Lal drew two conclusions from the six years of labour (1975-80) that he and his team had put in Ayodhya: one, the earliest settlement in Ayodhya dates to the eighth century AD, and two, there was a temple at the spot where the Babri Masjid stands today. Asked at the lecture whether he believed that Ram was born around the time, Lal said: "I am not saying so. But my spade is."

Lal was calling a spade a spade, but in the current controversy which seeks to bring out "historical evidence" which may bolster the Vishwa Hindu Parishad campaign, other archaeologists are clamouring for their spades too to be given a chance.

S.P. Gupta, former keeper of the National Museum, New Delhi (1961-86), and then a director at the Allahabad Museum till he retired in 1989, has come out with a thesis which says that there was a temple, it existed around the 11th century AD and that it was destroyed in September 1528 by Mir Baqi, lieutenant of Babar, who built a mosque in its place.

Two other historians, B.R. Grover, an authority on medieval history, and D.S. Aggarwal, an expert on modern history in Delhi University, have called upon prime minister Chandra-Shekar along with Gupta, and presented what they term, "archaeological evidence, revenue records and judicial records" in support of their claim. On the converse side of the coin are Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) historians of whom the trio of Romila Thapar, Sarvapalli Gopal and K.P. Panickar, have challenged Gupta's version. Along with R.S. Sharma, considered to be the *eminence grise* of ancient Indian history, this trio describes Gupta *et al's* assertions as false and accuses him of deliberately misinterpreting facts.

Yet others, such as Indologist Iravatham Mahadevan (also editor of *Dinamani*) and B.B. Lal himself, assert that while a temple did exist in the area, it would be dishonest to use history to suit one's political ends. These historians have tried to date the structure that they believe existed. Mahadevan, at least, believes that it would be regressive for the Indian state to base its decisions on secular matters by depending solely upon historical matters.

With historians and archaeologists willing to take a stand, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has also modified its tune. That the demolished temple marked the birthplace of Ram was purely a matter of faith, it said all along; now it is ready to substantiate it with historical evidence.

So who is really guilty? The ASI, master of the subterranean universe, refuse to talk. The present director-general, M.C. Joshi, is out of town and scheduled to return on December 12. All queries are passed on to the department of culture. While here too all officials kept mum, a serious bureaucrat of the ministry of human resources development, on condition of anonymity, told *The Independent* that ASI officials were indeed preparing a note on the controversy to present to the prime minister as asked for by him.

Said the bureaucrat, in all 14 sites in the area had been excavated, of which B.B. Lal had excavated three. "But there is no conclusive evidence that a temple existed," he said, adding that unless the site of the Babri Masjid is dug up, nothing can be confirmed.

He gave credence to the theory that a Buddhist temple existed on the site. R.S. Sharma is of the opinion that a number of Buddhist and Jain structures existed in the area, were written

about by travellers Fa Shein and Hieun Tsang, and that the Jains called the area Saket.

The source attached no importance to S.P. Gupta's assertions, saying that he was not involved in the excavations at all, and was therefore only "giving his opinion" based on someone else's evidence. This at best could only be seen as "tangential" evidence, the source said.

He questioned the timing of Gupta's findings, saying that the report in the *Indian Express* appeared on December 2 conveniently close to December 6, the date of the VHP's satyagraha.

The source expected that, after the ASI note was submitted to the prime minister, a committee of experts was likely to be set up to go into the "evidence". But the source was clear that it would be upto the prime minister to take whatever action he desired. He hoped though, that if such a committee was indeed set up, it would include "archaeologists of integrity".

S.P. Gupta, the man who began it all, has the following conclusion to offer: that a Hindu temple was built in the 11th century AD, which existed till the 15th century AD when it was demolished "suddenly". Debris from the temple was used in constructing the mosque, on the orders of the first Mughal, Babar, which were executed by his lieutenant, Mir Baqi.

Gupta cites the *Babarnama* (written by Babar himself) which says that the king camped on the banks of the Saryu and the Sidra rivers, some 8-10 km from the township of Ayodhya. The date of the event — March 29-April 2, 1528. Gupta seconds this conclusion from two Persian inscriptions that still exist on the Masjid— which say that the mosque was built by Mir Baqi in Hijra Era 935, which approximates 1528 AD in the Christian calendar.

Further, Gupta argues, floral designs including the lotus, the existence of "Hindu figures" and motifs such as *yakshas* (gods of water, heaven and earth), *devakanyas* (heavenly nymphs), *ganas* (short male attendants), *dwarapal* (door keeper) with a trishul in one hand and *danda* (staff) in the other, wearing a *tall-mukut* (crown); *Salabhanjika* (heavenly damsel); *purna ghata* (sacred water vessel), etc exist on the stone pillars in the mosque.

He says that this style, called the "late pratihar" or the *gahadval* is typical of the 11th century AD. At least four central pil-

lars existing in the mosque bear these original carvings, he adds.

In an interview with the *Indian Express*, Gupta has admitted that he was not a part of the excavation work conducted by the team of B.B. Lal but only "connected with the research work done at the site".

On the southern side the team found a "series of burnt-brick pillar bases which were constructed in two parallel rows." In addition the team found Islamic medieval glazed ware of the floral variety, which they dated to the 14-15th Century AD. Gupta argues that the brick pillars were used in the foundation of the temple.

The glazed Islamic tiles, argue the JNU historians, were first used in Persia in the 15th century AD and came to India later.

A number of archaeologists and historians like Gyanendra Panday, who has written extensively on Ayodhya, have said that the entire controversy is "irrelevant". But an ASI note on the matter may well help the prime minister make up his mind about setting up a 'fact-finding' committee. When such a committee is set up, perhaps it will get into the origins of Ram — when he was born, whether he was born at all... and perhaps S.P. Gupta of the Archaeological Survey of India may end up calling a spade a spade.

Courtesy: The Independent

INCONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE

by M. K. Venu

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bharatiya Janata Party have now undertaken the exercise of carefully putting together certain archaeological and historical material to suit their stand on the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi Dispute.

Prominent historians such as Romila Thapar and Servapalli Gopal have expressed surprise that such archaeological material should surface now as fresh evidence, especially when the report on excavation in and around Ayodhya was prepared between 1975 and 1980.

These excavations were done by a team headed by B.B. Lal former director general, Archaeological Survey of India. Lal has given his report to prime minister Chandrashekhar, who had expressed his keenness to go through such material. Along with Lal's report has come another opinion, widely publicised in some newspapers, by Dr. S.P. Gupta, who claims to be a member of Lal's team. The VHP has been particularly relying on Gupta's opinion; Gupta too has met the Prime minister.

However, the claims made by both Lal and Gupta with regard to the Babri Masjid structure have been contested not only by the Muslim leadership but also by well-known historians such as Romila Thapar, K.M. Panicker and Servapalli Gopal.

The major argument, which also forms the crux of the matter from the archaeological standpoint, extended by the Muslim lead-

ership and endorses by Romila Thapar, is that “the pillar bases, presumed to be that of a temple, were excavated south of the mosque, outside the wall surrounding the mosque”.

This does not necessarily mean that they run under the mosque as well. The B.B. Lal team had excavated six pillar foundations made of burnt bricks. Lal’s interpretation is that the pillars that might have existed there were used in the construction of the mosque which still has 12 pillars, five to six feet high and ten by ten inches in dimension.

The crucial question remains: was a mosque constructed on top of a temple after its partial or complete destruction? To prove this, experts say, B.B. Lal must establish that the site he had excavated south of the mosque runs under the mosque as well.

Lal in his own report does not categorically say that a temple did exist there. He is cautious and only talks about the possibility of the existence of a Ram temple on the site. He clearly says that the existence of such a temple has “to be confirmed through further excavations”.

Syed Shahabuddin, Rajya Sabha member, who has been a vocally active participant in the Ayodhya dispute, and is also involved in the ongoing exercise by the government to find a solution to the tangle, stresses that this central point can be established only through further excavations.

Shahabuddin had sent a series of questions to B.B. Lal on archaeological aspect which, he says, have not been replied to. “If they reply to all my questions satisfactorily, I am ready to accept these was a Ram temple on the same site”, he says.

He further argues, “If the pillar bases excavated by Lal are the bases of the pillars now found inside the mosque, their dimensions should match. I have received no reply to this.”

One major flaw in Lal’s case is that he estimated 700 BC as the period of the *Ramayana*. But historians point out that Buddha himself existed around 500 BC. The *Ramayana*, if at all it relates to real-life events, could not have been so close to the lifetime of the Buddha, say these historians. Buddha could not have arrived on the scene just 200 years after the *Ramayana*.

In this context another major contention of the Muslim leadership is that if all historians and archaeologists agree that there

was no habitation in Ayodhya before the seventh century BC, where is the question of Ram's kingdom existing there?

Shahabuddin also seeks to point out other contradictions in the VHP case which has been supported by some archaeologists. For instance, Dr. S.P. Gupta, former director of the Allahabad museum, talks about a grand temple with 84 pillars having existed on the site where the Babri Masjid stands today. The factual and historical basis of this is doubtful.

The VHP claims that the Ram temple was built by King Vikramaditya of the Gupta dynasty before the eleventh century AD. Historians are quick to reject this proposition as "the Gupta age is not at all indicated in Ayodhya between the third and eleventh century AD".

Finally, the theory made popular by the VHP, that the temple was demolished before constructing the mosque, has been questioned by Romila Thapar, who points out that there is no "sign of debris" from the excavations so far.

Shahabuddin finds another flaw in the interpretation that the pillars from the excavated site were the same as those in the mosque. "There are clearly two time layers between the excavated site and the earth on which the mosque stands. This indicates a vast gap in time in the period of construction of the excavated pillars and the mosque," he says. Thus, argues Shahabuddin, even if one assumes that there did exist a temple there, it probably became a ruin, and a mosque was then constructed on the site.

Archaeologically speaking, a lot still remains to be done to come to any firm conclusion. As of now, claims and counterclaims seem to have clouded the point at issue.

Courtesy: The Independent

THE PILLARS OF CONTROVERSY

by Seema Paul

The legal history of the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute dates back to 1885, but it is only after Independence that the plan for the proposed Ram temple has encompassed the actual site of the mosque. Thus, the demolition of the mosque is a mission more important than the construction of a Ram temple for the Vishwa Hindu Parishad which is telling people that the government is now allowing the Hindus to exercise their religious rights.

Raghubar Das, who filed the first suit for the construction of Ram temple on January 1885, had sought permission to build it on the *chabootra* which he called the Janmasthan, an area of 17 feet by 21 feet. It was an outer enclosure of the mosque's compound. To be precise, even this was a disputed area, but, significantly, no claim was made on the land on which the mosque's structure stood.

The dispute acquired its present more dangerous form after the deity was installed there by some Hindus who entered the mosque in the quiet of the night while a police picket stood mute witness. The VHP, which jumped into the fray as late as in December 1985, says that the deity made a miraculous appearance (*prakat huye*) at the site of Ram's birth and lays claims to this area saying that it will have to be the sanctum sanctorum of the temple. After circulating a temple plan encompassing the site of the mosque, it performed the shilanyas (foundation ceremony) on November 9,

1989 outside the compound of the mosque. While the Congress (I) government of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi permitted it, saying that the shilanyas site was undisputed land, the government of Mr. V.P. Singh and the government headed by Mr. Chandra Shekhar maintains that it was a disputed area.

After the deity was put inside the mosque, the chief secretary and the inspector general of police had sent frantic messages to the district magistrate of Ayodhya, Mr. K.K. Nayar, to remove the idols but he had refused to do so on the ground that it would lead to widespread rioting. While the gates of the mosque were locked, the court did permit puja of the idols from the outside.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad achieved its first major success when the district judge, Justice M.M. Pandey, passed an order on February 1, 1986 allowing an appeal for unlocking and the removal of restrictions on *Darshan* and puja of the applicant and other members of the community in general. Within 40 minutes of the order, the locks of the building were opened by the city magistrate.

The Babri Masjid Action Committee, which has been spearheading the agitation for the preservation of the mosque, has maintained that the Shariat does not permit demolition of any mosque as any area which is once dedicated to Allah cannot be taken away.

Whereas the real issue at stake is that of the nation's secular edifice, which the RSS-backed VHP is challenging by openly declaring its intention of establishing a Hindu rashtra, the debate has now come to focus on the archaeological, historical and legal aspects of the structure. The VHP and the B M A C, which have at last been brought to the negotiating table at the new government's initiative, have agreed to submit documents to the government to prove their claims regarding the site. These documents will be provided to the opposing parties and after perusal, the two parties will meet again for discussions in January. But surprisingly there is still no unanimity between the two sides on what exactly has to be proved before one side gives up its claims to the disputed area.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad's general secretary, Mr. Ashok Singhal, says that all they must establish for the other side to forsake its claims is that an 11th century temple existed at the site and that it was demolished to build the Babri Mosque. But the B M

A C convenor, Mr. Zafaryab Jilani, a Lucknow-based advocate, insists that "the VHP will have to give historical proof that a temple devoted to Lord Ram was present at the Ram Janmasthan and was demolished to establish the Babri mosque" in order for them to give up their claims.

In spite of the different stands taken by the two sides on exactly what has to be proved, a debate is being fiercely waged in the media columns on the historical and archaeological evidence about the existence of the temple at the site where the Babri mosque stands in Ayodhya. Dr. S.P. Gupta, former director of the Archaeological Survey of India and director of the Allahabad Museum who was a member of a team that carried out excavations on the western and southern side of the mosque between 1975 and 1980, has concluded on the basis of the excavations and his own research that a massive 84-pillar temple encompassing an area much larger than the mosque existed there till the 15th century. Fourteen of these very pillars he says, were used to build the mosque while two more are to be found laid upside down near a Muslim grave about a kilometer away. The carvings on the pillars, Dr. Gupta says, consist mostly of floral designs of garlands, often intersecting each other, as well as lotus and human figures of semi-divine beings such as *yakshas* (gods of water, heaven of the earth), *canas* (short attendant male figures) *dvarapala* (doorkeeper) with a *trishul* (trident) in one hand and *danda* (staff) in the other, wearing a tall *mukat* (crown), *slabhanjika* (heavenly damsel), *purna ghata* (sacred water vessel). All these semi-divine images, he maintains, are exclusively represented in a temple complex.

Dr. B.B. Lal, under whom Dr. Gupta had conducted excavations, has however refused to get dragged into this public controversy, though he has sent in his opinion to the Prime Minister, Mr. Chandra Shekhar, after he called for it. Sources close to Dr. Lal confirmed that his excavations bore evidence of a preceding structure which could have been a temple but there is so hard evidence that it was a temple and none at all to prove that it was dedicated to Ram. One of the papers published by Dr. Lal, which was proudly affixed as evidence in the files of an RSS activist, clearly stated that the excavations did not conclusively prove that the pillars used for the construction of the Babri Masjid has come from the preceding structure at the site. "In order to confirm this," Dr. Lal wrote, "and to obtain a full plan and other details of this

earlier structure, it would be necessary to carry out further excavations in the area.

A number of historians holding various shades of political opinion have also joined that debate, questioning the conclusions of Dr. Gupta. Three Jawaharlal Nehru University scholars, namely Dr. Romila Thapar, Prof. K.N. Pannikar and Prof. Sarvpalli Gopal have said that there is yet no evidence that the brick pillar bases that were discovered during the excavations supported a temple dedicated to Ram, which was destroyed and replaced by the masjid. It is quite plausible, they state, that there was a temple somewhere in the vicinity, perhaps dating to the 11th century AD, which gradually fell into disuse and disrepair and its material was picked up for the construction of a mosque.

Another eminent historian, Prof. R.S. Sharma, had come out with a new theory: he says the preceding structure at the site could have been a Buddhist monastery and cites the existence of Buddhist motifs like *salbhanjika* (a woman plucking sal leaves) and *danda* (staff) on the pillars on which Dr. S.P. Gupta has based his archaeological case about the existence of a temple.

The VHP also seeks to buttress its claim by citing historical sources from the 19th century. One of the documents they say that proves their case is *Hadiqah-i-Shuhada* by one Mirza Jan, an eyewitness as well as an active participant in the wars fought by Amir Ali Amethawi during Wajid Ali Shah's regime for the recapture of Hanuman Garhi in 1885. Jan says, "Where there stood the great temple, there they build a big mosque and where there was a small *mandap*, there they erected a camp mosque. The Janmasthan temple is the principal place of Rama's incarnation, adjacent to which is the *Sita ki rasoi*. Hence what a lofty mosque was built there by King Babri in 1923 A.H. (1528 AD) under the patronage of Musa Ashiqan."

The VHP also cites evidence from other Muslim authors but the Babri Masjid Action Committee is not willing to accept any of them as conclusive. Says Jilani, "They must produce evidence from the writings of Babar's contemporaries who were not relying upon hearsay." The BMAC also states that Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* which was written after the disputed mosque came into existence makes no reference to the birthplace. It has built its legal

defence, which it feels is its strongest defence, around the judicial records and point out that the original claims were not made on the land on which the mosque stands but on the *chabootra* inside the disputed compound of the mosque.

They also refer to the statement of Faizabad district commissioner, Mr. J.N. Ugra, in courts records in 1950 wherein he said, "That the property in suit is known as Babri Mosque and it has for a long period been in use as a mosque for the purpose of worship by the Muslims. It has not been in use as a temple of Shri Ram Chandrajji."

Interestingly, the VHP and the BMAC rely on the very same judicial records to prove their different theses. Whereas the VHP says that the site was disputed as early as in 1885 as proved by a court case filed by Mahant Raghbar Das, and must have been so before that, the BMAC members say that the fact that no court case existed before 1885 proves that it was not disputed prior to it. The long and fierce debate on the issue has become so politicised by now that a solution seems difficult to achieve. But some hope has arisen with the new initiative taken by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chandra Shekhar, but whether it will succeed is still a million dollar question.

Courtesy: The Telegraph

CUT - PRICE CULTURE

VHP Digs Up Myth, Buries History

by Arvind N. Das

Ayodhya has demonstrated that both Hegel and Marx were right. One said that events and personalities, as it were, occur twice in history. The other added the caveat, "the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce."

The *Kar Sewa* in October-November had the ingredients of a grim tragedy. Lives were lost, the state exposed its weakness through a combination of police over-kill and lack of political will. And, most tragic, the hyped up hoisting of the saffron flag atop the domes of the Babri Masjid made all those who stand for India's composite culture, rule of law, secularism and decency hang their heads in shame.

By contrast, the December drama, which some observers have characterised as *Bekar Sewa*, has the element of a farce. The routinised and rehearsed courting of arrest, the practised chanting of slogans, the fraudulent show of force by a compromised chief minister and back-room wheeling and dealing by self-appointment leaders of religious communities look like elaborate stage management of a show with a ludicrously weak plot.

BLATANT FORGERY

Whatever element of suspense there was has been destroyed by the centre-stage appearance of Mr. Chandraswami to disrupt the VHP scenario. Having dabbled in the sale of a department store, the God-man has brought his considerable commercial acumen into the transactions involving what Mr. Ashok Singhal calls *Sadhu-Sants*," elements outside the social production process about whom Goswami Tulsidas had acidly remarked *Nari muye, ghar sampatti nasi; muri muray bhaye sanyasi*" (if the wife dies or the house and property are lost, they shave their heads and become mendicants).

In the meanwhile, in a desperate attempt to remain in the limelight, the RSS-BJP-VHP-Bajrang Dal combine has pulled mouldering pseudohistorical data out of academic cupboards to reinforce its claim. In a manner of the devil quoting scriptures, a person owing allegiance to an organisation which was responsible for the murder of Mahatma Gandhi have even gone to the extent of circulating a purported letter by him on the subject of temple-mosque disputes. When the document was shown up as a blatant forgery, the unintelligentsia was quick to call up the services of fellow-travelling archaeologists.

In this move to shift the ground from blind faith to invented fact, the unprincipled opportunism of the government, Mr. Chandra Shekhar's middlemen and self-styled religious leaders have come in handy for the sectarian segmenters of India's composite cultural heritage. Fortunately, manufactured myth cannot stand the glare of genuine scholarship, and hence the attempt to commandeer academics into becoming the hand-maiden of bigotry is bound to boomerang. The state-of-the-art of scholarship on Ayodhya by Dr. Sushil Srivastava in a just published volume* show this.

* Sushil Srivastava, *The Disputed Mosque: A Historical Inquiry*, Vistar/Sage, New Delhi, Price Rs. 58 (paperback).

In the first instance, the RSS-BJP-VHP-Bajrang Dal case and the more surreptitious arguments of closet communalists in the government and its "outside supporters" rest on a perversion of the poetic tradition of Ram articulated by Valmiki and Kamban, Namdev and Tulsidas, Eknath and Krittivas. The conversion of

the idea of the Maryada Purushottam into a flesh-and-blood personage is nothing short of vulgarisation. Because, mundane historiography is no match for the creative imagination of a people seeking an idea.

Second, those who suffer from a poverty of imagination and have to assert the historicity of Ram's Ayodhya, are hoist with their own petard. If Ram is dragged into the domain of history, then problems of factual reconstruction arise. Both Prof. H. D. Sankalia of the Deccan College, Pune and Prof. B. B. Lal, former director-general of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), proceeded on the assumption of the present-day Ayodhya being Ram's Ayodhya. The eminent scholars soon struck the shoals of evidence denying the antiquity and divine omnipotence of Ram.

Prof. Lal's archaeological research demonstrated that the earliest human habitation at Ayodhya could not have been before the seventh century B.C.. And, as a good scholar, Prof. Lal concluded that if indeed Ram ever was in Ayodhya, he could not have pre-dated the period of the Buddha by more than a century or two. As he himself pithily remarks on the basis of his evidence, "for indeed, can anything be earlier than the earliest?" Prof. Sankalia went even further and concluded that if Ram was indeed a historical figure, his area of operation was severely limited and the superhuman feats ascribed to him were no more than the exercise of poetic license of Valmiki.

HISTORICAL INQUIRY

This delimiting of Ram through rigorous historical inquiry brings us to the third level of intellectual archaeology of myths: If Ram was a mundane historical patronage, what is the legitimacy of Ram Janambhoomi as "sacred space"? Regarding the birthplace itself, reference to literary and religious texts like the *Ayodhya Mahatmya* lead Dr. Srivastava to arrive at identification of at least two different sites. One is the Ram Janmbhoomi located on a grid whose referral points are Sita Paksthan (Sita Ki Rasoi), Kaikaiy kop Bhawan (40 yards away), Sitakerp and Sumitra Bhawan (300 yards away). The other is the Ram Janmasthan whose referral points are Vighneshwara temple (1,000 yards), Lomasa Rishi Ashram (500 yards) and Vasistha Ashram. There are several other claims regarding the actual birthplace in Ayodhya itself, not to mention one

made by Punjabi University scholars that he was born in Ghuram in Punjab, the paternal home of his mother Kaushalya!

Let us go to the fourth level: what happened to Ayodhya after the seventh century B.C.? Excavations carried out by Prof. Lal and Prof. A.K. Narain of the Banaras Hindu University reveal that the habitation passed on without interruption to the Sunga period. Subsequently, legend, called into service by the VHP, talks of Vikramaditya of the Gupta dynasty having built a Ram temple at Ayodhya. However, archaeological findings of Prof. Lal show that no Gupta layers were found in the excavations.

For the moment skipping the period before the site was re-occupied in the eleventh century, we proceed to the fifth level: did Babar destroy a Ram temple and built a mosque at Ayodhya? Dr. Srivastava and others doubt if Babar ever went to Ayodhya? Interestingly, in 1885-86 when the legal suit relating to the Babri Masjid-Janmabhoomi dispute originated, Mahanth Raghobar Das contended before the Judicial magistrate of Oudh that the mosque had *not* been built by Babar as declared by the district judge, Col. J.E.A. Chambier.

On the basis of a careful reading of the controversial inscription of Babar's General Mir Baqi and other sources, Dr. Srivastava concludes that it is possible that the "Babri Masjid" may be no more than an earlier ugly Jaunpuri-style mosque which Mir Baqi might have renovated and dedicated to Babar.

ANCIENT STRUCTURE

We now come to the final level of historical inquiry: although there is no conclusive evidence of the existence of a Hindu temple consecrating the birthplace of Ram, what is the possibility of there having been some other ancient structure at the site? In this context, the accounts of the Chinese travellers Fa-Hein and Huen-Tsang, the archaeological excavations done by A. Cunningham in 1862, the motifs on the carved stone pillars found in Ayodhya, all suggest that the site was a Buddhist *stupa*. The possibility of the destruction of this Buddhist site by Brahmanical on slaught, which desecrated even the Mahabodhi temple at Gaya, cannot be discounted.

The conclusions is that reverting to medieval barbarity of

counter-point destruction of monuments of India's composite cultural heritage is self-destruction. The defence of elements of this culture is not the responsibility of any particular community: indeed, even if all Muslims are bludgeoned into silence by force or deceit, the temple must not be allowed to destroy the mosque. Otherwise, the very foundation of India will have been destroyed. Philistinism, brute power, myth and political greed will have prevailed over culture, history, science and civilisation.

This is a frightening prospect illustrated by the examples of intolerance encountered by both Prof. Lal and Dr. Srivastava when they were carrying out their scholarly pursuits. Dr. Srivastava was threatened by bigots in Ayodhya when he referred to the building as Babri Masjid they were adamant that it should *only* be called the Ram Janmabhoomi. Prof. Lal was told by irate *pandas* that he would be subjected to a *danda-munda sammelan* where their staves (*danda*) would meet his head (*munda*). Fascist terror is the inevitable outcome of simplifying history and vulgarising culture.

Courtesy: The Times of India

ADVANI'S FAILURE

Limits Of Bluff And Bluster

by Harish Khare

Irrespective of whatever Mr. Lal Krishna Advani and his colleagues still hope to achieve on October 30, they are bound to invite a harsh and unkind judgement from history. Whether it is their mistaken confidence in the combined capacity of Mr. Chandra Shekhar and Mr. Rajiv Gandhi to create mischief for Mr. V.P. Singh or whether they have an unshakeable belief that the communal epilepsy over the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue can be converted into a lasting political asset, the Bharatiya Janata Party leaders have squandered the historic opportunity that had come their way to evolve into a genuine conservative political formation.

In retrospect, it is obvious that Mr. Advani and his senior colleagues have allowed themselves to be rail-roaded on the temple issue by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. And now, having made his political bed, Mr. Advani had no choice but to lie on it. In the process he has steered his party into a political isolation that threatens to undo the gains the BJP has made in the last few years.

No alternative leadership scenario in New Delhi can afford to be seen as embracing Mr. Advani at his current saffron-most self. And if the party does end up forcing a mid-term poll on the country, Mr. Advani cannot possibly hope to augment his party's

strength in the Lok Sabha. If anything, the figure of 86 members can only go down.

MINOR PLAYER

That Mr. Advani has overplayed his hand is evident. No doubt he hoped to take maximum advantage of the difficulties Mr. V.P. Singh was facing from his friends inside the Janata Dal and from his detractors outside. However, it would have been entirely untenable for any Prime Minister to allow any political party, not even the BJP, to exercise power disproportionate to its strength.

After all, Mr. Advani should not have forgotten that his party could win only 86 seats in the last election: no doubt an impressive and decisive improvement over the mere two seats it bagged in the December 1984 elections. But the party nevertheless remained a minor, even if key player, in the power sharing arrangement in New Delhi. And for quite a few of these 86 seats the party had to depend on the electoral adjustment with its National Front allies. It could not logically insist that its tally of seats entitled it to a kind of say which means a fundamental redefinition of the constitutional arrangement in the country. As any number of BJP ideologues are stridently pointing out, the Ayodhya dispute is not just a question of a temple but what is at stake is the basic demand for Hindu cultural supremacy..

"The sooner the Hindu cultural supremacy is established in the country the better for all concerned," opines the *Organiser*, the RSS mouthpiece. For this, obviously the BJP simply did not have the requisite electoral mandate. Mr. Advani's *Rath Yatra* was meant to overcome this political limitation in indecent haste. Mr. Advani's constant evocation of the need to respect the "sentiments of crores of Hindus" as well as his refrain that in matters of faith the judiciary cannot adjudicate could not be conceded without undermining the only source of legitimacy, the Constitution of India, that binds modern India together.

AGGRESSIVE HINDUISM

In preferring bluff and bluster over political realism, Mr. Advani has ended up throwing away the kind of changes in national perceptions he and his party have achieved in the last few years.

Mr. Advani should have known that the 1989 verdict in favour of his party was not in any way an endorsement of the kind of aggressive Hinduism that the RSS and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad prefer to espouse; rather, it was an expression of the countrywide revulsion over the kind of distortions the Congress had over the years wilfully introduced in the practice and theory of secularism.

The charge against the Congress of appeasement of minorities for narrow and petty political gains was not without some substance. This charge acquired a cutting edge after Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's *volte face* on the Shah Bano case. The BJP had broken out of silence and obloquy imposed by a cunning political opponent. Yet Mr. Advani and his men had not performed any alchemy of history. They had their task clearly defined. It was a long process of educating the country about the iniquities of the "pseudo-secularism" of the Congress variety which the party was convinced was just an euphemism for "Hindu baiting." The country had to be tutored in a positive interpretation of nationalism, deriving its sustenance from Hinduism. This was a massive task that could not be accomplished effectively within months, or at gun point. It required years of mobilisation on all front, thankless and unrewarding organisational spadework, commandeering of manower and resources. Instead, the party allowed the *Mahants* and *Dharmacharyas* to set the agenda for it. So much so that Messrs Advani and Vajpayee have no choice but to go along with RSS general secretary, Mr. H.V. Seshadri's formulation that a confrontation over Ayodhya will do the party and country good. The RSS ideologue argues: "For the first time in our post-independence history, there is clearcut polarisation of two forces: One, of the pristine nationalism of the soil and the other, a combination of the pseudo-secularists, fanatic communalists, and splitters of the country's unity and subverters of national identity. Such a polarisation was long overdue and is verily a boon in disguise." Mr. Advani must now join the battle-lines drawn for him by the VHP-RSS establishment.

Inasmuch as in a political leader's obligation to anticipate the consequences of his actions. Mr. Advani has failed rather abjectly. He has made inevitable the much decried "appeasement" of the Muslims. Suddenly, the likes of Mr. Shahabuddin and Mr. Suleiman Sait are no longer the political untouchables that they were a few months ago, Mr. Advani's unabashed assertion of "the Hindu

power" has made it necessary for the political establishment to blur over, for the time being, distinction between the moderate and the fundamentalist leadership in the minority community.

More than the political failure, the plunge into the Ayodhya confrontation represents the BJP leadership's inability, in fact in capacity, to usher in an era of Hindu renaissance, leave alone any national regeneration. As a political party, the BJP has yet to evolve finer political, culture and social points of departures which would have enabled it to emerge as an antidote to the Congress variety of electoral populism and wasteful and authoritarian statism.

RELIGIOUS PASSION

The party's much touted political distinctiveness remains undefined except as a platform for neon signs of religious passions. The longer the party postpones this process of self-definition the greater the danger of its cadres becoming addicted to the temptations of power and its leadership wallowing in ideological slumber. The "Rambhakt" is not and cannot be substitute for a party activist. The leadership will sooner rather than later come to rue its reliance on the VHP and the Bajrang Dal cadres.

Mr. Advani has, more than others, failed as a leader. He has neither been able to pace the expectations of his followers nor manipulate the perceptions of his detractors, nor finetune a favourable realignment of a political force in the country. In a way, he has placed the country in the imminent danger of losing its respectability as well in disgrace as the RSS was in the aftermath of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination.

If the BJP leadership is unable to wrest the initiative back from the Ramshila Kar Seva Samiti, it can well invite a kind of political, even legal, backlash that will revive the demand for a ban on communal organisations. Its leadership can be expected to remember that it was their current hero Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel who had slammed the ban on RSS. And if the BJP should persist in imposing its own version of nationalism and its own interpretation of history on the polity, the moment can produce another Sardar Patel.

JOURNEY TO AYODHYA

Hindu Nationalism Comes Of Age

by Swapan Dasgupta

Call it communal, abuse it as antediluvian and denounce it as irresponsible. Yet no amount of secularist vitriol and Left wing derision can detract the reality that Mr. L.K. Advani's *Rath Yatra* across Western and North India has been a spectacular success. Irrespective of whether or not he is allowed to enter Uttar Pradesh and perform *kar sewa* in Ayodhya on October 30, the *Rath Yatra* has succeeded in momentarily uniting a deeply fragmented Hindu society in a symbolic show of strength. Mr. Advani may not have lived up to his promise of creating the "greatest mass movement", but he has certainly triggered one of the biggest upsurges in post-independence history whose impact will be felt long after Mr. V.P. Singh's government fades from memory.

In harnessing the energies of India's majority community for the construction of a temple at the Ram Janmasthan (birth place) in Ayodhya, Mr Advani has shattered many of the fundamental assumptions governing political behaviour. First, he has called into question the very powerful belief, fostered by our former colonial masters, that sectarian divisions negate the possibility of any viable Hindu consolidation. Masquerading in various guises—the vulgar casteism of Mr. Kanshi Ram and the Left wing indictment of "syndicated Hinduism" are two recent examples — this cynical portrayal of a people permanently at loggerheads has hindered the

creation of a durable nationalism capable of withstanding external threats and internal subversion. It was also this vulnerability of nationhood that made it possible for manipulative politicians to impose the divisive Mandal Commission report, thereby ensuring protracted caste animosity and conflict.

NATIONAL UNITY

Against such a backdrop, Mr. Advani's audacious *Rath Yatra* has shown that Hindu consolidation need not necessarily be a pipe-dream. If nationalist forces, cutting across formal party lines, are able to build on this volatile assertion of faith, they will, to a very large extent, be able to offset the devastation wreaked by Mandalisation. A Hindu *Rashtra* is not, and is unlikely to be, on the political agenda. But it is not a tall order to aspire for a political community that, in view of its numerical preponderance, is in a position to act as an effective watchdog of national unity and integrity. In effect, Mr. Advani has posited a post-partition view of Indian nationalism that challenges all forms of separatism — cultural, ethnic and religious. It is, arguably, the most honest attempt yet to tackle those vital issues left untouched by the Nehruvian consensus.

Paradoxically, this forward march of Hindu nationalism has been made possible by a departure from the elitism that marked earlier attempts to provide alternatives to the existing secular consensus. It may be recalled that the pioneers of Hindu nationalism, notably Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Dr. Hedgewar had based their political philosophies on the intellectualised Hinduism of the *Vedanta*. But while these gave Hindu nationalism a claim to moral superiority, it also made for limitations on its spread.

For example, both Swami Vivekananda and Dr. Hedgewar concentrated their energies on creating a moral leadership whose examples would be emulated by the rest of Hindu society. Inevitably, this elitism had a natural appeal to those activist such as the terrorists of Bengal and the Brahmins in Maharashtra who were reluctant to engage in mass politics. Even Mahatma Gandhi's successful experiments with non-co-operation and civil disobedience did not force a reappraisal of this vanguard role and Hindu nationalism emerged from the freedom struggle with its purity intact but

politically isolated. Its ideology made it unable to cope with the rigours of electoral politics.

Where the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the BJP have departed from this tradition is in sensing the opportunities offered by popular Hinduism, an idiom that had earlier been adopted by Mahatma Gandhi. The Ram Janmabhoomi agitation has been a remarkable success because, for the first time, the Hindu nationalists have been able to link their appeal to religion as practised at the grassroots. In drawing upon the little traditions of Hinduism, symbolised by a common attachment to Ram, the Ram Janmabhoomi movement has, in effect, turned its back on the Brahmanical religion that inspired an earlier generation.

LOCAL TRADITION

Indeed, the accusations that the Ram Janmabhoomi movement is an attempt to foist a regimented, monotheistic and codified religion on an unsuspecting mass are completely misplaced. If anything, the recent Hindu resurgence is based on devotionism and implicit acceptance of the multiplicity of local traditions. The mobilisation around the *Rath Yatra* has not been effected through the "high church" of the Brahmanical faith, but through the folk tradition of roadside temples.

However, in drawing sustenance from the religious beliefs, at the grassroots, the *Rath Yatra* has inevitably linked the re-definition of Indian nationalism to the question of secularism and the status of religious minorities in India. In a sense this is unfortunate since the Ram Janmabhoomi dispute is primarily political and not a religious issue involving Hindus and Muslims. The communal dimension was partially resolved in 1939 when the Muslims of Ayodhya abandoned the Babri Masjid, and finally decided in 1949 when the shrine was formally converted into the Ram Janmabhoomi temple following the curious appearance of a Ram idol. Notwithstanding the Shahi Imam's strident plea to restore the shrine as a mosque by removing the deities, it is almost certain that no court or government will risk reverting to the pre-1939 status.

In view of the fact that the champions of the Babri Masjid are in a nowin situation on the question of the shrine and are, in effect, waging a battle over a structure that is unlikely to be ever used as

a mosque unless relocated, it is surprising that the issue should have been posed as one affecting the rights of Muslims to practice their faith. In part, this is a consequence of the alarm sounded by so-called secular groups, notably the two Communist parties and sections of the Janata Dal to win Muslim votes.

In recent months, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav has raised this alarm to a feverish pitch, with a handful of his over-zealous associates generating communal clashes to maintain the illusion of Hindu-Muslim tension. The anti-communal rallies, far from promoting an awareness of the complexities of the dispute, have promoted a dangerous communal polarisation that will undoubtedly vitiate the atmosphere. Nor are the fanatics in the VHP and Bajrang Dal devoid of blame. By responding to the secularist provocation with equally intemperate rhetoric they have institutionalised the communal divide.

ALARMING ASSERTION

However, it is an unfortunate fact that the stridency of the U.P. government has been linked to the perception that secularism in practice implies the acceptance of a Muslim veto on major policy issues. The belief was initially fostered by the erstwhile government's capitulation on the Shah Bano controversy and the Salman Rushdie affair, and confirmed when last November's *shilanyas* led to the Muslim revolt against the Congress.

The government's second thoughts on the ordinance acquiring the disputed lands in Ayodhya has further bolstered this dangerous impression. True, the VHP rejected the initiative outright (although the BJP was more circumspect), but what has taken the nation by some surprise is the vehemence with which the Muslim leadership denounced the ordinance. What is particularly alarming is the assertion that the ordinance violated Muslim personal law and that Waqf property is beyond the purview of legislation. This is tantamount to suggesting that religion imposes limits on the sovereignty of the state, a proposition that has very disturbing implications.

Indeed, this latest development is calculated to strain communal relations beyond endurance. Having demonstrated the extent of popular support, the Hindu nationalists expected a

measured government response that took into account the depth of feeling over the Ram Janmabhoomi issue. Instead, the government capitulated to counter-vailing pressure and compromised its image as a neutral arbiter.

The country will have to pay a very heavy price for this folly. And all because the government of Mr. V.P. Singh failed to realise that Mr. Advani was not instigating bellicosity and fanaticism, but merely responding to the growing disquiet of Hindu India.

Courtesy: The Hindustan Times

CHARIOT OF FIRE

by N. Ram

Few calculated political moves made over the past decade by a major player on the troubled Indian scene have as irreparable in their scope and as pregnant with reactionary mischief as the BJP's decision to throw its full weight behind the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's campaign to 'liberate' Ram Janmabhoomi on behalf of Hindu nationalism. That a modern party with national ambitions has cold-bloodedly embraced the anti-Muslim programme of a fringe organisation will shock even those who have had no illusions about the BJP's ideological and social orientation. It is quite possible that the alarmist press predictions of a communal conflagration or bloodbath will be disproved by the run-up to October 30, but secular and democratic India will find it difficult to live down the shameful effects of the progress made by L.K. Advani's rath yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya.

LIVES LOST

Whatever happens in the weeks ahead, the lives lost and the blood shed in the communal clashes of areas in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Karnataka over the last few days must be charged to the VHP's moral account, the latter half of 1989 demonstrated convincingly, that there is a strong co-relation between the launch of this type of militant religious programme (the Ramshila processions) and an increase in communal violence

in different parts of the country. The expectation that a formula for a settlement of the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute will be put in place by the V.P. Singh government in the nick of time rests on certain assumptions. If assumers, first, that the BJP's interested in continuing its critical support to the National Front government in order to keep the Congress out and secondly, that it is engaged in playing a political hand where brinkmanship, and, therefore, last-minute bargaining are on the agenda. It also assumes that the hard core of Hindu revivalism — the RSS — and the fringe elements — the Bajrang Dal, the Shiv Sena, the fanatic sadhus and saints and the rest-can be persuaded by the Advanis and the Vajpayees to rein in the trishuls, the bows-and-arrow, the knives and the shouts of Hindutva which must have a menacing ring to the average minority year.

Whatever be the interpretation of the BJP's game plan, one thing is clear. During a period of political disarray and volatility, this party hopes to steer the course of Indian politics, the correlation of complex religious and social factors; and the relationship between state policy and 'majoritarian' as well as minority religious aspirations, in India in a direction away from the one they too several decades ago under a formal secular-democratic arrangement. The basic structure of secularism — which is expressed in the propositions that there shall be no preferred religion under the constitution and the rule of law, and there shall be no mixing up of religion and politics or of religion and state-funded education — is under challenge at the ideological as well as mass political level.

The challenge was crudely conveyed by an early warning signal that political India tended to underestimate. This was the VHP boss. Ashok Singhal's 1986 boast: "You will soon see within this country a vertical divide within each political party — those who accept Hindu nationalism and those who don't." It reverberated in the Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray's late-1989 assertion. "The colour of this country has been saffron since ages... and this will remain saffron Hindustan." It is being primitively expressed today in the militant tactics and style of the Bajrang Dal and the saffron clothed gentry. More significantly, it is contained in the BJP chief's sophisticated and soft-spoken discourse on 'positive secularism' and his determined assaults on the ideas and activities of the 'pseudo-secularists' led by the UP Chief Minister, Mulayam Singh

Yadav, and including the Communists and politicians and intellectuals of the 'Centre' and Left.

KEY CONCEPT

Stripped to its ideological essentials, the Advani discourse of 1990 asserts a need to examine the concept of secularism in the light of the 'pseudo-secularist' track record of India after independence. 'Positive secularism' in India can be linked to 'guided democracy' in Pakistan: in both cases, the key concept and practice have been so qualified, under the guise of doing justice to the cultural and spiritual 'particularism' of the society, that the integrity, spirit and credibility of the concept are lost. The ideological crux of 'positive secularism' is the demand for the recognition the hegemony of majoritarian Hindu religious sentiments and emotions by the state by political parties and by various minorities for the greater glory of nation unity.

HIGH GROUND

The political expectations is that symbolically and emotionally, the high ground can be seized by building the Ram temple at the disputed site - each brick borne triumphantly to Ayodhya in a travesty of a 'Long March' — after reverentially relocating in the language of the theoretician of 'positive secularism'. Advani the alien mosque raised in the sixteenth century under the auspices of a Moghul conqueror.

What must be remembered by those who are interested in India's real history is that if the idea of modern secularism is old-fashioned, this revivalism is not brand new either. In her writings, the outstanding historian of ancient India. Romila Thapar, has offered the nation a scrupulously objective picture of ancient Hindu religio-social and ideological realities and has demonstrated, beyond dispute, the anti-historical and philistine nature of the aggressive communal motivation of today. A vital and complicated part of the development of the freedom struggle from the late nineteenth century has been the issue of the relation between religion and politics. One of the weaknesses in the way the freedom movement was led was the 'the disastrous combination of political radicalism and social reaction which was noted and

regretted by a great friend of India the British Communist leader B. Palme Dutt in his 1940 analysis *India Today*.

The political genius of Bal Gangadhar Tilak could not rise above the temptation to campaign in 1890 against the Age of Consent Bill use the emotional symbolism of the Ganapati festival, from 1893 to develop the mass basis of the freedom movement and initiate the Shivaji festival in 1896, to stimulate patriotism among young Maharastrians. The game plan was essentially to identify the national awakening with a revival of Hinduism and although the mobilisation was brilliantly effective against imperialism the effect was to isolate or cut off large section of the Muslim masses from the national struggle.

EXTREMISTS

This weakening tendency was not confined to the nationalists or extremists of the turn of the century. It appeared in a more refined and complicated form in the strategy and tactics of Mahatma Gandhi himself. During the non-cooperation struggle of 1920-22 the greatest among the nationalised leaders proclaimed himself a Sanatani Hindu who stood by the Vedas, Puranas, Scriptures, avatars and rebirth and believed in *varnashram dharma* in its 'vedic' as distinct from its present popular and crude sense, the sacred cow and idol worship. In her careful and sympathetic analysis of the ideas, emotions and practice of Gandhi: *Prisoner of Hope*, published in 1989, Judith Brown, the English historian, explores the built-up to the tragedy of Partition, a situation which found Mahatma Gandhi and his weapon of non-violence 'ineffective.'

'Hindu' political mobilisation and parallel reactive efforts among the minority communities, have taken a variety of divisive, socially damaging forms. On the 'majority' side, the movements for the ban on cow slaughter which have been around from the late-nineteenth century, opposition to the encouragement of Urdu as an official language as well as a medium of instruction in the relevant state of independent India, the 'textbook' controversy of the Janata years at the centre, and the eighties movement to 'liberate' claimed Hindu religious sites from their alleged occupation by Muslim religious structures built on top of them — not to mention the periodic bloodbath of communal 'riots', in which the police

and the state machinery have been known to participate—are part of this anti-secular, anti-democratic lineage.

In this situation, it is the political heritage of Jawaharlal Nehru (as the tallest among the nationalist leaders after Gandhi) which sets a high standard and provides real hope.

GANDHI WAY

While Gandhi worked passionately for fraternal Hindu-Muslim relations and campaigned powerfully against untouchability, an influential section of the Congress, or 'Gandhian' leadership retained an orthodox and socially conservative bias in politics and policymaking. The legendary communist leader BT Ranadive noted that "the most revolting expression of this bias was seen in Sardar Patel and Rajendra Prasad's reaction to the massacre of Muslims in the capital after Partition" and charged them with "an anti-human hatred of the Muslims..." Fortunately in this struggle, Gandhi supported Nehru. "It is difficult to imagine the consequence," wrote the Marxist theoretician, "if either of the two senior leaders of the Congress had been control of the government as prime minister. If anyone except Nehru with his deep secular outlook and commitment to the modern concept of democracy had been in charge of the government the independence of the country could have been jeopardised." It was a tribute from a life-long political opponent that Nehru would have appreciated.

Politically and ideologically, for those who have problems with the Left standpoint and programme on basic issues, the ideas and practice of Jawaharlal Nehru will appeal at the present critical juncture — when national unity, secularism, civil society and progressive human values are under fierce challenge. The Left apart, Nehru emerges as the quintessential pseudo-secularist' as viewed through the BJP lens.

OPPORTUNISM

Political opportunism on the question of communalism/ religious revivalism vs secularism was manifest, with disastrous results, in the Eighties — with the Congress's incoherent attempt to both play and counter the 'Hindu card' collapsing in November 1989. (This opportunism has been encountered in the handling of

relations with minority as well as majority fundamentalism).

Today Mulayam Singh Yadav, backed by the Central government as well as by one of its most outspoken Janata Dal critics, Chandra Shekhar, is holding high the Nehruvian flag of Hindu-Muslim mass unity and secularism, in alliance with the Left and other progressive forces. They must not be let down under any circumstances.

Courtesy: Current Weekly

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**RAM JANMABHOOMI,
KARSEVA AND COMMUNAL
VIOLENCE**

by Asghar Ali Engineer

From October 30, 1990 onwards the country witnessed unprecedented communal violence. Hundreds were killed for no fault of theirs. The intensity and spread of violence was such that it shook the nation and it can be said without exaggeration that after 1947 such violence was not witnessed in the country. It was not only the scale and intensity but also cruelties committed during the current wave of communal violence were unprecedented. Women and children were also killed in large scale either by stabbing or burning. In many cases limbs of these children and women were cut before killing them. Some of them were first stabbed and then burnt while still alive.

Thus it will be seen that not only our secular values but also human values are at stake. The lopsidedness of our values can be judged from the fact that we do not hesitate to kill and maim thousands of people just for the sake of a mosque and a temple. Historical and intellectual controversies cannot be settled through debate and historical evidence but by killing and intimidating. No nation can survive if a section of its population follows such methods against other sections and if the intimidating section

happens to be the majority religious groups. The BJP has always raised the slogan of *akhand Bharat* but they are not prepared to see the result of their actions on Ramjanmabhoomi temple. They have pushed it too far, so far as to push the country to the precipice of deintegration

Before we survey some of the communal riots which occurred after 30th October, 1990, i.e., after the Kar-seva programme, we would like to say few words about the communal situation and its possible causes. Because these riots which took place recently cannot be understood in right perspective if we do not understand the dynamics of our society today. Most of these riots, as we know, took place during or after the Rath Yatra taken out by the BJP president Shri. L.K. Advani covering almost, 11,000 kms. It is also worth noting that the Rath yatra was announced after Shri V.P. Singh, the then Prime Minister, announced implementation of the controversial Mandal Commission. This is quite significant to understand this. It is really doubtful if Mr. Advani would have announced his rath yatra had V.P. Singh not announced implementation of Mandal Commission.

Why was it so? The answer is not difficult to find. The BJP tried to win quite a few seats in the 1989 elections using Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy. It multiplied its strength from 2 to 11 in Parliament. The percentage of votes obtained by BJP in the last election was not however impressive. It got not more than 11.4% votes, a bare 3% more than what it had got in 1985 elections. But it could get impressive number of seats as this time contests were straight between the Congress-I and the united opposition. Thus it went into the heads of BJP leaders. For the first time they saw the chance of capturing power at the centre in the name of *Hindutva*. And they could increase the appeal *Hindutva* and translate it in terms of votes only if they could achieve Hindu unity.

In a caste-ridden society it is not easy task to achieve unity. The very dynamics of caste hierarchy leads to fragmentation of society. The BJP had by now realised that it cannot come to power but from a Hindu platform and Hindu platform can be effective only and only if Hindus could be united in some emotional issue. It is precisely for this reason they had chosen Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy to bring about at least a temporary unity

among the Hindus. In entire Hindi-belt Ram is greatly revered by all Hindus whatever their caste, high or low. In shilapujan programmes before 1989 elections, dalits had shown as much enthusiasm as upper caste Hindus in rural areas and small and middle-sized towns. The BJP thought it is coming very close to uniting Hindus for political purposes. It was now determined to forget this unity among Hindus, arouse emotions in the name of Hindutva and establish Hindu-Rashtra at the Centre.

Whatever the merits or demerits of Mandal Commission, its implementation came as a bomb-shell for the BJP. The Backward caste Hindus would now be veering round Janata Dal and the BJP's dream of political unity of the Hindus, and its chances of coming to power at the Centre as the champion of Hindu Rashtra were seen to be shattered. It had to do something to retrieve this situation. He thus thought of rath yatra as an ingenious device to forge unity among the Hindus in the name of Ram and to incite their raw passions. Medieval Hindu image was sought to be reinforced with all might. Hundreds of Bajrang Dal Volunteers came with trishuls and offered a bowl of blood as a befitting fight to the political deity as the devotees offer sacrificial blood to the Kali and Durga. Mr. Advani kept on claiming that no riots took place on the route of the yatra. It is technically true but this truth has its own irony.

Everyone knows that riots cannot take place unless planned by some group or a party. Mr. Advani knew riots on his route will be a great milestone around his neck. He wanted to scrupulously avoid such rioting on his path to make a rhetorical point when accused of communalising the situation by his political opponent. But he was not averse to shedding of blood in places away from his route. More riots means greater consciousness about Hindutva Hindu Rashtra. What is few thousand lives if Hindu Rashtra could be established. This price is worth paying. There will be greater chances of Hindu Rashtra only if 'they' i.e., Muslims are seen as politically irreconcilable and communal riots are a great help in that direction. And thanks to the propaganda blast about the rath yatra number of riots did break-out in several places both in south as well as north.

About these recent riots, one more point should be made. In a multi religious society, it is highly necessary for secular rulers to

maintain a delicate balance between different religious communities. Majority community or minority, certain religious sensibilities have to be respected. Both Mr. V.P. Singh and Mulayam Singh Yadav could not maintain this delicate balance. V.P. Singh began openly courting Muslims. He came very close to the Shahi Imam who at best is a demagogue. He began consulting him in all matters pertaining to Muslims. He, at the Imam's instance, appointed some people as members of Rajya Sabha who were seen as communal Muslims. Ubaidullah Azmi was highly controversial among them. His role during the Shah Banu movement was at best highly controversial. Cassettes of his speeches were selling like hot cakes among Muslims. Then V.P. Singh announced the Prophet's birth day as a gazetted holiday on 15th August from the ramparts of Red fort. The time and occasion chosen was not very appropriate. In a communally surcharged atmosphere it was seen as yet another measure to placate Muslims to create vote banks among them. Very provocative pamphlets were distributed against it by the VHP and it became one of the issues in the Madras riot of September 2, 1990.

Mulayam Singh Yadav was even more aggressive in his pro-Muslim attitude. He threw all caution to the wind and delivered speeches in his rallies during September and October preceding the Karseva on 30th October, which were seen as quite provocative by the Hindu and blatantly pro-Muslim. These speeches in fact became counter-productive and further communalised Hindu mind. He was in fact seen as anti-Hindu. He also took very stringent measures to protect Babri Mosque and he did all this in full glare of publicity. It appeared as if he is vying with Mr. V.P. Singh to win over Muslim votes. Mr. Yadav, as a chief minister should not have given impression of being partisan of one community even if that community was at the receiving end of communal violence. A chief minister should appear quite impartial, neutral and strictly minding law and order situation. In fact it would not be wrong to say that Mr. Yadav's secularism proved to be more harmful to the Muslims. Within a few days they paid very heavy price for it as we will see below.

What is worse, unlike V.P. Singh, he could not remain even steadfast in his position. When the V.P. Singh Government fell, he chose to throw his weight behind Shri. Chandra Shekhar and lost whatever goodwill he had earned among the Muslims. He was

seen as a traitor to the cause by them. What is worse, soon a series of riots occurred in Aligarh, Agra, Khurja, Bulandshahar etc. in which the Muslims badly suffered. The PAC and the police played anti-Muslim role and he remained at best a helpless spectator. One is left wondering why Mulayam Singh Yadav employed PAC to quell riots when he knew so well its true character. PAC had massacred Muslims earlier in Gonda too during his chief minister-ship. Then too, he could not take any worthwhile action. Thus Mulayam Singh's record too is hardly different from that of any other previous chief minister in this regard.

II

COMMUNAL RIOTS IN U.P.

As pointed out above a fresh wave of communal violence started in different parts of India after the Kar Seva began on 30th October. Number of people were killed in the first wave of violence in Gujarat immediately after 30th October, 1990. According to the news paper reports on 30th and 31 October at least 34 persons were killed in Gujarat. Hindus and Muslims clashed in Juhapura, Vasna, Shahipur, Khanpur, Paldi and satellite Road in Ahmedabad. Juhapura was affected by large-scale looting, arson and stabbing. Two people were killed in the police firing itself. But according to the Chief Secretary of Gujarat Mr. Khan in all 24 people were killed. Seven towns in Gujarat Godhra, Baroda, Bhruch, Jamjodhpur, Padra, Halol and Ahmedabad were put under curfew. In Ahmedabad Army had to be called in. We will deal with riots in Gujarat which broke out after 7th December the second phase of Kar Seva later on.

The major riot broke out in Bijnor in U.P. on 30th October and violence continued unabated for three days. Unofficial sources put the death toll at more than 200 while official sources admitted very few deaths. But personal interviews with some eye witness indicated that toll was very heavy and unofficial claims were much nearer the truth. Apart from the loss of life, economic losses were also very heavy. Looting and burning of shops and other properties were quite extensive. The town was under curfew even after 10 days of the outbreak of violence. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi who visited Bijnour on 10th November was visibly moved by the pathetic tales

of woes and suffering narrated to him by the victims.

DELHI RIOTS

Nex Delhi was worst affected. Muslims and Sikhs took out peace March together on Nov. 15 from Gurdwara Sisganj to old Idgah in Old Delhi. Delhi was also tense on account of exaggerated news reports about Kar Seva in Ayodhya on Oct. 30. Thus even peace march turned into bloody rioting. It is alleged that some youth were leading peace march and they raised slogans which were not very sober. The Hindus termed then as very provocative, when the peace march terminated at old Idgah, it was turned into public meeting. Muslims and Sikhs spoke. When a Sikh leader rose to speak, there was heavy brickbating from the vicinity. The news papers described it as "virtual breakdown of law and order". The Delhi police along with the presence of 10 companies of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) failed in its task of preventing another flare-up. In the end, the police had to fire several round to send the rioters packing.

The Hindus had resorted to brickbating in retaliation to the slogans and speeches and this brickbating began, according to the eye-witnesses soon after the three BJP leaders and members of Parliament from the Capital, Mr. Madan Lal Khurana, Dr. V.K. Malhotra and Mr. Kalka Dass, Left the troubled area after a visit. The Commissioner of Police Shri Vijay Karan, however, denied any connection between the visit and the rioting. By the evening in all 6 persons were killed including the sub-inspector Bhim Singh of the CRPF who had sustained head injury. It is said that the trouble began when a resident of Qasabpura (a Muslim) went to buy some provisions in the shop in nearby Basti Harphool Singh. Some youngsters assembled there and warned the shopkeeper not to sell anything to the man as he belonged to another community. An altercation soon ensured and the man was very badly beaten up. Shortly thereafter heavy brickbating followed between the residents of Qasabpura and Basti Harphool Singh.

The residents of Qasabpura angrily alleged that the police openly sided with the Hindus during the skirmishes. Express news service reported that lending credence to this allegation was the fact that while policemen patrolled with ease Basti Harphool Singh, there was hardly a constable who risked going inside Qas-

abpura. The Delhi Communist Party of India also held the police responsible for letting the situation out of hand. Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar who visited the area blamed Pakistan infiltrators for the riots. Shri Chandra Shekhar was told by a weeping uncle that his nephew, a child, was stabbed and he died of stab wounds.

The situation was quite explosive throughout U.P. in the first week of November. On 1st Nov. riots broke out in number of places and curfew had to be clamped on no less than 30 districts. In Lucknow itself two persons died in the old city and army had to stage a flag march. The Government offices and business establishment in the state capital had to be closed down for more than four days. With the escalation of violence entire eastern U.P. came under curfew for a fortnight as well as the Bundelkhand region adjoining the Madhya Pradesh region. Bihar too was affected and two persons were killed in Patna city on Nov. 1 which was already under curfew. One person was killed when two mobs exchanged fire at Sadar Gali near Paschim Darwaza around noon. The clash occurred when a place of worship was damaged. Another unidentified body was recovered by the police from the railway tracks near Noon-Ka-Chauraha in Patna where rioting had begun on the night of October 31. Also, frequent explosions of bombs and crackers occurred near Noon-ka-Chauraha, Lodi-ka-Katra and Fasad-ki-Maidan while shops were burnt in other localities.

On 1st Nov. five persons were also killed in Hyderabad and neighbouring Ranga Reddy district in Andhra Pradesh. There were seven stabbing during a three-hour relaxation of curfew and three of the stab victims succumbed to injuries. Hyderabad was under curfew since October 29 and more than 11 people were killed in communal violence and more than 500 people were arrested in connection with specific offences and as a preventive measure in Hyderabad. Later on the figure on those arrested mounted to 1000. (We will deal with communal violence which rocked Hyderabad again after 7th December in a separate article).

RIOTING IN ALIGARH

The Country was once again rocked with communal violence from 7th December onwards during the second phase of kar seva in Ayodhya. Among other towns, Aligarh was one. Violence broke out in Aligarh on 7th December itself. The apparent cause was attack on some PAC jawans by some Muslims who were returning after the Friday prayers on 7th. The PAC jawans were stoned by these angry Muslims who were told that some PAC men had raped a Muslim widow in the town a day earlier. Also, on 7th December Gomti Express was stopped by a Hindu mob few furlongs from Aligarh station, Muslims pulled out and several of them killed. Official sources put the number of passengers killed at 4 but Muslim sources claim not less than 11 persons were butchered. It is surprising that the Station Master allowed the Express to proceed from the station though he was warned of the mob collecting just a short distance away. There was no adequate police protection either. This incident sent shock waves through Aligarh city. On the first day itself toll was 15 as different areas exploded with violence. An indefinite curfew was imposed and army staged flag marches. On 6th December violence had broken out in Sarai Sultani, Pakki Sarai and some other places and these areas were placed under curfew. But on 7th December curfew had to be extended to two additional thana areas following the Gomti Express incident.

The situation in Aligarh was highly explosive for quite some time. The incident outside the Kotwali when two PAC jawans were stoned was only a triggering one. According to Ajay Singh, Tariq Hasan and Syed Zuber Ahmad "Preparations for it had started since the first week of November, when illegal arms started flowing into the town. Inflammatory pamphlets and video cassettes added fuel to the communal cauldron, as did the speeches of Uma Bharti, BJP MP. during her stormy tour of Agra division. Many people expected riots to take place on December 6, the day the second round of kar seva was to take place in Ayodhya."

December 8, was the worst day of violence in Aligarh. Perhaps it was the blackest day in the history of the town. That night, even the district administration was unable to salvage the dead bodies of the victims. The death toll, according to reliable sources crossed 50, the second day of violence. The most shocking

incident took place at the Jogiwara locality near the Sasni Gate police chowkie, where ten members of a family were burnt alive. Their hutments were surrounded on all sides by members of the other community. What was still worse was that rumours gripped the town that number of Hindu patients were deliberately killed by Muslim doctors at the Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College. The local Hindi dailies also mischievously published this news which lent it further credibility. The local Hindi press, as if assumed the role of agent provocateur.

According to Mr. Ashok Chauhan, general secretary of the district Congress Committee, and an industrialist Promod Kumar, who constituted a fact finding committee to look into the incident, "Not only was this news item totally false but it symbolised the threat which irresponsible journalism can cause to the country's unity. Many of these dailies were publishing mere rumours without as much as preliminary inquiry. Also, other propaganda machine was working at furious speed. Smita Gupta of INDEPENDENT, Bombay, writes, ".... there was virtual explosion of Hindu propaganda material. Uma Bharti's inflammatory audio-cassettes blared from every paan shop. Dr. J.K. Jain's equally objectionable video cassette was beamed directly into homes through a dish antenna. Pamphlets and bills were pushed into houses and even kites with provocative handbills, but were no match for the massive Hindu machinery."

Such rumours and propaganda add maximum damage. The riots spread like jungle fire in new localities across railway line and new settlements on the out-skirts, Hamdard Nagar, Jamalpur and Badam Nagar, and eventually to rural areas and other districts. All evidence shows that not only the district magistrate and S.P. totally failed to control the situation but the PAC went on killing spree. PAC, it seems, has specialised in killing Muslims. PAC has strong anti-Muslim bias which has been repeatedly proved in number of communal riots in U.P. whether it is Moradabad, Meerut, Banaras or Aligarh. Now it is in much more aggressive mood as the VHP is also directly inciting it. According to Vidya Subramaniam and Aditi Phadnis of INDEPENDENT; "The Vishwa Hindu Parishad, in a virtual call for rebellion, has despatched copies of view-cassettes on the Ayodhya violence to commandants of all Provincial Armed Constabulary battalions posted in Uttar Pradesh. The cassettes made by BJP MP J.K. Jain, are accompanied by a person-

alised appeal to the commandants to protect jawans from attacks by "Muslim infiltrations." The highly inflammatory appeal is based on a news item published on December 9 in PAN-CHANJANYA, a BJP-RSS publication. It warns that these "infiltrators", who have crossed into India in thousands from Afghanistan, are planning "bloody civil war" in the country with the help of their Muslim relatives here.

One can very well understand the effect of such incendiary propaganda on the minds of PAC which already has strong anti-Muslim bias. What is totally surprising is complete silence of the Government in view of such blatant provocation. Neither action is being taken against J.K. Jain for making such video cassettes and disturbing them uncensored nor against the leaders of the VHP for sending these cassettes alongwith equally provocative letters to the commandants of the PAC battalions in U.P. We would not get such instances of blatant provocation even during 1947 period. The letter sent to the commandants also states that the main target of these "infiltrators" is the PAC. The appeal further informs the commandants that "infiltrators" are camping in the homes of their Muslim relatives and their gameplan is to build an "electric chamber" in every home which will blow up the minute the PAC jawans enter it.

A delegation of the Aligarh Muslim University Students held a press conference in Delhi on 21 December and its president Hafiz Muhammad Usman accused the PAC of playing a partisan role and targeting Muslims for attack. "This was not a Hindu-Muslim riot", he said, "but a PAC vs Muslim riot." Usman said that in all predominantly Muslim localities like Hamdardnagar, Jamlpur, etc. where the PAC was patrolling, people were bayoneted by the PAC rifles, houses were burnt after being looted. The Students' Union demanded that in the wake of the PAC's partisan role in Malliana, Gond, Bijnore, Agra and Aligarh riots, the PAC should be withdrawn and replaced by the CRPF, BSF etc.

It is difficult to estimate the number of people killed in these riots in Aligarh. Official estimates are around 85. However, the AMU student's union claimed 500 dead. They claimed that over a 100 Muslims had been killed when the Gomti Express was forcibly stopped on December 8. However, this seems to be exaggerated claim. Generally it is believed not more than 11 persons were killed

in that incident.

There is socio-economic angle too to Aligarh riots. Undoubtedly the immediate cause of provocation was *mandir-masjid* controversy and politics of competitive communalism in the country today. Aligarh is the centre for lock manufacturing. This industry provides employment to around a lakh of people in Aligarh. There are both house-hold units as well as large scale units. The former are owned mostly by the Muslims whereas latter are controlled by the Hindus. Some studies have shown, according to a group of AMU teachers, that the large scale industrialists used to provoke communal riots to damage the small scale industrialist financially. It is evident that a communal violence had always hit the small scale financially and caused them heavy losses as almost all small scale industry have been closed for two months since the situation in the city became communally surcharged. Even if the large scale industrialists do not directly provoke riots they may help the parties involved as in the event of riots, small scale units would inevitably suffer.

RIOTS IN KANPUR

Kanpur once was considered communally peaceful area. I never had large scale communal flare-ups like Meerut, Morabad etc. However, since last year things began to change. A major communal flare up took place in Kanpur last year too. It again became Victim of communal violence on 10th December in the surcharged atmosphere of U.P. There were some small incidents since 6th December, the day of second phase of *kar seva*. Some well meaning people and Muslim leaders warned the district administration but their pleas were ignored. Muslims also observed *hartal* in protest against the negligent attitude of administration but it did not stir the authorities. The daily news papers like *Dainik Jagaran* and *Dainik Aaj* also published provocative material adding to the tension.

One incident on 10th December at last sparked off the violence. Some Muslim hawkers selling clothes on Babbar Road were attacked and their clothes burnt. They came to their locality and complained about it. Some Muslims came out of their houses and went round their area shouting slogans and protesting and some of them looted Hindu shops and burnt some of them. In the

evening then some Hindus came and burnt chappal shops belonging to the Muslims. One mosque was also damaged. At night firing took place and more shops began to be looted. Curfew was imposed by the administration on 11th December. Curfew was clamped mostly in the Muslim areas.

Same day, according to Advocate Nasim Siddiqui, ex-MLA, PAC entered Muslim localities and cut off telephone lines and water connections. Most of the Muslims houses went without water. PAC also began to make arbitrary arrests. Real trouble began on the morning of 12th December. Firing shots were heard early morning and by 11 AM. Muslim-PAC confrontation began. Beconganj, Chamanganj, Kanghi Mahal and Colnelganj were chiefly affected. By 11-30, a large mob of Muslims in these localities came out of their houses and raised slogans of Allah-o-Akbar and began confronting PAC and the Police. The authorities found situation beyond their control and appealed to the Muslims to go back to their houses convincing them that their demands would be fulfilled. Their demands included: 1) withdrawal of PAC who was indulging in arbitrary arrests and 2) restoration of water, electric and telephone connections. Army was brought in and did flag march. It was welcomed by the Muslims which shows army is considered impartial by them.

On the first day of violence in Kanpur about 6 persons were killed, according to the hospital sources. However, by 12th December, i.e. their day of violence the death toll had risen to 13. In the Chamanganj area of Kanpur 4 people were killed when the police opened fire, according to Mr. Mathur, the Director General of Police. Also, two more persons were killed in Chamanganj and Anwarganj Localities in stabbing incidents. The total deaths mounted to 20 by the 14th December according to the official sources.

This includes killing of three children - two brothers and one sister aged between nine and twelve in Chamanganj and their mother too who died later in the hospital. In all 600 persons were arrested according to the district administration. There were not many incidents of large magnitude after 15th december in Kanpur.

COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN AGRA

Agra too erupted this time. Agra has a large population of

Muslims and dalits (jatavs) both mostly engaged in shoe-making trade. It is not clear how the incidents began. However, it is certain that the members of the two communities clashed in Tajganj and Loha Mandi areas of Agra. The locality near Taj-Mahal was also affected badly and curfew had to be imposed in that area and Taj also had to be closed down. It is also clear that there was a serious attempt to incite violence in Agra. According to Bisheshwar Mishra the Agra riots were "electronically engineered", Writing in the Sunday Times of India of 23 December, he says, the Police seized some audio cassettes, which screamed slogans inciting both communities. The cassettes started with "Allah-o-Akbar", and then "Jai Sir Ram", followed by BACHAO, BACHAO and MARO, MARO. These were played by Maruti car stereos at full volume in the dead of the night. The unidentified cars would zip off in the darknes of night, leaving behind two panick-stricken and suspicious communities, who would then begin screaming and pelting stone at each other.

It should be remembered that Agra has been one of the most peaceful areas and it did not experience communal violence even in 1947, according to one serious citizen of the city. Prof. Ram Gopal Chauhan, former head of the Hindi Department of Agra College, these riots were imposed on us artificially. Mr. Chauhan laid the blame on the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. The Professor said, "they should not have taken the ASTHI KALASH (urn containing ashes of those killed in Ayodhya on 2nd Nov.) through the sensitive areas, raised provocative slogans and deviated from the route prescribed by the administration." According to Mr. Ajay Singh, Janata Dal MP from Agra, the riot was one sided and targeted poor Muslims. He very strongly felt that why Mulayam

Singh does not arrest Uma Bharti, the BJP MP who is visiting every kasba of U.P. spewing poison against Muslims?

The bulk of 22 persons killed in Agra were poor Muslims, at least eight of who were killed by the PAC on 16th December while they were doing their daily chores in their homes. According to the eyewitnesses, the PAC jawans climbed on to rooftops in the congested, Muslim localities of Dholi Khar, Tila Ajmeri Khan and Ghati Mamu Bhanja in the Mantola police station area, and aimed at and shot people **INSIDE THEIR HOUSES**. It is also alleged that the PAC men had also climbed atop the houses of the former Congress MP, Mr. Nihal Singh Jain, and the sitting BJP MLA, Mr. Hardwar Dube.

The victims included Mohammad Nasim, 40 who had just come out of the lavatory and was climbing up the stairs. Even six days after the incident, blood could still be seen on the stairs. Jamal, 18 year old boy, was shot dead while he was brushing his teeth while Babubhai, 35, was hit with a bullet when playing with his three-year old son. Munna, 22, was recently married, was shot in such a way that portions of his brain hit the wall. According to Haji Islam Qureshi, it was a Muslim area and there was no communal trouble here and yet the PAC came and shot so many people.

According to one theory some Satta Bazaris were behind these riots in U.P. They are generally traders who support BJP. According to Smita Gupta, "the satorias not only stand to make a killing if their predictions turn out right, but they also have an ideological interest in a riot. For the riot means sharpening of communal divide, which can only benefit communal parties like the BJP. "According to Dharmenda Dev, Commissioner of Agra Division, "The phenomenon in communal riots, with amounts as large as rupees ten lakhs being batted on and our investigation in Agra show that the satorias played an active role in instigating the riots."

This is quite new but a bizzare phenomenon. It is said that betting on communal riots is highly profitable as riot can be easily instigated by the betters. There is nothing uncertain about it. Betting on other things like rains etc. Remains quite uncertain. This shows what selfish interests and ideological perversions can do to fellow human beings.

TACKLING TOYOTA HINDUISM

Restore The State's Moral Authority

by Swaminathan S. Anklesaria Aiyar

When you are riding high on a wave of Toyota Hinduism, it is easy to be carried away by the religious frenzy of the crowds surrounding your chariot. Mr. Lal Krishna Advani's *Rath Yatra* has without question been the biggest and most successful spectacle ever staged by the Bharatiya Janata Party or its earlier incarnation, the Jana Sangh. So it has decided to withdraw support to the National Front government, hoping that in the election that will follow public enthusiasm for Ram will translate into votes for the BJP.

That is a ploy that has been tried before and failed, Arun Govil, who played the role of Ram in an earlier spectacle, the TV version of the *Ramayana*, tried to persuade voters that Ram was on the side of the Congress in the Allahabad by-election of 1988. He failed miserably. There is no obvious reason to think that voters will confuse Mr. Advani's journey to Ayodhya with the original *yatra* of Ram at a time when there was no masjid or election.

Given the enthusiasm generated by the *Rath Yatra*, the BJP may well increase its popular vote significantly. But in the absence of an electoral alliance that will still mean a drubbing at the polls. In all probability, the person who will ride victorious in a quite different sort of chariot will be Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, dubbed by the BJP as an incarnation of Ravan not so long ago. This shows that

political *Ramayanas* can have very different endings from TV serials.

POPULAR VOTE

However, the matter does not end at the next election. Some BJP strategists are not worried about losing the next election provided they increase their popular vote significantly. These gentlemen are focussing on the long run, and want to stoke Hindu sentiment in stages to the point where they can aim for power on their own, not in harness with parties that worry about Muslim sentiment.

Harnessing Hindu sentiment on this scale cannot be done without communalising Indian society to a degree where the very future of a secular India will be in jeopardy. Mr. Advani's protestation that his Hindu India will really be secular is no more convincing than the claim made five decades ago by Mohammad Ali Jinnah that his Muslim Pakistan would really be a secular country in which all Hindus would be safe.

Whatever one may think of the BJP, it is impossible to deny that it has managed to make Hindu sentiments a major political force. This represents a dramatic reversal of earlier trends. The Jana Sangh tried for decades to harness the Hindu vote but discovered that there was no such thing. In despair, it decided in the mid-1970s that it had little future as a narrowly-based Hindu party, and tried to don secular clothes. It emerged with the Janata Party in 1977, which however split in 1979. The old Jana Sangh members regrouped to form the BJP, but took pains to proclaim their secularism and give a prominent position to Mr. Sikander Bakt, a Muslim. In 1980, the BJP thought that a Hindu platform was too narrow a political base. Ten years later, Hindu platform looks like a feasible launching pad. What has changed so much in a decade?

There are several answers, including the Hindu backlash against the Shah Bano case, Sikh terrorism in Punjab and Muslim insurgency in Kashmir. But an important reason that needs to be highlighted is that despairing search for new ideals by a population that is by now thoroughly disgusted with the corruption and oppression of the state machinery and cynical manipulation by

secular political parties. When the secular organs of the state are seen to be riddled with bribery and nepotism, people will always look around for alternatives that provide some sense of purity. Religion is one such.

FRACTURED SOCIETY

In many countries people have turned to religion as a vehicle for dissent against what they see as an oppressive, unjust state. In Poland and Nicaragua, the Catholic church was a channel of dissent against Communist rule. Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic message channelled disgust against the secular but oppressive regime of the Shah of Iran. The Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt provides a vision of purity to Egyptians unhappy with the secular state. The Catholic church provided inspiration to those opposing the Marcos regime in the Philippines.

Given world-wide experience, it should come as no surprise that Hinduism is providing a similar outlet in India. Indeed, we need to ask why the process has been so muted and delayed in this country. One reason is the fractured nature of Hindu society, riven by caste. The second and more important reason is the existence of democracy, which normally enable people to demand rights, to get the sort of governance they want, and to get redress against injustice. The secular organs of a democracy — the legislatures, administration, police, courts — are the avenues through which citizens are supposed to get their due.

At independence, political parties and the state apparatus commanded respect from the population, and were seen to be manned by people imbued with idealism, with a sense of mission and justice. Alas, both political parties and the organs of state have lost their ideals and sense of mission. What works today seems to be money, muscle and influence, not the rule of law or an impartial dispensation of justice. Under the husk of democratic institutions, there is a rot that has now run so deep that little is left of the moral authority of the state.

Violence is the natural result of a state in moral decay, and explains why so many violence eruptions have taken place in the

past decade. Fighting an immoral state can yield an aura of purity and idealism. Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was thus able to justify murder in the name of a purer, more lofty ideal than the secular but morally flawed state. His sentiments would have sounded like lunatic ravings in a state commanding moral authority, but attracted a fair amount of support in the mess that Punjab had become in the early 1980s. The uprising in Kashmir this year was another sort of protest against what was seen as an oppressive state that did not allow free elections and was riddled with corruption. Communal Sikh and Muslim parties have gained strength in such a milieu. So has the BJP. When the secular state has betrayed the aspirations of people, many will seek solace in the opium of religion.

Mr. V.P. Singh was the beneficiary of public disgust with an immoral, manipulative state. To voters he represented a man willing to sacrifice office and career in a crusade against corruption, and so he won the general election last year. However, after coming to power he did little about the corruption and extortion faced by the ordinary man in daily life.

MEHAM AFFAIR

Corruption may have diminished at the top, but this has helped only a few businessmen in search of licences, not the ordinary man. Meanwhile Mr. Singh compromised with principle and Mr. Devi Lal in the Meham affair, and eventually sacked him not on a matter of principle but of "spine". The reservation of jobs for other backward classes was widely seen as the act of manipulative politician in search of votes. This cost him much of his moral aura, and drove more people to seek the Hindu optiate.

What does this signify for the future? One thing is clear. No future government can tackle the rising tide of militant Hinduism by simply banning *Rath Yatras* or seeking court verdicts on disputed mosques. Nor will the rise of communalism be checked by any number of meetings of the National Integration Council, or of chief ministers, or of religious scholars. Communalism is a symptom of a state lacking moral authority. To combat communalism it is necessary to revive national idealism, to restore public respect for the state, to show that the state is capable of giving people the impartial and just governance they want.

That means a host of political, administrative and legal reforms. It means creating a new regime where many of today's leaders will be indisgrace or in jail. It means creating a new sense of idealism and mission in the organs of state which will act as a counter-magnet to the attraction of communalism. Whether our current bunch of political leaders are capable of such reforms is another matter.

Courtesy: The Times of India

VAJPAYEE'S CAUTION

by Vinod Mehta

It's finally happened. One of India's most astute, charismatic and urbane politicians has decided to challenge party orthodoxy on an issue which, if inflamed, could make the reservation riot look like inter-mohalla wrangling. As a result, this same politician has forced the Congress, the BJP and the VHP to re-examine long-held positions on a potentially devastating discord. I refer of course to Atal Behari Vajpayee who at last has come clean on the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute, thus providing the nation with the first glimmer of hope that the crisis might be resolved without large-scale communal havoc.

BJP APPROACH

And the first person he has taken on it his own party president, L.K. Advani. On 19 September, Vajpayee told Smita Gupta of *The Independent*, "Our approach has always been different from that of the VHP — it is they who have said they don't believe in a court verdict on the Ram Janmabhoomi issue as it is based on faith rather than fact. As a major national party, how can we say that we repudiate the authority of the courts?"

Our approach? On the day Vajpayee was enunciating his stand in Delhi, Advani, in that city was explaining his. "They (the courts) cannot determine whether or not there was a temple at Ayodhya that was pulled down by Babar in the 16th century,

whether a mosque was built in its place, and, if so, what should be done about it. This remains our position till today."

On the court verdict then, it would seem that Vajpayee is out of step with his party. Why, even on L.K. Advani's 10,000-km Ram rath yatra, scheduled to begin later this month. Atalji seems to be both sceptical and apprehensive. "Remember", he warns the faithful, "you are going to Ayodhya, not Lanka. At times the *vanar sena* does not realise where it is heading."

Grateful thanks at this juncture must be extended either to Prof. Satish Chandra, the convener of the committee for the promotion of communal harmony, or to a yet unnamed North Block official. It was their ineptitude (deliberate?) that brought the differences between the two leaders into focus. Usually, meetings of the communal harmony committee are occasions for show-biz glitterati, politicians, journalists and academics to spend a few pleasant hours debating the discharge of onerous social responsibility. However, Prof. Chandra achieved a real miracle. He and other members (Chandra Shekhar seems to have been a major player) of the committee got Advani and Vajpayee to initiate a unanimous resolution recommending that the court's decision on the Ayodhya issue be accepted. It was an extraordinary achievement, not the least because it was so unexpected. Alas, the unanimity lasted all of 24 hours.

Advani was the first to protest, declaring that the resolution conveyed a "totally misleading impression" of his party's position. He had nothing to do with it. Once again, Atalji demurred, confirming to journalists that both he and Advani have been party of the resolution. And here we get into a murky area. Apparently, the committee had agreed that the recommendations of the meeting be kept secret until 22, September, when they would be presented to the National Integration Council scheduled to meet in Madras. The convener and the government official, working individually or in concert, ignored this directive and leaked the recommendations to the press. As I write, Vajpayee has resigned in protest at the "breach of faith."

Considering the import of the resolution, it seems a small lapse. Timing is doubtless critical to decision making in public affairs, but would a delay of four days have made such a difference? At any rate, the BJP president swiftly backtracked, thereby

fuelling the mystery of his endorsement in the first place.

Almost on cue, some instant soul-searching was conducted by the Congress. There were reports that Rajiv Gandhi was under pressure from the rank and file of the party to drop his week-long *padayatra* from Delhi to Ayodhya. Given the party's record of ambivalence and triplespeak on the subject, why remind the electorate of an unsavoury past? Moreover, the overwhelming feeling within the Congress is that there are not too many votes to be won through championing secularism at this time. But the biggest fear centred around the possibility of clashes between the BJP and Congress stalwarts. If serious violence broke out, the government would be quick to blame the Opposition. As of now, no firm decision has been taken, but it is likely that if Gandhi insists on going ahead with his "mass consciousness" drive, it will be curtailed in scope and scale.

Already, some states, beginning with Bihar have banned not only the entry of Parishad officials but of BJP members too. Additionally that stern policemen in Lucknow, Mulayam Singh Yadav, shows no signs of relenting. With the formation of a statewide body called the Anti-Communal Action Committee, supported by the communists and Kanshi Ram's BSP, he is geared to crack the whip.

HESITANT

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad meanwhile, seems hesitant and marginalised. I have always maintained that these self-style guardians of Ram and Krishna have no real hold on the Hindu mind or on Hindu society. They are perceived throughout the nation as dangerous rabble-rousers exploiting the poor and uninformed. Without the active support of the BJP, they would be lost.

More pitfalls confront the advocates of Hindu revivalism. They holy men are squabbling among themselves. The *sarkari* Jagatguru, who Mulayam Singh arrested recently, is a known opponent of the VHP and is bound to queer the pitch. Now a much more respected voice, the Shankaracharya of Kanchi, has expressed his fears and urged all concerned to work towards a peaceful, out-of-court settlement. The Babri Masjid Action Committee Muslim intellectuals and the Imam Bukhari of Jama Masjid have hailed the

Shankaracharya's intervention. Swami Chinmayananda favours a similar strategy. Thus, the facade of Hindu unity on Ram Janmabhoomi is slowly but surely cracking up.

However, it is dissension within the BJP that poses the biggest danger to the VHP. Advani's party has a formidable reputation for discipline. Nevertheless, Vajpayee's brave and lone voice of dissent suggests that the few 'wets' in the BJP might speak out if the hardliners insist on going all the way. In this scenario it is difficult to label L.K. Advani. Despite his strident rhetoric, he will carefully assess the direction of the politically wind before taking the final plunge.

POWER

Advani knows that his party's chance for capturing power at the Centre have never been better. Today the BJP runs three states, administering over 100 million people. In two others, Gujarat and Bihar, its support is crucial to keep the Janata Dal government in office. L.K. Advani must surely want to build on this strength, not fritter it away in an unnecessary general election. All the opinion polls indicate the if V.P. Singh dissolved Parliament, the BJP would be hard put to return even half its MPs and MLAs.

Moreover, the BJP president is aware that the big prize cannot be won from the fringes. If *New Delhi chalo* is the cry of the party, then boxing itself in an ultra right-wing strait-jacket would be fatal.

Meanwhile, Hindus and Muslims should pray that the incipient gulf between Atal Behari Vajpayee and Lal Krishan Advani persists and widens. Therein lies the nation's best hope.

Courtesy: Current Weekly

AYODHYA — A TIME BOMB

by Ram Jethmalani

Sardar Patel persuaded the Nehru Government to rebuild the Somnath Temple. It had been pillaged, plundered and razed to the ground in successive assaults by Moslem hordes from across the Himalayas. His act was symbolic. It restored Hindu dignity and removed its sense of historical humiliation. It gave the Hindu confidence in the security of his culture and sacred places and an assurance that the era of barbaric invasions was over after all.

Does this afford any parallel or precedent for what the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bharatiya Janata Party or others of the same ilk threaten to do in Ayodhya later this month? Whoever destroyed Somnath did not put up a mosque over the ruins. Sardar Patel did not have to destroy an existing Moslem place of worship and then reconstruct the Somnath Temple. He did not have to make the Moslem grind his nose in the dust to bolster Hindu pride and heal its bruised ego

INOPPORTUNE TIME

Sardar Patel is seen by many Hindus as a symbol of Hindu resurgence in contrast to Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru who are seen as appeasers of the aggressive Moslem minority. What would Sardar Patel have done about the Ram, Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue? Would he have approved of the VHP-BJP plan? Fortunately we know that he would have done. In his famous letter

of January 9, 1950 to U.P. Chief Minister Pantji he unequivocally committed the forces of law and order against forcible Hindu action.

Let the Sardar speak for himself: "... I feel that the controversy has been raised at a most inopportune time both from the point of view of the country at large and of your own province in particular. The wider communal issues have only been recently resolved to the mutual satisfaction of the various communities.... It would be most unfortunate if we allowed any group advantage to be made on this issue. On all these grounds, there, I feel that the issue is one which should be resolved amicably in a spirit of mutual toleration and goodwill between the two communities. I realise there is great deal of sentiment behind the move which has taken place. At the same time, such matters can only be resolved peacefully if we take the willing consent of the Muslim community with us. There can be no question of resolving such disputes by force. *In that case, the forces of law and order will have to maintain peace at all costs.* If, therefore, peaceful and persuasive methods are to be followed, any unilateral action based on an attitude of aggression or coercion cannot be countenanced...."

The Indian Penal Code makes it a serious criminal offence to pull down any place of worship. It is not defence in law that the place of worship was constructed five hundred years ago on the site of another demolished place or worship belonging to the community of the accused. The throngs that threaten to converge on Ayodhya and pull down the mosque willing the eye of law be an unlawful assembly determined to commit offences of mischief, criminal trespass, wounding of religious feelings and desecration of a holy place. Grievous injury and killings as possible consequences will be within the reasonable contemplation of its member. It would be the plain duty of the the Government to tackle this situation according to the law of the land. The law doubtless requires the State to use all the force at its command to disperse the unlawful assembly and prevent the commission of the threatened offences. The resulting mayhem and loss of life will only be legitimate consequences of the execution of legal and constitutional duty. Every sane person must therefore pause and do a bit of rational introspection while there is still some time left — however short. The time bomb is ticking away. When it explodes communal harmony and national integration will be the prime

casualties. The nation will not emerge stronger but weekend and debilitated beyond measure. Mr. L.K. Advani is a Member of Parliament. He has sworn to uphold the law and the Constitution. While he will lead the assembly of law-breakers what does he expect the U.P. Government to do? Its ministers are also sworn to uphold the law and Constitution. The police force is statutorily committed to neutralise the marching hordes even though composed of Sadhus, Acharyas and otherwise respectable political leaders. There is no loophole or ambiguity in the law. Besides, Mulayam Singh Yadav will only be acting in accordance with the advice of Sardar Patel, He has it and he has read it. The advice holds a good even if the facts of the VHP-BJP case can be fully established according to the rules of evidence current in our courts.

A SILVER LINING

Two facts provide a silver lining. Mr. Advani has not till date unequivocally asserted any intention to demolish the mosque. He is currently riding a 'rath' to Ayodhya. He will, he says, enter UP and reach the site of the proposed Rama temple. He is not clear what he will do thereafter. He is non-committal about what the millions that will congregate there are going to do and who is to regulate them, control their actions and prevent them from acting as crowds animated by religious frenzy often do. May be he is only engaged in a war of nerves with the Shahi Imam, Syed Shahabuddin and the Muslim masses who too are deeply disturbed about the possible turn of events. Secondly two of his lieutenants Vijay Kumar Malhotra and Madan Lal Khurana have declared that the aim of the Rathayatra is to foster communal amity, strengthen national integration and initiate a debate on communalism. Granted such is the aim the two worthies do not explain how they propose to go about it. People like me with less wisdom and experience are left gaping with incomprehension but these leaders may have some esoteric and high-minded plan not apparent to lesser mortals. One hopes that like their leaders they do not intend to bring down or forcible shift the mosque.

The B.J.P. leaders must seriously ponder the consequences of their actions on Hindu sacred places located outside India and the security of Hindus making a living in Muslim countries the world over. There is reason to believe that Atalji and Jaswant Singh Ji

have privately expressed serious concern about the impact on Kashmiri Moslems. I do not believe that it has not dawned on these patriotic gentlemen that humiliation breeds sullen resentment which in turn leads to hatred and disloyalty. Millions of actively disloyal citizens is not the price to be paid for one mosque less in the country.

The Babri Masjid Action Committee in the meantime is busy demolishing the VHP-BJP case on facts. They have been able to marshal impressive testimony that Lord Rama was not born at the very spot where the mosque was built by Mir Baqi and Vikramaditya had constructed no Rama temple at that spot and none was therefore demolished. There is no doubt whatever that if the burden of proof is cast on the VHP-BJP supporters they would not be able to discharge it. The latter are however on strong ground in contending that in matters of this kind what is relevant is not facts or legal evidence but the intensity of belief, and the near universality of its prevalence amongst devout Hindus of India.

How should rational and responsible Muslims react to this phenomenon? Ram & Ayodhya are inseparable in Hindu psyche. Most despotic rulers in the past perpetrated atrocities on their helpless subjects. Certainly non-believers were not accorded equal rights and protection as the believers, by most Moslem Kings. The former did not enjoy any fundamental right of freedom of worship or religious practice. Their cultural and religious symbols were systematically effaced and destroyed. Islamic ideology as understood in Babbar's times certainly sanctioned this barbaric practice. Even Shahbuddin's *Muslim India* concedes that post British records and sources clearly declare that the Babri Masjid was built on the precise site of a pre-existing Rama temple and describe it as the Janmasthan Masjid. An indubitably Muslim source, publication No. 66 of the Majlis Tehqiqat Wa Nashriat Islam by Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow in its chapter on the mosques of Hindustan has this to say about Babri Masjid as Ayodhya:

"Babri Masjid at Ayodhya: This mosque was constructed by Babar at Ayodhya which Hindus call the birth place of Ramchandraji. There is a famous story about his wife Sita. It is said that Sita had a temple here in which she lived and cooked food for her husband. On that very site Babar constructed this mosque in H. 963..."

HEAVY PRICE

The answer to the question posed is not in doubt. Moslems must accept the genuineness and complete bonafides of the Hindu belief. They must accept that in their mind the Masjid is a reminder of a humiliating past; it is an irritating eye sore, a relic of historical atrocities perpetrated in the name of Allah on despicable Kafirs. After paying the heavy price of partition to gain independence it is not an unreasonable ambition to remove these eye sores. Moslems and Hindus have to live and die together in this country. Co-existence is not possible without a strong bond of love and affection. Is it too much for one brother out of sheer delicacy of feeling to conceal or efface what justly irritates and humiliates the other? Sensible conclusion is that while the Hindus have no legal right to demolish the mosque it is the plain moral duty of Moslems to take it away. It is like removing the statues of British monarchs and viceroys and installing those of our national leaders in their place.

Moslem obscurantists would have the gullible believe that a mosque is irremovable; the very thought is sacrilege and an affront to Islam. This further complicates the problem and makes it intractable. Fortunately the argument is totally fallacious, demonstrably false and mischievous. There can be nothing more sacred to a devout Muslim than the place where the prophet of Islam himself lived and prayed. The apartments in which he lived were models of simplicity. Each was a cottage of unburnt brick not much more than a dozen feet square height not more than eight feet and thatched with palm branches; the entrance was a bare screen of goat or camel skin; the furniture just a mattress and pillows perched on the floor.

The public mosques were no less austere or much different. No body could have thought that God would frown on change of their location. Not one line in the Holy Quran could be cited to support the argument. Prayer, alms giving, fasting and pilgrimage constitute the four duties of Muslim religion. These with belief in Allah and the Holy Prophet are the five pillars of Islam. Prayers did not even need a mosque. When the muezzin sounded the call to prayer, the devout was expected to pray wherever he was, his home, the open ground or the pavement. The Masjid was where he did his Sajda — bowing down to Allah.

EQUAL THE GRANDEUR

The Moslem mosques became magnificent much later in aping the great churches of Byzantine Christianity when the holy cities of Islam became centres of wealth leisure gaiety and song which would have shocked the prophet and his immediate Caliphs. The Babri Masjid is a simple dilapidated structure. It can be converted into a magnificent mosque a few yards away from its present location, if the Moslems want to equal the grandeur of the Rama temple to be built in the vicinity. But if this basically non-Moslem passion does not overtake them, Islam would not suffer any humiliation or defeat by just relocating it in some less controversial and more peaceful area.

What is the alternative to a situation in which the Hindus insist on exercising a right they do not have and the Moslems ignore a duty that is theirs? In a society governed by the rule of law and an enlightened Constitution all intractable disputes must be resolved in the court room. It is a shocking state of affairs that the courts have slept on this matter for decades. I refuse to believe that this is due to the normal congestion of our court calendars. The judiciary too has failed the nation. It is idle to speculate why. The governments in power at the centre and the State since the inception of the controversy have shown no anxiety to secure a judicial decision. The Congress played politics for nearly half a century and manipulated the controversy for base political advantage. Last year the Hindus and Moslems both saw through the immoral game and displaced the regime that had kept the communal fires smouldering.

Men of compassion and understanding from both the communities conscious of the obligation of citizenship in a secular country and willing to subordinate religious passions and antagonisms to the paramount needs of the Republic must forthwith go into serious conclave and refuse to part until a solution is found. With knowledge as their guide and love as their inspiration the task is not impossible. It is not even difficult. Whether a mosque or temple or both exist or not or get shifted a few yards is a matter of supreme indifference to the spirit of Lord Rama or that of the Prophet of Islam. It only troubles their "followers".

Courtesy: The Indian Express

WHAT I SAW AT AYODHYA

Patralekha Chatterjee

By now all know how the saffron flag was raised over the Ram Janmabhoomi - Babri Masjid on October 30. But Ayodhya signifies much more today — the rising tide of Hindu fundamentalism and intolerance, of the retreat of secularism, once considered a cornerstone of the Indian Constitution. The process can perhaps be best described through a narration of events that centred around the virtual collapse of the state machinery over the issue of the disputed shrine.

OCTOBER 28: We are driving down the Lucknow - Faizabad highway. Our destination: any nearby village, where my British friend wants to photograph rural India. We arrive at Kuda Sajat in Barabanki district as dusk falls and the residents are almost through with the day's threshing. Most are Shia Muslims and Harijans.

Kuda Sajat is so far unaffected by the communal passion rising all over Uttar Pradesh, informs Akhtar, a farmer in his mid-twenties. But Muslims are tense, and apprehension mounts as October 30 approaches. "Our leaders have asked us to be low profile. We have been asked not to provoke or to give in to any incitement", says Shabir Ali, another resident.

A gaunt old man, lace cap on his head comes running. "Get out, get out", he shouts. "We do not want any outsider. They al-

ways come to create trouble. This village is peaceful and we want it to stay that way". It is the *Pradhan*. He calms down and apologises once we establish our identities, but his first words are the best revelation of the way Kuda Sajat is awaiting October 30.

OCTOBER 29: Early afternoon, and we are about to start on our drive from Lucknow to Ayodhya. A colleague supposed to join us is delayed, and finally arrives with *tilak* smudged all over his forehead. "Saying no wound have been dangerous", he explains.

As the car wends its way through the surging mobs in the heart of Lucknow I understand what he meant. The crowd is feverishly chanting "*Jai Sita Ram*", *Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan/Muslim Jao Pakistan*", and so on. The people are of all ages, though the young predominate, and appear to be from all socio-economic strata. Each holds a pot of *tilak*. All passerby are smeared, and so are the *vehicles*. None is exempt from shouting the slogans. The frenzy borders on menace, and we suddenly see it boiling over.

The crowd has converged on a cyclist just in front. A young lanky man, probably in his twenties. He is reluctant to shout "*Jai Sia Ram*" as demanded. The enraged mob pushes him off his bicycle and starts to beat him mercilessly. Our car moves on.

As a Hindu, the sight sent a chill down my spine. How would a Muslim feel in the brute face of such intolerance? — I kept asking myself; this is not the Hinduism I have been brought up on, as the clichés on the Bhakti and Shakti traditions went through my mind.

On the highway to Ayodhya, the police checkpoints start as evening approaches. We are stopped at each, our press passes examined and the car number noted down in a register.

But as the headlights are switched on, we always see pedestrians. Moving in ones or twos, they are barefeet, and carry small cloth bags on their shoulders. And they always disappear as we get near them. After a while we realise they are slipping into the adjacent farms as soon as the headlights fall on them.

The *kar sevaks* are moving, but we are not. Near the Faizabad border we are grandly informed at a police checkpoint that all our curfew passes and special entry passes have been declared invalid 30 minutes back. It is the order of the Chief Minister. There is no explanation, no entertainment of any appeal or entreaty. "Orders

are orders", the sub-inspector says majestically.

As we spend the next five hours driving up and down the highway in search of a senior officer who would let us in, we see two senior foreign journalists in a quiet corner of a police station. One carries a letter of entry from the Prime Minister's Office, but at the Faizabad border they just could not care less. Our colleague finally contacts the District Magistrate and we get in.

And all this while, the *kar sevaks* are moving. Orders are obviously not orders for them. They walk on the road, and as they approach each police checkpoint with its floodlights, they catch the trail to the nearest village. A journalist did the same reported that in the villages they are given places of honour to rest, are fed, and then shown the shortest route to the road beyond the checkpoint. The *kar sevaks* are folk heroes, their gruelling journey the stuff which crusader tales are made. Their grim determination and willingness to sacrifice all to "liberate" the disputed shrine give them an aura of heroism in the public eye.

OCTOBER 30, 3 AM: We are finally driving through Faizabad, which is a ghost town all right. It looks like a fortified military encampment. The only people on the streets are in uniforms of all kinds, all carrying automatic weapons.

4 AM: We have been issued fresh entry passes. Reportedly, the authorities feel the earlier press passes have been misused by the *kar sevaks* — specifically the Vishwa Hindu Parishad leadership — to gain entry into Ayodhya.

Soon after entering the temple town, we go to the banks of the Saryu. It looks like a tranquil autumn dawn. The bathers are there already, paying their obeisance to the rising sun: "Oh remover of doubt and darkness and all sins, I salute Thee". It is the morning of *Devotthani Ekadasi*, the day the gods come down to earth. The *panchkosi* (ten mile) *parikrama* of the Ayodhya temples is about to begin.

The surcharged atmosphere seems very far away. Maybe nothing will happen, maybe the government has actually succeeded in preventing the *kar sevaks* from getting to their destination. After all, did not the Chief Minister boast that not even a bird would get into Ayodhya?

A distant rumble disturbs the calm. A policeman bathing on the *ghats* says there is trouble on the bridge between Ayodhya and Gonda. We move there, and the tranquility is shattered.

Thousands of *Kar sevaks* have suddenly materialised on the bridge, and are battling it out with lathi-wielding securitymen. There are old men, women, young boys and girls from all over the country. The sight is over-whelming. The place is resounding with battlecries of "Jai Sia Ram".

Through the confusion, some vivid images remain. Images of raw passion and maniacal frenzy. There is a young couple, clad in jeans. Probably in their early twenties. The girl, a red T-shirt over blue denims, looks like a tourist, or a hitch-hiker inadvertently mixed up in this crowd of temple crusaders.

There is a row of buses on the Ayodhya side of the bridge, waiting to take away the arrested persons. The police are dragging a middle-aged man by the collar towards one bus. He keeps screaming: "I want to die. Pump bullets into me".

The girl faints. She and her companion are carried into the bus, the boy dragged through the road. She collapses on a window-seat. But suddenly, as photographers cluster around, she sits bolt upright and wildly screams: "Jai Sia Ram!" The face which looked so helpless seconds ago is infused with a frenzy one has never seen before. The boy choruses the slogans, shouting to reporters: "We are from Maharashtra. Our parents have sent us to build the temple. We will die if need be, but we will not return till we build it".

Another *kar sevak* in the bus is bleeding all over his face, thanks to police lathis. Suddenly he thrusts his bleeding face out of the window and screams at a passing policeman: "Shame, shame! Why can't you be like Jhansi Ki Rani or Ahalya Bai? Why are you with this traitorous government"?

The *kar sevaks* are ready to die and ready to kill. Thwarted at the bridge, one jumps into the Saryu and tries to swim to Ayodhya. The river police catch up with him after a long chase.

A cluster of young men shout: "What is the point in this youth unless it can be dedicated to the cause of the temple"? Watching them from below the bridge a policeman standing next to me mutters: "I feel like throwing away my rifle and joining them".

The sympathy of the men in khaki for the temple enthusiasts is evident again and again. During the course of the day, as the surging masses try to break police barricades all over Ayodhya, one cannot help wondering how so many got into the town to begin with. Asked this question, a policeman smiled quietly and said: "Duty is one thing. The dictate of the heart another. I do not want to say anything to a journalist. But ask yourself how so many people could have got in despite the curfew and the heavy barricades".

One of the many firsts during the day's "holy war" is the open participation of local residents. As the police teargassed a crowd near Hanuman Garhi, a sadhu clambered atop a corrugated roof and poured water down the slope. It was the only possible succour to the red-rimmed eyes. Other residents threw packets of sweets and puffed rice to the hungry *kar sevaks* from the upper floors.

The crowd was composed of ordinary people. Many looked like babus in government offices who would be pushing dusty files from nine to five for the rest of their lives. Many had taken leave-without-pay to be in Ayodhya today. Others were college students or unemployed young men. Suddenly all had found a cause, an all-consuming passion. The lathi blows, the teargas, the bullets, the confrontations with a half-hearted and demoralised police force were parts of a struggle which had suddenly given their lives a focus.

The depth of the anti-Muslim feeling was frightening. It became clear to all observers that the '*kar sevaks*' primary aim of the day was not to start any construction but to pull down the structure that stood at the disputed site. Many openly said that now no force on earth could stop the advent of the *Hindu Rashtra*, and the day was not far off when all non-Hindus in India would have to live like non-Muslims in theocratic Arab states. The slogan of the day: "*Hindustan mein rahena hoga/Ram ka naam lena hoga*".

Throughout the successful assault on the disputed shrine, the mania was most evident in the glint in the eyes of men whose skulls had just cracked under police lathis and who believed they were dying for a just cause.

A veteran journalist, among the first to be inside the shrine as the crowd was vandalising it, said he had never seen such raw

passion before. The crowd tore down the boundary wall of the shrine with bare hands, and were raining hammer blows on the dome as if their lives depended upon it. The men who died in police firing were martyrs for the holiest of holy causes in their eyes.

VHP leaders like S.C.Dixit, former Director - General of Police in UP, gave middle-class legitimacy to the cause. Dixit's statement that many people would lose their jobs if he divulged how he got into Ayodhya speaks volumes for the groundswell of support the VHP had managed to mobilise. Many *kar sevaks* said the shrine had been destroyed to show the minorities "their rightful places" in India. *Hindu Rashtra* was becoming an increasingly legitimate cause.

And despite the confrontations, despite the deaths in police firing, the *kar sevaks* were thrilled by their "success" in Ayodhya on October 30. They had support. Throughout Uttar Pradesh that evening people were coming out on the streets, bursting crackers, distributing sweets, blowing conch shells. *Diyas* were lit in middle-class residential areas of New Delhi in honour of the *kar sevaks* and the "auspicious occasion" of the damage to the shrine.

All India Radio and Doordarshan persisted in saying nothing had happened. As we drove back to Lucknow that evening, news of the events was yet to reach most people. Rumour mills were grinding hard. Effigies of V. P. Singh and Mulayam Singh Yadav were being burnt in street corners.

We stopped for tea at a roadside *dhaba*. The owner did not know the day's news. He had been listening to AIR but did not believe what it said. He had unsuccessfully tried to tune into BBC throughout the day. Overall, he was an unhappy man. No truck had been playing on the road for days, thanks to the curfew.

OCTOBER 31: Trying to reach the railway station through a curfew-bound Lucknow, my rickshaw-puller was a Muslim. He did not know what had happened, but he was scared, unsure of what the future held in store for him. "We have to live and die in this country whatever happens. We know no other".

The *kar sevaks* cared nothing about reservations on the Shatabdi Express to New Delhi. They sat wherever they wished and

chanted the Ram Dhun. Some passengers complained, and at Kanpur station there was an announcement, asking all the *kar sevaks* without reservations to get off the train.

In a trice, about 30 of them were around the conductor, demanding what he meant by that announcement. Did he mean that the *kar sevaks* travelled without tickets? They would teach him how to talk. They caught the man by the lapel of his jacket and forced an apology out of the public address system before the train was allowed to move.

To celebrate their victory, the *kar sevaks* roamed from coach to coach, singing: "Time for reflection has gone/The time has come to rewrite history/ Got ready with your swords/The earth is trembling/Hindus are rising/Victory of Hindus".

The sentiment is echoed manifold from unexpected quarters. A US-educated executive in a computer firm says: "Pandering to minorities must stop, why do these people think they are"? He is not with the damage inflicted on the shrine. "The *kar sevaks* are cowards. More of them should have faced bullets on October 30 and razed the mosque completely. This is a Hindu country".

It conjures up memories of Deorala in 1987, when a senior IPS officer had told me in Jaipur. "Who are you to decide whether it is right or not for a woman to throw herself in the fire when her husband dies? Take back a pot of *sindoor* from here to Delhi and spread the word around. See how many women from your neighbourhood queue up for the blessed vermilion".

Courtesy: Mainstream

DAY OF THE SAFFRON

by Kanchan Gupta

Security check began from Amausi airport. Senior police officers stood at the only gate of the arrivals terminal, eyes trained on every passenger disembarking from IC 410 on which I had arrived after interminable delays at Ranchi and Patna. Who among us could have been a potential *kar sevak*?

I was too tired and in a hurry to reach Faizabad before nightfall to hang around, and find that out.

From the airport to the Uttar Pradesh Information Director's office where visiting journalists and photographers had to collect special entry passes to enter Faizabad and Ayodhya. Last year, we had collected them from the Faizabad Magistrate's office to visit this benighted western Uttar Pradesh district.

The director, Shailesh Krishna, had been informed of my arrival and I did not have to hang around in the corridors of Suchna Bhawan. An early audience did not mean an early departure. There's something about Lucknow which infects almost everybody — the humble chaprasi to the mighty bureaucrat to the almighty politician. Nobody is in a hurry. In the city of nawabs, you learn to be patient.

After what seemed to be a never-ending meeting — Shailesh Krishna was a pleasant man, after all *paan bahar* and cold drinks in not so clean glasses made by Bajrang Crystal -- I was given an entry pass for the car. Dodging another round of *paan bahar*, I was

finally on my way to Faizabad and Ayodhya.

Three p.m. The late afternoon sun added a golden hue to the empty fields as we raced down the national highway. The crops had just been harvested, the brown of the dry earth broken by patches of mustard in bloom. Gazing out of the car window, I tried to recollect memories of my last ride down this very road exactly a year ago. This was my fourth visit to Ayodhya. I had come to recognize landmarks that would not have struck the casual visitor: the hoardings telling farmer the virtues of the right fertilizer, the garish family planning slogans painted on whitewashed walls, the *dhaba* where the same man, grown slightly fatter, sits making *alu tikias*.

But something was missing. There were no people on the road. We did not come across a single bus or a farmer on his bicycle. There were no tractors, no crowded autorickshaws. There was a palpable atmosphere of gloom and the waning light did not make things any better.

Vinod, my driver, refused to let the tension worry him, insisted on playing Hindi film songs on the car stereo at full blast. I protested but he said without music he would fall asleep at the wheel. I saw he had a point.

The first road block barely a few kilometres out of Lucknow. The *daroga* dutifully took down all details about me, Vinod and the car, searched my bags, found nothing objectionable, inquired whether my portable typewriter was "phoren", and waved us through. "Mujhe neend na aayee...chain na aaye..." trilled the cassette. And before the singer could move on to the next line after repeating the first one a couple of times, we had run into the next barrier. The security drill once again.

After that it fell into a pattern. Halfway through a song we would be stopped, our credentials checked, and allowed to proceed. "Muhabbat, Inayat..." check... "Tum bhi akele, hum bhi akele, mazaa aa raha hai..." check... "Nazar ke samne, jigar ke pass..." check...

But there was something wrong this time. After the mandatory two - minute halt, we were not moving any more. I tried to peer into the gathering dusk, but could not see much. I got down and was accosted by a towering U. P. Police official. "You will have to go back. We cannot allow you to proceed any further", he

said dismissively. "But I have the papers", I pleaded waving the special pass issued by the State Government. "That is just a pass. You need a curfew pass".

The Faizabad district administration had apparently just clamped on curfew. I tried to reason.

"Look how can I have a curfew pass issued by the magistrate if you won't let me enter the town".

"Not my problem. My orders are not to let anybody in without a curfew pass". Finally we managed to get through to the control room on the wireless. The magistrate told the policeman to allow me to enter Faizabad with police escort.

So we entered Faizabad at last, well past eight in the evening. I squeezed in between two burly policemen, stinking of rancid hair oil and spitting in all directions. The officials at the magistrate's residence took down my name — one of them recognized me — and said the pass would be sent later that evening.

Nobody came to deliver the pass. I had to go and collect it.

Curfew had left the streets and bylanes of Faizabad deserted. Not used to such firm administrative action, the residents had been taken by surprise. Together with Ayodhya, this backward area has a population of 3 lakhs, of whom seasonal migrants account for 50,000. Of the total workforce, nearly one lakh people are dependent on daily wages. The statistics serve the purpose of explaining the impact continual curfew has on a bewildered population which, to start with, had no part whatever in the events that led up to the events of October 30 or November 2. With most households without enough foodstocked up, people had literally to starve for the first couple of days.

However, what finally swung local sympathy towards the *kar sevaks* was the virtual, if undeclared ban on the *parikrama*, an annual ritual which had always been left alone. Till October 28, the residents were united in their effort to ensure that the amity between Hindus and Muslims was not disturbed. This year, too, Hindus and Muslims had joined in each other's festivals and religious processions. But on October 30, it became clear that something had gone wrong somewhere. There was no way the *kar sevaks* could have entered Ayodhya in such numbers without local support.

What then had happened?

Miranghat is a small village of 12 houses on the bank of the Saryu. There is only one Muslim family living here, of Mohammed Jalil. The others are Hindu. A little before we got there a group of *kar sevaks* had been arrested and carted away in a bus. The villagers had just stood by, they didn't participate in the slogan-raising.

I asked them about their reaction. "We have nothing to do with the *mandir-masjid* issue, we just want peace. The Government wants to make life difficult for us. There is no need for curfew. *Sab gaddi ka chakkar hai*", said Sanjay Verma.

Sundari Devi, an old resident said that this was the first time she saw policemen anywhere near the village. "We have never known tension", she added.

Mohammed Jalil owns a pucca house and a press, Jyoti Press. He has lived here all his life and has never seen communal friction.

However, the disruption of a tradition did change things. P.S. Kaurav, a teacher, said: "The *parikrama* should not have been stopped. They have had problems at Mecca, but no Muslim has ever been stopped from visiting it. We have no objection to *kar sevaks* being stopped, but ordinary pilgrims who look forward to this day are not being allowed to attend the *parikrama*".

And that perhaps explained the increasing resentment.

Ayodhya is often described as a "temple town". There are 6,000 temples, ashrams and akharas dotting the maze of lanes and bylanes. As in Faizabad, the place wore a deserted look, not a soul in sight.

The only movement one came across was of the monkeys, estimated to be around four to six lakhs. Pampered and fed by the pilgrims and Sadhus they had got used to an easy life. Not ever having to look for food, the curfew hit them the hardest. Many baby monkeys had died of hunger. I did not see any. A wildlife expert claims that the massive deployment of paramilitary forces, the constant roar of heavy vehicles have had a traumatic effect on them.

On October 27, around 9.30 p.m. I went looking for Mahant Nritya Ram Janambhoomi Mukti Yajna Samiti. The police were looking for him and he was supposed to operate from Mani Ram

Ki Chhauni, a sprawling complex comprising a temple, store rooms and sleeping quarters for itinerant *sadhus*. Once upon a time it must have been a chhauni in the true sense — a thatched roof to provide shelter. Not today. Lakhs of rupees have gone into building the concrete edifice and more money continues to pour in.

The fortified structure has a maze of corridors leading to well hidden rooms and a basement. I was asked to wait till his attendants got permission to let me in. The *mahant* was holding court in one of the inner rooms out of bounds for the general public. He checked my credentials. Recognizing me waved away the tough-looking attendants.

The *mahant* made no attempt to hide his contempt for the law, the State, the Government and the minority community. "The axe of the law has fallen on religion. Even during Muslim rule religion was not attacked. Nor during British rule or Congress rule," he said. The *mahant's* next statement gave the VHP game away: playing on local sentiments by describing the ban on the *parikrama* as an attack on tradition and "izzat". Since outsiders are not being allowed, we'd planned to continue the tradition by getting the local residents to participate in this annual ritual. But the curfew has foiled that plan", he said.

According to him, the police bundobast notwithstanding, "kar sevaks have been pouring into Ayodhya. They have gone underground. Others are on their way". Nobody took him seriously. Especially the administration. And everybody who was given the job of maintaining order on October 30 was taken aback when they realized that the *mahant* had not been boasting.

Nritya Gopal Das was brutally frank. The *sadhus* and *kar sevaks* were spoiling for a fight. "Tees ko bugle bajaa denge. *Sadhus* and *kar sevaks* will march towards battle", he told me.

"We would not have had this problem if Muslims had not been kept back by Gandhi... Muslims do not want to say *Bande Mataram*... Gandhi's anthem of '*Raghuapati Raghav*' has reached temples but not *masjids* ... Imam Bukhari is trying to establish Islamic raj... Muslims who have attended *madrasas* set up by Sheikh Abdullah in Kashmir want to break away from India...." The rest is unprintable.

What could be a solution? "By converting this (the disputed structure) into a temple, Muslims can be cut to size. *Ahimsa* can

never work. Look what happened to Gandhi. *Yeh desk ki akhandata ka prashna hai*" he answered.

What about secularism? "Till such time the Muslims do not realize that they are at the mercy of the Hindus, there cannot be any secularism. The only path to secularism is *Hindurashtra*".

"Sar pe kafan baandh ke aye hain, mandir banake jayenge" (we have come here prepared to die and will leave only after building the temple), said 17-year-old Ajay Kumar Singh, an activist of the Bajrang Dal. He had slipped through the police cordon with 50 others and reached Ayodhya. Two-hundred of them had started from Bhind in Madhya Pradesh. He had not eaten any food for the past three days, but that had not dampened his spirits.

And there were many like him: Avdhoot Girendra(45), Harish Sharma(20), Shiv Bahadur(27), Parveen Kumar(20), Rajesh (16), Rudra Kumar Mishra(22), Pavan Srivastav(18), All of them had come looking for *moksha* through *kar seva*. Some of them had grown up on RSS propaganda, others were new converts to the Bajrang Dal. Devoid of any ideology, willing to die. They said they were hiding in the fields near Faizabad and being looked after by villagers.

On October 29, day before the proposed *kar seva* programme. I decided to look for *kar sevaks* outside Faizabad town. I was given a tip by a local reporter. "Go down the National Highway till you reach Mumtaz Nagar. Once there, ask for Awdesh Singh. He has been taking care of the *kar sevaks*". We drove down the highway and finally found Awdesh Singh's house. But he was not home. The *haveli* (all large pucca houses are called *havelis*) was teeming with people and I was told most of them were *kar sevaks* who had taken refuge there.

Where is Awdesh Singh? "He has gone to attend a *yadav sabha* where he will try and get Mulayam Singh Yadav thrown out of the community", said Gyan Singh. Gyan Singh is in his late twenties. For the past six years he had been running a tea shop at Sati Chauraha. He has been a committed member of the RSS for the past 18 years. I ask him if he could take me to one of the hideouts, where I could get the feel of things. He hesitated initially, but later agreed to act as my guide.

We hit the road again. He asked us to stop at a small hamlet

where a milestone said "Lucknow 95 miles Barabanki 68 miles." We hid our car behind a haystack, away from the eyes of mobile police patrol men.

The trek began. For miles we walked through empty fields, kicking up clouds of dust. The only vegetation was the occasional field of *jowhar*, mustard or *arhar*. We finally reached Baba Gauraiya Devi Mandir where the *kar sevaks* were hiding. It was lunch time when we arrived. The *kar sevaks* were sitting in the courtyard, eating a frugal meal of rice, *dal* and *sabji* provided by the villagers. The group of 50 men was being led by Prem Prakash Khosla, a middle-aged man working for Mahanagar Telephone Nigam. The group included a 70-year-old man from Rohtak in Haryana. They had somehow made their way to Lucknow, from where they had walked up to this point. They were now preparing for the last stretch of their journey — to Ayodhya.

Standing in the shade of the mango grove I wondered what had made these men leave home. There seemed to be no plausible answer. What man would risk his life for a cause of which he knew little? None of the *kar sevaks* I spoke to was in the least aware of complexities of the dispute they had come to "solve". All they knew was that they could be killed by the police. "But we told our *gharwale* not to expect us back", said Bhanu Raghuvanshi who had come from Guna district in Madhya Pradesh.

The tide of *kar sevaks* that broke through the cordon near Hanmangarih pushed us aside. All the reporters who had come to cover the October 30 proceedings had decided to stick together. But when the crowds came, we lost track of each other for a while. Some of us ran after the *kar sevaks*, weeping from the tear-gas. At Barasthan, I stopped for a while to watch the arsonists in action. They methodically set a bus and seven jeeps on fire. All in the name of Ram.

Standing about 10 feet from the main entrance of the disputed shrines, we saw the mobs breaking through the barrier. We saw people being shot. One man in the chest. For a few seconds he sat on the road, clutching the ground for support, and then rolled over. Another man, in his sixties, was shot between the eyes. Two teenagers lay holding each other, splattered in their own blood. Behind the Babri masjid, some more were shot. All of them died in the belief that they had gone straight to Ram. Many of them had left behind families which would not even get to know of their deaths for many days.

On my way back to Lucknow. I tried to put together what I had just seen. It seemed like a long bad dream. I wanted to run away, from the madness that had been unleashed by the pedlars of religion. I also knew that this was only the beginning. Not of hope, but of despair.

Courtesy: Miscellany

AYODHYA : WHAT NEXT?

by S. Srinivasan

It was a war-like scenario. On one side of the national highway that cuts Ayodhya into two halves were paramilitary forces specially flown in from Delhi. Across the road were kar sevaks ready to storm the disputed shrine for the second time in a week. The attackers began shouting slogans and Ram bhajans, gradually taking their chantings to a crescendo. The mob started jostling and pushing the police barricades and soon all hell broke loose. There was heavy lathi-charge followed by several rounds of tear-gas firing till finally the security forces opened fire. They pushed the stone throwing mob and as if they were not satisfied by the retreat, chased them further into the narrow lanes. The final toll was over 30.

It was November 2 and it marked the bloodiest day in the calendar of the movement for the Ram temple intensified by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad four years ago when the Faizabad district court ordered unlocking of the gates of the temple at the disputed site. The Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), one of the most organised Hindu bodies working with the ultimate objective of establishing a "Hindu Rashtra", the main force behind the movement since the bloodshed, seems to have tactically withdrawn the agitation for a while before launching a fresh offensive. The RSS, in its internal assessment, has come to the conclusion that the agitation has reached a high pitch and needed some respite or else the situation could well slip out of its hands.

The RSS-VHP-BJP combine had achieved one of their main objectives of winning at least a symbolic victory over the security forces two days earlier — on October 30 — when a highly surcharged mob stormed the temple and was able to plant saffron flags on the top of the mosque. In a 10 minute period the volunteers managed to break the boundary wall of the mosque temple and chip the plaster off the main structure. This partly fulfilled the earlier declaration of the VHP that it would begin its kar seva on October 30 and that there would be no compromise on the date, place and time for beginning the construction of the temple. Where would the rightwing combination take the agitation from there? Are they progressing towards their objective of a Hindu rashtra? Will the people who turned up in large numbers in Ayodhya also vote for the BJP? What would be the sanctity of the Constitution which enshrines secularism as one of its corner stones? What happens to the rule of law if a particular community, specially the majority one, does whatever it wants by sheer use of force?

As the over ambitious politicians of the Janata Dal were quibbling and politicking in Delhi, the RSS-BJP-VHP was clearly taking another step towards their objectives in Ayodhya. The construction of the temple was only a step forward in furthering their cause and if the shilanyas in Ayodhya last November represented the sowing of seeds for a Hindu rashtra, a tiny plant seems to have sprouted in a year and, according to an analyst, "If nothing is done within the next few years to challenge the trend politically and ideologically, then the RSS objectives may turn out to be a dreadful reality." A senior BJP leader was in fact openly celebrating the event in Delhi when he said that it was immaterial how many votes the party would get in the next elections as planting saffron flags over the mosque represented another step towards Hindu Rashtra.

The tactic of playing the Hindu card to win votes began a decade ago when Indira Gandhi abandoned her traditional supporters, the Muslims and Harijans and tried to force the majority Hindu community into one solid vote bank. The RSS which clearly foresaw a political synthesis in the form of Hindu revivalism, grabbed the opportunity and its political wing, the BJP, fought the last general elections on a blatant Hindu plank. Although anti-Congressism and the Bofors fallout also helped the BJP, sections of the party believe that essentially it was the Ram Janmabhoomi

issue that helped the party most. Ram became their new ideology and they tried to preach their own brand of nationalism, saying that he was the true national hero. On the other hand, Babar was described a symbol of invasion. The VHP simultaneously was building fundamentalism not out of love or reverence for God but hatred of Muslims. According to Mr. Ashok Singhal, the general secretary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Muslims in India should choose between Ram and Babar — while the former led them to their roots the latter was an aggressor.

The BJP-VHP combine has kept up the tempo of its movement after the shilanyas last year as they received encouragement from the electorate. They first decided to start construction of the temple in January this year. After two postponements, finally October 30 was declared as the date for beginning construction at a gathering of religious leaders in Hardwar. While Mr. L.K. Advani approached Ayodhya through a rathayatra covering 10,000 kms the RSS-VHP displayed its organisational prowess and smuggled kar sevaks into Ayodhya. It was a battle of wits as the kar sevaks walked hundreds of kms. skirting national highway and roadblocks. The fields in the towns around Ayodhya were teeming with marching men as they walked all night to reach their destinations. The district administration said it was doing its best to stop the inflow. On October 29, on the eve of D-Day, the administration started flushing out men from the temples and dharmshalas.

But the next morning policing collapsed as thousands of men from nearby villages pushed their way into the town. The VHP had coincided its programme with "panchkosi parikrama", an annual ritual during which thousands of men, women and children come to bathe in the river Saryu and do a 15-km walk. Then, while the police failed abysmally to perform its duty, mobs of men and sadhus marched into the disputed shrine after a ding-dong battle. Six men died in police firing near the disputed site and the Saryu bridge. After a 10-minute free-for-all, the police regained the upper hand and pushed out the mob. It was evident that a large section of it was frustrated and wanted to go for a second attack.

There are different theories over why the VHP decided to go for a second attack on November 2. According to one version the second attempt was to ensure credibility of the movement as on October 30 the police had sought the help of one of the VHP vice-

presidents to another version there was a split in the ranks of the VHP with a hot-headed section wanting a second assault.

But what was clear after the second attack in which several VHP volunteers were killed was that the movement was getting influenced by the Punjab agitation. The term 'kar seva', which gained currency after Operation Bluestar was used as "karya seva", but in common pronunciation it was "kaar sewa." Maniram Chawni which was on the other side of the road and in which all the volunteers of the VHP had gathered, became a kind of fortress. Although the kar sevaks were not armed, the police dared not enter. After the second attack, even the Press came under pressure as some photographers and reporters were threatened and man-handled. Some volunteers were even heard to say that if there was a third attack it would be an armed one.

While the VHP leaders are meeting in Delhi on Sunday to decide how they should respond to the new government, their strategy is fairly straight. The RSS, which is the source of support for both the VHP and the BJP, has decided to politicise the movement to bring it back onto the rails. The VHP will no longer talk of demolishing the mosque. It will try to politicise the issue by taking the ashes of those killed in Ayodhya to every village in the country. Alongside, a 10,000-strong force of storm-troopers or "bajrang dal" will be created who will "give a fitting reply to the violators of democracy" as the VHP believes that their democratic rights have been denied by the government through mass arrests and ignorance of the court order that the devotees should be allowed "parikrama."

The BJP will try not to whip up sentiment against the Muslims but appeal to Hindus to vote for them as, by remaining in opposition, the BJP will not be able to give the Hindus the Ram temple as it involves construction. The new slogan would be "*Jo Hindu hit ki baat karega vahi desh ka raj karega,*" (one who takes care of the Hindu interests shall rule).

The Babri Masjid Action Committee, on the other hand, has decided to keep an open mind on the issue. Some of the BMAC leaders who met in Delhi to take stock to the situation went to the extent of criticising the previous Prime Minister, Mr. V.P. Singh, and Uttar Pradesh chief minister, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav. These leaders say that they do not doubt the secular credentials of Mr.

Chandra Shekhar but would nevertheless wait to see how he performs in office. According to them, Mr. V.P. Singh could have solved the issue but he dithered as he wanted to please both communities. They accuse Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav of being overzealous to the extent of creating a rift between Hindus and Muslims. His acute anti-Hindu posture, they said, had harmed the Muslims.

The Congress (I), which burnt its fingers in trying to tackle the issue earlier has decided to take a strictly secular line. It will, like the Left parties, abide by the court verdict and welcome a negotiated settlement. Mr. Chandra Shekhar, however, is personally of the view that the issue should not be politicised and that a solution can be found through discussions between the leaders of various factions. But there is a lesson for all secular political parties from the developments in Ayodhya. The dedication of the RSS-VHP-BJP volunteers was impressive. The cadres walked hundreds of kilometers to reach the site. Many of them were ready to face bullets for their cause.

"Gods are supposed to protect all living beings but now we have the unenviable task of protecting the god," former law minister Dinesh Goswami told a group of reporters outside the Parliament annexe hours after his government withdrew the ordinance on the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute. Perhaps he had a premonition that his would be the second government to fall over the issue. The same could well be the fate of the next government with the difference that if the present trend continues, that government could be of the BJP itself.

Courtesy: The Telegraph

A PROFESSIONAL PROPAGANDA JOB

by Jyoti Punwani

By the time the minister of state for home decides to take action against J.K. Jain for circulating an uncensored video recording of what happened in Ayodhya between October 30 and November 2, thousands would have seen the cassette. Cuts imposed by the censor board or even an outright ban would have been ineffective in this case, for those who commissioned this recording are not media professionals who must abide by rules if they want to stay in the business. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has a definite aim in ensuring that as many people see this cassette as possible, and no ban will make any difference to its determination.

Effectiveness apart, it is debatable whether a ban can be a solution. The flourishing existence of a number, of banned outfits in Punjab, Assam and Kashmir should have taught us that bans cannot counter a movement that a large mass of people think is worth joining. Unless the government can convince them otherwise, they will ignore all bans imposed by it, even if it means remaining underground. When people support you, life in the underground is not exactly a bed of thorns.

Similarly, a ban on *Pran jahun paru bachanu na jae*, will not make people less eager to view it; on the contrary, the VHP will derive all the mileage it can from it, terming it one more example

of the Way 'Hindus are being discriminated against in their own country'.

The hour-long recording is, predictably, the BJP view of the Ayodhya dispute, projected as part of a 400-year-old struggle waged by Hindus to reclaim what was once theirs. Reports of the cassette had aroused fears of a rabid, inflammatory depiction. It is a testimony of the professional skills of Jain Studios that at no point is the movement to build the temple at the site of the Babri Masjid, which has claimed hundreds of Hindu and Muslim lives all over the country in the last four years, seen as anything but reasonable. Not once does the commentator raise his voice. And, most surprising of all, there is not a word against Muslims. Even Babar is let off with a brief description as an 'invader'. A far cry indeed from the speeches of VHP and BJP leaders; they were obviously kept away from this production by someone who has an intimate knowledge of the medium and how best to exploit it.

The target of attack is the government, especially that of Mulayam Singh Yadav. Here too, the temptation to describe him as 'Mullah Mulayam' is avoided. Yet, such is the effect of the film that one resident of Faizabad who works in Bombay and who understands the Ram Janmabhoomi movement for what it is, remarked at the end of it, "They will get Mulayam and VP soon."

The film highlights, through its commentary, the attempts by activists to get into Ayodhya despite the police bandobast sealing the town and the state. This is bound to win the admiration of viewers.

As far as live footage is concerned, there is not too much of it. The same shots are repeated over and over again, for instance the lathi-charge by policemen, half-hearted when confronted with the mob; over enthusiastic when making stray individuals (including a journalist) its target. There is one memorable scene: a group of policemen keep hitting a white-haired, dhoti-clad villager. Not only he get up after the beating, he refuses to budge, using his own lathi as a shield against the six policemen. The conclusion is inescapable: the police were just not interested in their job. And to drive it in, you have one of the injured recounting how the police "begged us to turn back, cajoled us, fell at our feet, but we didn't listen and then they lathi-charged us".

A few shots function as key symbols: the men on the dome,

hoisting the saffron flag and digging a hole in the cement structure for the flagstaff: close-ups from every angle of two bodies lying in a street (the commentary says "hundreds of kar sevaks were killed" on November 2); and close-ups of the faces of the Kothari brothers, who says their uncle who was also in Ayodhya with them, were dragged out of the house in which they were hiding and shot dead. The real impact of the film is here, in the last 20 minutes, in the tearful account given by the uncle, in which he says that the brothers had been seen off with tilaks and aarti by their family and had come prepared to die, but not like this, not after being dragged out of a house. He ends in English, his voice composed and the tears over. "Are we a civilised country? General Dyer must be relieved; we are doing better than he did." Silence follows.

"Why did they have to shoot at them?" asked one viewer after the film was over. "Couldn't they have lathi-charged, used tear gas?" This comment came despite the repeated shots of lathi-charge and tear-gassing (doused by local residents who kept on pouring water from their balconies). The monument had to be protected, you reply; they wouldn't budge even after the police fell at their feet. Later the incongruity of it strikes you: does one protect a building at the cost of young lives, however few in number?

This could be one reaction: ok, take the monument and be done with it. But one viewer was left with a feeling of waste: is this a cause worth dying for? The bleeding man who lies propped against a wall, bleating like an animal (fortunately, the shot is not repeated); another who can barely speak but, Hindi film style, makes a gasping speech about how Babar had left instructions that he should be buried in Arabia (Afghanistan actually), yet we are left with his reminder - these can make some viewers angry with the leaders who propel youngsters towards risking their lives for a false cause.

The danger of this cassette lies in the one-dimensional view it gives of the dispute, making it out to be a flight to build a temple between Hindus and the brutal government of a Hindu majority country. As if Muslims all over India have not been made to pay for the existence of the mosque; are not being killed for it even now and in fact, were not being killed at the very moment when the police were making feeble attempts to push back the mob. The

questions asked by Kothari brothers' uncle have been asked again and again by Muslims whose sons have been similarly dragged out and shot dead; and the community has finally accepted the answer to the question: '*kya yeh hamari police nahin hai*' asked by an eye-witness to the boys' killing.

The government can counter the impact made by this cassette by making one of its own, explaining why it felt it necessary to shoot down people wanting to build a temple after demolishing a mosque, showing the havoc wrought by the movement. It should have get one made immediately after October 30. It would have had no difficulty finding professionals who would have done as good a job as Jain Studios and with equal conviction. But if the government had imagination to do this, it could have used the medium available to it. Doordarshan's reach remains unrivalled. The government has only itself to blame for not using it effectively.

One cannot blame the VHP-BJP for being more imaginative. They are serious about what they want, that's why they make the best use of even the two minutes accorded them on Doordarshan's programmes on secularism while other parties waffle on till you switch off your set, the BJP's arguments still in your ears. Surely the latter known the BJP's arguments, and also that party will use every chance it gets to push them. That they still let go of the many opportunities they get to demolish these arguments is a reflection of their tired minds.

Courtesy: Independent

THE BJP'S PROPAGANDA OF LIES

by Sitaram Yechury

The communal passions that have currently gripped our country are reminiscent of the period, preceding the bloody riots that accompanied the imperialist-inspired partition of India. The virus has been spread so deeply that even areas that have not seen a communal conflagration in independent India were scenes of death and destruction. Even in West Bengal which, under Left Front rule with its justifiably proud record of communal amity, Advani's rath yatra left a trail of death in Purulia district.

Those who had thought that with the passing of the October 30 and November 2 incidents in Ayodhya the situation would ease are in for a rude shock. Judging by the brazen inflammatory propaganda that has been unleashed through the video/audio cassettes, it is clear that the progeny of the assassins of Mahatma Gandhi are all set this time to tear at the very fabric of united India.

L.K. Advani's latest interviews in the national Press again clearly strip away the mask of hypocrisy behind which the BJP had hitherto taken refuge. He openly admitted that the Ram Janmabhoomi issue is a political one, that his rath yatra had a political motive, and issued a veiled threat that Muslims would be safe only under the BJP's rule. That the real reason for whipping up such communal frenzy is to enable the BJP to ride the wave of Hindutva,

to capture power in Delhi and establish the RSS goal of Hindu Rashtra, is today more than obvious.

A long campaign: These events in fact are a culmination of many years of planning and execution by the proponents of Hindu Rashtra. The erstwhile Jan Sangh was forced into political oblivion in 1980 when its representation in the Lok Sabha went down drastically from ninety and it had to pass some time in the political wilderness. Initially flirting with "Gandhian socialism", it was evolving strategies to stage a comeback. Ultimately it reverted to the RSS notion of Hindu Rashtra, and exploitation of the sentiments of the Hindus was seen as the best bet for the reemergence of the Jan Sangh-BJP into the national political mainstream. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad was thus formed in 1983, and this was followed by nationwide inflammatory communal campaigns which included the Ekatmata Yagna in 1984.

Propaganda technique: Causing even greater concern to all those who value secularism as the very foundation of independent India, is the remarkable resemblance that this (Ram Janmabhoomi) campaign bears to the fascists methods employed by the Nazis in their rise to power in Germany. Following the famous dictum of Hitler's propaganda minister Goebbels: "If you tell a big enough lie, frequently enough, it becomes accepted as the truth", the BJP has let loose a barrage of disinformation, and has succeeded in making some sections of the people believe in these untruths.

The BJP/RSS/VHP/Bajrang Dal and the various others outfits (which we shall collectively refer to as the SS - Saffron Shirts - for short, their similarity to Hitler's Brown Shirts and the notorious Hitler SS is more than coincidental) would have people believe that they are only espousing the cause of building Lord Ram's temple in Ayodhya, on behalf of the millions of exploited and deprived Hindus. But the real issue is not that of building a temple. Not one but a hundred temples for that matter can be built. But why the insistence on demolishing the Babri Masjid and building the temple only in its place? It is now abundantly clear, despite all the BJP's prevarications, that their demolishing the Masjid and raising the temple on its ruins is very germane to their intention - to plunge the country into a permanent communal conflagration with all the concomitant disastrous consequences.

Dimitrov's forewarning: If we go back to Georgi Dimitrov's acutely incisive address to the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in 1935, to date still the most scientific analysis of the nature and emergence of fascism, we find this perscient statement.

"Fascism acts in the interests of the extreme imperialists, but it presents itself to the masses in the guise of a champion of an ill-treated nation, and appeals to outraged national sentiments".

This is precisely what the SS is doing. By reopening the issue of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple after so many years, the SS is trying to make people believe that they are undoing a historical injustice heaped upon the Hindus by the Muslim invaders.

There is no dispute and history is a witness to the desecration of many a Hindu place of worship by Muslim zealots. But this is now a part of the history through which our nation has passed, and an issue that was settled through the years of the freedom struggle, and which was drafted by an Assembly which was predominantly Hindu, had envisioned the future of independent India as a secular nation. Who are the Hindus that the SS today claim to champion? Those who had framed our Constitution? The millions who uphold it today, living and dying to preserve these principles?

A basic principle: If today India proclaims in its Constitution a secular democratic republic, it is so because the predominantly Hindu population has embraced secularism, accepted the multi-religious, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural character of our country and championed these as an advance of human society. At the time of independence, the majority of Hindus in India emphatically rejected the then RSS plan of converting India into a Hindu Rashtra. They rejected it because it would mean taking India back into the medieval times as a religious theocratic state, and the very antithesis of a democratic polity. And it is this majority Hindu sentiment which is today being challenged by the SS. It is not the championing of the Hindu sentiments that the communal forces have undertaken, but the demolition of the entire product of generations of secular Hindus who, through their struggles, had achieved independence and established a secular India.

False choice: Thus, behind their fascistic propaganda blitz lies the ideology of a Hindu Rashtra, a theocratic state. These saffron-shirted 'warriors' have placed before the country and the people a divide between what they call the "nationalists" and the "pseudo-secularist". Those who are with them are supposedly nationalist, and all those who uphold the secular foundations of independent India are the pseudo-secularist. The ideology behind this is not new; it was frighteningly outlined by the late RSS chief, Golwalkar, way back in 1939 in a book titled '*We Or Our Nationhood Defined*'.

Bemoaning the fact that Hindus have forgotten their nationhood and calling upon them to rise in defence of their nation, Golwalkar defined his concept of a nation which completely contradicts the modern foundation of a secular state, namely the separation of religion from politics. Golwalkar states:

"With us, every action in life, individual, social or political is a command of religion." He continues, "Indeed politics itself becomes...a small factor to be considered and followed solely as one of the commands of religion and in accord with such commands. We in Hindusthan have been living such a religion (Hinduism)".

Not content with this, Golwalkar proceeds to state that:

"In Hindustan exists and must exist, the ancient Hindu nation, nought else but the Hindu nation. All those not belonging to the national, i.e., Hindu race, religion, culture and language, naturally fall out of the pale of real national life".

And he proceeds to lay the basis for the claim of being "nationalist", which Advani today is espousing, by stating:

"Only those movements are truly national as aim at rebuilding, revitalising and emancipating from its present stupor, the Hindu nation. Those only are nationalist patriots who, with the aspirations to glorify the Hindu race and nation next to their heart are prompted into and strive to achieve that goal. All other are either traitors and enemies to be national cause, or to take a charitable view, idiots".

This is the SS perception of those who are today laying down their lives in defence of our country's unity and integrity in Punjab, Kashmir-Assam and elsewhere, and about those who are guarding our national frontiers against our enemies from outside.

Extreme chauvinism: By thus making religion inseparable from politics, the SS today only strengthens the enemies of the country. It provide grist to the mill of the Khalistani extremists in Punjab, and Muslim fundamentalists in Kashmir. It in fact legitimises these secessionist movements and plays directly into the hands of imperialists plotting against India.

And for those who are not Hindus but who have contributed to the developments of their country and continue to live here, Golwalkar has this to say: "They have no place in national life, unless they abandon their differences, adopt the religion, culture and language of the nation, and completely merge themselves in the national race. So long however as they maintain their racial, religious and cultural differences, they cannot but be only foreigners."

And adds: "The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence the Hindu religion, must entertain no idea except the glorification of the Hindu religion, must entertain no idea except the glorification of the Hindu religion and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation, and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or they may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment - not even citizen's rights.

There is, at least should be, no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation, let us deal as old nations ought to and do deal with the foreign races who have chosen to live in our country." (Emphasis added.)

Naked fascism: And how do they propose to deal with such people? Golwalkar's answer is—a sickening parallel with Nazi fascism. (Which incidentally was at its height when he wrote his book.)

"To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by purging the country of the semitic race - the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany

has also shown how well nigh impossible it is for races and cultures having differences going to the roots, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in *Hindustan to learn and profit by*" (emphasis added).

Thus, according to the RSS, Hitler's fascist methods are to be adopted for achieving their goals of the Hindu Rashtra.

Approach to history: This is the real nature of the debate being posed by Advani and the SS between the "nationalists" and the "pseudo-secularists". Under the cover of nationalism what is being advocated is unbridled fascist violence. And this is based on a Goebbelsian propaganda of untruths. All historical evidence is either brushed aside, ignored or distorted. Hence the claim that the exact spot of Lord Ram's birth is a matter of faith and not history; or that four lakhs Hindus were martyred over the years in 76 precious attempts at 'wresting' the place of Lord Ram's birth; and the fact that the British guelled the communal conflict in Ayodhya as a pretext for the annexation of Oudh.

All this is being done in the name of restoring Hindu pride and prestige. Yet the vast heterogeneity of the Hindu religion and Hindu community is consciously repudiated. Thus those from the south, who have always felt humiliated at the fact that kings south of the Vindhyas are depicted as monkeys or inferior to the aryan, who come from the north, are not considered by the SS as Hindus. Golwalkar also cites language as one of the important factors in his definition of a Hindu nation. Thus all those who speak languages as varied and different as exist in India, are according to the SS not Hindus.

A grave challenge: Contrast what Swami Vivekananda had to say about the Hindu religion, to the incendiary and inflammable passion-whipping that Golwalkar and today's SS is doing. Vivekananda had said: "If anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance; help and not fight, harmony and peace and not dissension". Will Advani and the SS today excommunicate Swami Vivekananda for having said this? Does this not in fact reflect more accurately and truly the Hindu way of life than the proponents of Hindu Rashtra?

The situation in which all of us find ourselves today is in fact

the gravest challenge facing our country and poeple. And this challenge is being forced at a time when various anti-national forces are actively tearing asunder the fabric of united India in Punjab, Kashmir, Assam and else where. But for the SS, it would seem the people for our country today face no other problem than that of demolition of the Babri Masjid.

That more Indians than the entire population of US live below the poverty line is of no concern to them. That children in our country, in millions, outstripping the entire population of many a nation, are forced to earn their livelihood is of no concern. That more Indians die every year from malnutrition than the entire population of Australia, is of no concern. By posing the demolition of the Babri Masjid as the only agenda before the Indian people, the SS today is in fact strengthening the very edifice of exploitation that is heaping miseries on our people.

Unless this challenge is unitedly combatted, unless the communal frenzy is challenged with an equal vigour, the very future of India for whose freedom thousands have been martyred is at stake. All patriots, who have not sold their conscience to the enemies of our country, realising strong unity in action against this communal monster.

To those who underestimate the dangers of the present situation we can only remind them of what a German intellectual Pastor Numoeller, had said at the time of Nazi ascendancy:

“First they came for the Jews
and I did not speak out —
Because I was not a Jew.
They they came for the Communists
and I did not speak out —
Because I was not a Communist.
Then they came for the Catholics
and I did not speak out —
Because I was not a Catholic.
Then they came for me —
and there was no one left
and speak out for me”.

To those who consider that these developments do not affect their life and future we can only recall to them the wisdom that has filtered down through the ages? "For evil to succeed, the good has only to be silent." Passivity in meeting this challenge can only mean peril for the individual and the country.

Courtesy: People's Democracy

SECULARISM IS NOT A MANTRA

by K. R. Malkani

Mr. S. Mulgaonkar is the Grand Old Man of Indian Journalism. It was therefore a delight to see his column "The dragon rampant" in the *Indian Express* on december 22 after a longish break. Readers would very much share his anxiety over the present state of the nation. However, not many will agree with either his averments or his conclusions.

SM has blamed Mr. Advani's Ram rath yatra for the violence that has rocked the country over the last two months; and he thinks that the Ram Janmabhoomi issue is a "contrived controversy" over which Hindus had never protested until recent times. Both statements happen to be factually incorrect.

First the rath yatra. Mr. Advani passed through seven States and his visit was not marked or followed by any violence any where. The people protested only when he was arrested and the Ram rath impounded in Bihar. Had the yatra been allowed to proceed to Ayodhya and Mr. Advani and some other Ram bhaktas been allowed to add a few bricks to last years' shilanyas, there would have been no protest and, therefore, no violence anywhere.

A CHALLENGE

After the 1942 movement, the then British Government of India had held the Congress responsible for the violence in the wake of the passing of the "Quit India" resolution. But Gandhiji pointed out that it was only the "leonine violence" of the Government in arresting the leaders etc. that had provoked the people. The same was the case with the rath yatra.

Many other questions arise regarding the violence of the last two months, particularly the role of the UP Chief Minister. He addressed 50-odd meetings all over UP, attended largely by Muslims, and flying more Communist than Janata Dal flags. Here he urged Muslims to "keep arms" for "self-defence". He ridiculed the Hindu case, said they could build a Ram temple anywhere, but not where they wanted it in Ayodhya, and he said not even a bird ("chiriya", a sparrow) would be able to enter Ayodhya on October 30. No wonder the kar sevaks took it as a challenge.

What was damaged on October 30 was not the mosque but Yadav's pride. Responsible local Hindu and Muslim interviewees have told the press: "Yadav's rallies were absolutely irresponsible", "a riot followed every one of Yadav's rallies"; "earlier, only the minorities felt insecure. Now the Hindus feel so too. The situation can only deteriorate"; "the man who was the messiah of Muslims till yesterday has today become their worst enemy."

SM takes no note of the murderous Mulayam factor in the recent violence

JUDICIAL INQUIRY

Another question arises: The violence that followed Advani's arrest in October was nothing compared to what happened six weeks later in UP, Hyderabad and Gujarat, in the second week of December, when even the kar seva had been turned into only a satyagraha. What was at the back of this second and bigger wave of violence? Only a detailed judicial inquiry can unravel the mystery. But some of the lineaments of the mystery are already showing.

The then Congress Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh has alleged the hand of party dissidents in the violence, to discredit him. Earlier, the then Chief Minister of Karnataka had also accused

Congress dissidents of hand in violence in the State, also to discredit him.

Nor does SM have to overlook the Pakistani hand in the many mischiefs in India. This hand has become particularly active with the change of governments both in India and Pakistan. The new premier of Pakistan is a "natural ally" of the military establishment there, which finds its best defence in a weak and off-balance India. And they see in Chandra Shekhar's rump regime a golden opportunity for fishing in the troubled waters of India.

SM's other assertion is that the Ram Janmabhoomi issue is a "contrived controversy" and that "there is no history to a Hindu protest movement either at the time it was built or during all those 460 years, except the last forty." The fact is that there is a long and gory history and the learned author has probably been too busy with other, bigger issues, to be in touch with this one.

Any visitor to the Ramkot area of Ayodhya can see monuments associated with Rama, Sita and Hanuman all around the disputed structure, which stands on the elevated ground in the centre. Obviously a spot like that could not have been left vacant for somebody to come and build a mosque there. And, in any case, archaeologists have found the foundations of pillars around and about this structure; they did not dig right under the structure because of standing instructions that no damage may be done to any standing structure in the course of archaeological excavations.

It is quite possible that the old temple was destroyed long before Babar by earlier invaders. We have a long history of mandirs-converted-into-mosques being reclaimed and rebuilt, and being once again desecrated and yet again rebuilt. N. Manucci (17th century) and A. Cunningham (19th century) have testified that Hindus often kept returning to places on which a mosque had been imposed, since the site was more sacred to them than the structure thereon. And, so although the "Babri masjid" was built by Mir Baqi at the instance of Musa Ashikan, a Muslim religious leader, with the permission of Babar, it was long known as "Masjid-e-Janamsthan."

DIVIDE AND RULE

It is significant that this structure has the dome of a mosque, no minarets or pool for ablutions (*wazoo*) which are essential parts of a mosque, and pillars that are pure temple. Even Aurangzeb's grand daughter in her book "Safiha-i-Chahal Nasaih Bahadur Shahi," says that Ram Janmabhoomi mandir was pulled down to build a mosque. This was followed by several fights which are all recorded. When Tieffenthaler, the Austrian Jesuit priest, visited Ayodhya in 1767, he found Hindu worship going on inside as well as outside this building.

in 1853, and again in 1855, when Avadh was still ruled by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, some four hundred Muslims were killed by the Saivite Bairagis in the fight for control of this site. The 1857 revolutionaries of Ayodhya handed over these premises to Hindus, but when the British came back, they hanged the Hindu and Muslim nationalist leaders of Ayodhya and, in pursuit of their "divide and rule" policy, handed over the place of Muslims.

In 1934 there was a big riot in Ayodhya over cow slaughter near Ram Janmabhoomi, when the Babri Mosque was extensively damaged. The present structure is a result of repairs done in 1936. In the same year some persons were found murdered in the masjid and the same was declared "*napak*" (impure) and no longer fit for prayers. (Incidentally Ayodhya with a Muslim population of some 5000, has 26 mosque of which only half are in use.) It was on this state of neglect that *moorthis* made their appearance here in 1949 and even Pandit Nehru thought discretion the better part of valour and allowed them to remain there. Today there is a functioning temple inside this structure and, under court orders, Muslims can't get within 200 yards of the same.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

So much for what SM thinks is a "contrived controversy." And he will appreciate that, all things considered, India is more in the Nature of a cow, which knows when, where and how to use its horns and its tails, than a dragon, which is the speciality of our Chinese friends.

SM's argument is that both sides to the dispute are illiterate "obscurantists" who foolishly agree that "secularism is their

worst enemy” and that, therefore, the Government should not talk to them. I don't know whether SM has seen the testimony exchanged by the two sides. And I myself have not seen the BMAC documents; but I have seen the VHP documents on the subject and I must say they would do credit to any research organisation; they would certainly put JNU historians to shame.

But documents apart, when both Hindu and Muslim leaders feel that something is seriously wrong with secularism as preached and practised in India, it is time for all concerned to sit up, re-think their thoughts and re-examine their basic assumptions. Secularism is not a mantra which we have to chant until we are hoarse. Perhaps in this country we need something more than this sterile colourless concept, something with a positive content and a moral tone.

Gandhiji's concept of "Ram Rajya" and Rabindranath's of "Dharam Rajya" immediately come to mind as two such cognate positive concepts. Perhaps if our Muslim brethren can get over the language barrier of the Hindu idiom, they too would agree that is precisely what they want — namely — justice for all.

Courtesy: The Indian Express

THE METHOD BEHIND HINDUTVA

by Sunil Adam

Double double toil and trouble Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

There has to be a method in the communal madness that has laid siege to India. None would dispute that an understanding of the method is imperative for surviving the madness. Yet, the subjectivity characterising past exercise has often precluded their utility. Manufactured myths for authenticating the predelictions of both the secularist and communalist have not only prevented a dispassionate study of history but, as a consequence, denied the successive generations from learning from the mistakes of the past.

Clearly, the on-going tragedy and farce, the two facets of India today, are beyond immediate redemption. But an identification of the historical forces at work will prepare us for what is likely to follow. At the outset, the present editions of communal carnage are unprecedented in many respects. Unlike those of the past that were spaced out in time and place and were to a large extent unrelated, the current ones are interlinked on a national scale with a national issue.

The most important difference is that present spate is singularly motivated by politics. While local politics has always been in-

trinsic to communal violence, more pertinent were the economic factors. This time, however, communalism in the north as well as the south are inextricably linked to what is essentially the resurgence of the Hindu political consciousness which is being commonly, and perhaps erroneously, depicted as the rise of Hindu fundamentalism.

Can there be anything called Hindu fundamentalism? If yes, is it a new phenomenon that is steering the country to an unknown destiny? Conceptually, the term fundamentalism cannot be applied to a religion like Hinduism which is not based on a single text or a doctrine and which does not prescribe a rigorous spiritual servitude. The term fundamentalism is a derivative of 'The Fundamentals', the title of a series of twelve books published by an American obscurantist evangelical sect in the early part of the century. The books attacked modern scientific temper and the liberal attitude towards religion and prescribed strict adherence to the fundamental tenets of Christianity.

Although the so-called rise of Hindu self-consciousness (which has been described by the western historians as fundamentalism), in the middle of the 19th century coincided with the Christian evangelical sweep of the western world, the former had little in common with the latter. In fact, one of the goals of the Hindu movement was to imbibe the scientific temper and liberal values. It is however, extremely pertinent to note that the Hindu consciousness was clearly a product of the growing political consciousness of the Hindu elite. As early as 1828, Raja Ram Mohan Roy wrote: "I regret to say that the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not well calculated to promote their political interests....It is, I think, necessary that some change should take place in their religion at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort."

In other words, what has come to be known as the Hindu renaissance was both reformist and revivalist in nature and conspicuously political in intent. The revivalism was related to giving so-called Vedic orientation to Hinduism and reform was directed at the rituals and practices of the Brahmanical order.

As the freedom movement gaining momentum, the reform got neglected but revivalism continued apace given its political utility in rallying the masses against the British. Even that was

soon intercepted by Gandhi, who not only captured the leadership of the national movement from the Hindu elite but found newer and liberal weapons to fight the colonial power. With the exit of the British, the Hindu movement was further weakened with the absence of the principle enemy necessary for sustenance. And the events that followed the partition represented the last hurrah of the Hindu movement. Or, at least, it was assumed so.

Looking back, one can say that the process of development of Hindu political consciousness only stood suspended. For it was a historical process — similar to the kind that led to the formation of Pakistan — which had to be completed. After all, the majority do construe it to be the basis of an Indian identity.

Though restive occasionally, the Hindu political consciousness remained dormant as long as traditional Hindu society tolerated the modern ideas of liberalism and secularism. And it did so not because it understood and accepted those ideas but because society chafed under the spell of Nehruvian charisma and Mrs. Gandhi leadership during her early phase at the helm. By the mid-seventies, both were on the wane and in the vacuum that ensued, the Hindutva began to gain a foothold. Mrs. Gandhi fuelled the process by actively courting this new revivalism. It would not be an exaggeration to say that she methodically created conditions that acted as a catalyst for the growth of Hindutva.

What we are witnessing, therefore, is a relapse of a process of Hindu political awareness that was artificially thwarted by the imposition of modern structures over a people yet to evolve as a nation — a prerequisite of political modernisation

Though, by the logic of history, the 'Hindu raj' may come into being, there are two important factors that may intercept or, possibly, correct the course. One of them lies within the Hindu fold and the other, outside. The latter concerns the likely rise of Muslim political consciousness as a reaction to the Ayodhya controversy. No matter which way the Mandir-Masjid issue is resolved, or not resolved, it is possible that Muslims will emerge politicised in a manner that is uncharacteristic of the community. Since independence, barring those in Kerala and Kashmir, the Muslims along with the Christians have been the most political communities among the minorities. Muslim communalism was strictly related to their religion, while their political participation was confined to

voting for any party that seemed secular at that given point of time.

If as an apolitical community, the Muslims were the objects of Hindu distrust and aggression, it is not difficult to apprehend the turn the state of the nation will take if the Muslims charge into the mainstream of political competition. This process would also entail a greater awareness of their rights and the consequent awakening to the fact that they, as a community, are among the poorest and most backward, with no constitutional patronage worth the name. That the discrepancy between expectation and capabilities leads to aggression is an acknowledged principle of political sociology.

The factor within the Hindu fold is a paradox. Like the British in the pre-Independence era, the Muslims only serve as a negative target of Hindu consciousness so as to marginalise the contradictions of the Hindu social order and at the same time maintain the social and political status quo, which is the actual object of Hindutva. The economic and political mobility of lower castes is one of the factors that stirred the upper castes to resurrect the question of Hindu identity during the early eighties. In other words, for Hindutva to succeed it has to accomplish the twin and contradictory tasks of uniting the country's majority under the Hindu banner and also ensure that majority among them accept their place in the social and political hierarchy prescribed by the pristine Brahminical religion which has been corrupted by over five centuries of alien rule and ideas.

It is this schemes of things that the Mandal recommendations, flawed they may be in many respects, is capable of upsetting. Whether the Hindu identity will submerge caste identity or vice versa will depend on which is a better agent of politicisation: caste or religion. In other words, India today has the paradoxical choice of choosing between caste, which has a secularising impact, the *Hindutva* which can lead the nation to an unknown destiny.

Courtesy: Sunday Observer

GRAPES OF RATH

Who Lives If India Dies?

By A. K. Roy

The real destination of Mr. L. K. Advani's journey was Delhi and not Ayodhya. So his arrest might have been unfortunate, but it was inevitable and was forced on a reluctant Government which had exhausted all efforts to ensure that one of its allies respected the law court. The withdrawal of support in retaliation brought into focus the element of blackmail if not that of hitting below the belt and was not quite in keeping with the spirit of certain episodes in the Ramayana. The political fall-out of the arrest is not quite measurable at present, but the Bharat Bandh and the varying degrees of casualties indicate its menacing potentialities. However, one casualty is certain, that is the poor Central Government.

India is a land of Rama and many religions. Each sect has a religion of its own and a god of its choice. Article 25 of the Constitution takes special care of that in spite of Article 44 of the Directive principles emphasizing the country's march towards a uniform civil code. There is hardly any room for controversy if Rama's rath goes anywhere. This is so for all religions. But the problem arises if politicians start moving in Rama's rath replacing Rama, and politics is mixed with religion and that too with an election symbol.

STATUS QUO

Religion and politics are like water and oil. Though useful in their own spheres — water to quench and cool, and oil to ignite and drive — the mixture, an emulsion, is always wasteful and detrimental. It is not the job of the political parties to build temples and of the government or the court to remain busy with that. It is the job of the people and the religious leaders. When there is any difference in the matter, as with the Rama mandir - Babri Masjid complex, the religious leaders of both communities should discuss the controversy and come to some consensus. The status quo should be maintained by the Government till then and accepted by all.

This is the usual practice. Why should there be an exception? There were several appeals from several quarters, but without effect. The country slid towards the doomsday of October 30 as if it was preordained. Everybody was asking: What would happen on that day?

In Dhanbad we saw Mr. Advani in his petrol-driven rath and the devoted people flocked to see Lord Rama in it. I can understand Lakshman, Sita, Hanuman, etc. in a rath but why should Advanijibe there and that, too, with the lotus? Does that fit in any definition of secularism or the code of the Election Commission by which he was sworn, being a member of Parliament? I wonder what would have been the reaction of Mr. Biju Patnaik rode the Jagannath Rath at Puri flaunting the chakra, or Comrade Jyoti Basu the Tarakeshwar Rath decorated with the hammer, sickle and star.

But the basic question arises: What is the object of the BJP leaders? How do they gain, whether in the short or the long term, by being instrumental in the fall of a government which was almost falling under its own weight? At least one thing is certain: if Mr. V. P. Singh goes, Mr. Advani will not come, but Mr. Rajiv Gandhi will return. Does the BJP find Mr. Rajiv Gandhi preferable to Mr. V. P. Singh? Is Mr. Advani playing the role of the late Raj Narain, only replacing Charan Singh by Rama? If so, it would be a definite disservice to the image of Lord Rama.

There is also speculation which can only be cleared by the BJP leaders that the BJP is facing an identity crises on the reservation issue after implementation of the Mandal Commission report,

being bracketed with Congress (I) as the party of the upper castes. Is it a desperate move to fight caste feeling by whipping up religious sentiments, as there are already posters of the VHP accusing the Mandal Commission of dividing Hindus?

The proximity in class composition and political approach suggest a natural unity between anti-reservationists and communalists, the Congress (I) and the BJP, and the only stable government the present Parliament can offer is a Congress (I) - BJP coalition of the former's 195 and the latter's 86 M. P.'s with Mr. Rajiv Gandhi as Prime Minister and Mr. Advani as Deputy Prime Minister.

But the question still remains: what was the immediate cause or urgency to bring the matter to a breaking point? In no Hindu scripture is October 30 described as the most sacred day for constructing a temple and the heavens would not have fallen if some more time was given as requested by the Government and many others to defuse the situation. One can understand the accommodation problem of ordinary people. This time the M.P.s faced an accommodation problem as their defeated colleagues did not vacate theirs for which a housing committee has been formed to go into the matter.

But now the nation is astonished to know that Rama is facing an accommodation problem. Where is the kingdom of heaven? It is in the hearts of the people. Lord Rama lived for thousands of years in the hearts of the people, and there was no indication that he had suddenly become impatient for an exclusive temple of his own and that, too, at a particular place and particular time. The National Front's election manifesto contains many laudable time-bound programmes of possible and impossible things, but the construction of a Rama mandir does not figure in it.

There is always some dispute about the real meaning of secularism even 40 years after the Constitution of a secular India was promulgated. While the Oxford dictionary meaning of secularism suggests separation of religion from public life and its confinement for personal salvation, the Indian meaning of secularism is equal treatment to all religion. Now, however, the real meaning of secularism has become: let hundred religions bloom and quarrel and the state should take the role of a referee.

IQBAL'S HINDUSTAN

According to the BJP, to be secular is to become a Hindu as Hindu means Indian and Hinduism itself is a secular religion distinguishing it from all other man-made religions, though they too are great in their own spheres. So to become a progressive does not mean one should be anti-Hindu. Hindu and Hindustan are synonymous with Indian and India. So the great poet, Iqbal, sang praising this land and calling it Hindustan before supporting Pakistan, and Karl Marx in his famous treatise on India always called Indian Hindus.

Even Indian Muslims are known as Hindus in the Arab world when they go on pilgrimage. So Rama is the idol of all Hindus, meaning thereby of all Indians, and not of one particular faith. If that is so, in building Rama's temple the feeling of all the faith is to be taken into consideration and hurting the feeling of any sect will amount to hurting the image of Rama.

Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee once said we should take care that while constructing the temple of Rama, the temple of India was not destroyed. But did he not to some extent destroy exactly that when marching for the construction of the Rama mandir and by calling on the faithful to offer kar seva and damage the mandir-masjid complex at Ayodhya, which has been standing there undisturbed for 500 years? Why is he silent on his earlier stand for has he been cornered in the BJP itself? Was the real object of Mr. Advani's adventure to eclipse Mr. Vajpayee and establish himself as the exclusive leader?

But what is most baffling is that even if we return to the traditional definition of Hindus, i.e., followers of the Vedic religion, then the question also arises whether the construction of the Rama mandir by destroying the Babri masjid is the focal point for its elevation. History says that between the Mughals and the British, there remained a hundred years of confusion when the Marathas ruled in the name of Hindus. They annexed even Delhi and Punjab, and the Mughal emperor of Delhi became their subject, which was one of the reasons why the East India Company stopped payments to him after getting the dewani rights over Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The surging Maratha power plundered many things, but we have never come across any incident of destruction of a mosque or its conversion or reconversion into a temple.

SWAMIJI'S GOAL

In modern times, Indian nationalism grew out of the womb of the Hindu reformation movement. The greatest representative of Hinduism, whether in India or abroad, was Swami Vivekananda, who travelled all over India — of course on foot and not in a petrol-driven rath — and wrote volumes on the emancipation of the Hindus, giving the clarion call: "Arise, Awake and Stop not, till the goal is reached." But he did not ever specify that goal as Ayodhya or write even one word on the Rama mandir-Babri masjid issue.

If all these great proponents of the Hindu renaissance could carry on without this issue, why not these self-appointed modern guardians? The biggest tragedy of the BJP is that it symbolizes not the Hindu reformation movement represented by Ram Mohun Roy and Vivekananda and bringing enlightenment, but the Hindu orthodoxy of monks and sadhusspreading ignorance, obscurantism and darkness.

The rath has stopped. But the wrath is advancing. It is spreading everywhere. This is a matter of concern for all. According to Marx, religion is the opium of the people. Had Marx lived in India, he would have attributed a more positive role to it after observing its intoxicating effect. Perhaps religion alone in its traditional feudal casing is opium, but religion mixed with politics in a capitalist system is a wine. This is fundamentalism; it has a maddening effect on all parts of India and all religions as class struggle has stopped and the concept of socialism has receded to the back seat although it alone can sustain the concept of secularism.

The Ramayana depicts the route of Rama as always full of joy and bliss: People danced in happiness. Even nature assumed a festive look. Flowers tossed their heads. But when this political Rama marched in his petrol-driven imported rath, the CRP and BSF had to be called to maintain law and order. It is unfortunate that when the country is already in the midst of crises on all fronts and virtually under attack in Kashmir, Punjab, Assam, and the people are groaning under the problems of price rise, unemployment and poverty, the outstanding leaders of a party should think it fit to plunge the country into another serious turmoil and that,

too, in the name of a Hindu cause, although Hindus will be the worst loser even with a hundred temples around if the country collapses.

All this recalls George Bernard Shaw's words: "Beware of the person whose God lies in the sky". Perhaps in the present context, this should be slightly modified: "Beware of the people whose Rama lies in the temple".

Courtesy: The Statesman

HOSTAGES TO INDIA?

Rise of Majority Consciousness

by Sunanda K. Datta-Ray

Whoever remarked that destruction of the Babri masjid would mean that no mosque will ever be tolerated in India simplified the choice that lies ahead. What is at stake is not just the survival of places of particular worship by the character of the Indian state and the status of a community of some 120 million people.

Though not explicitly acknowledged, this is the crux of the conundrum at the level of public perception. The real controversy is not religious. Nor is it political except to the extent that all parties have tried to gain mileage from it. The Constitution's clauses on secularism and equality are also irrelevant. They can have no sanctity beyond what is acceptable to the sovereign people. Constitution are made for men, men are not made for constitutions.

While the Bharatiya Janata Party's seeming ascendancy may have exacerbated the problem, it is by no means the only factor. Certain urges have been building up for many years, encouraged by events at home and abroad and strengthened by TV serials. But it does not follow that the BJP as a party has benefited sufficiently from popular trends to improve on its present parliamentary position. Even if it again attracts 11.4 percent of the vote, it will not win 86 seats without the help of adjustments with the Janata Dal.

The vast throngs that took part in the shilanyas ceremonies, applauded Lal Krishna Advani's rathayatra and stormed the Babri masjid, as well as rioted in many places last week, were responding to a call that is not exclusive to any one party. The "integral humanism" that the BJP claims to preach need not conflict with voting for the Congress (I) or Janata Dal. At least one Congress (I) legislator is known to have supported the kar seva call; many other Congressmen probably viewed the event with sympathy.

DELAYED REVOLT

Indeed, the BJP's achievement — if such it can be called — lies in the fact that it has been something of a catalyst for a change in attitude. But it is not quite accurate to describe the result as the "Hindu backlash" which indicates the delayed revolt of a long-suffering group which finally decides that it will no longer be sat upon. Not everyone will agree that India's 700 million Hindus fit that description. But just as Ram's birthplace is more significant as an article of faith than a matter of fact, the Hindu's sense of injustice may carry greater weightage in shaping the future than any proven discrimination against the majority.

Perhaps the reaction would have been less sharp if unemployment had not been so high, if prices were not soaring and the administration paralysed by a combination of total indifference and rampant corruption. This debilitation cannot be pinned just on the present Government at the Centre. It is the result of a long process of decay reflecting callousness and avarice that cut across all political labels in a ramshackle get-rich-quick society.

Nothing could expose the bankruptcy of the Indian system more starkly, for instance, than the fact that the sons of so many of our most important politicians, civil servants, judges and business, executives vote with their feet in respect of India. It is even more damning that those bright young men who have not yet fled to the West and who succeed in their UPSC examination are nowadays said to prefer the Customs and Excise to any other service.

HINDU CULTURE

It is usual to look for scapegoats when society is thus demoralized, economic hardship underlined by gross opulence at the other end of the scale and compounded by political instability and a breakdown of law and order. But it would be idle to pretend that only the deprived are now questioning the status quo. The point that Mr. Advani makes, that India's is "essentially a Hindu culture", can be heard, perhaps less bluntly phrased, in drawing rooms all along the Gangetic belt. It is endorsed by many upper middle class Indians who would not dream of voting for the BJP and who have no time, in their own lives, for the rituals or the stridency that are associated with revivalist organisations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

The opinion most commonly expressed in these otherwise urbane circles is that even if Ram was not born in Ayodhya, even if he did not ever exist, democracy demands that the minority respect the majority's sensibilities in the matter. The masjid should, therefore, be handed over to Hindus. This is only a secular way of reiterating what Atal Behari Vajpayee and Jaswant Singh meant when they said: "The Muslim religious leaders have to appreciate that Ayodhya, the capital of Ram-Rajya, occupies a very special place in the Hindu mind and the urge for a Shri Ram temple at the site believed to be his birthplace is a transcendental urge."

One reason, perhaps, why a formal commitment to secularism has not dampened religious ardour is the fact that the Constitution does not discourage religion. It promotes all religions, thereby encouraging militancy and the likelihood of conflict.

The majority community feels especially virtuous in staking out its position. Its old grumble is that Muslims were provided with a place of their own in 1947. That is buttressed by new arguments about the elimination of Hindus in Pakistan, the current violence in Bangladesh, Kashmiri secessionism on religious lines, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the alleged ill-treatment of non-Muslim Indian workers in West Asia.

Whatever Syed Shahabuddin or Imam Bukhari may say only compounds the damage, prompting the comment that no non-

Muslim leader would ever be allowed to speak with equal authority in any Islamic country. Others besides Mr. Advani insist that India is officially secular only because the majority is Hindu. Others, apart from Bal Raj Modhak, argue that Bangladeshi Hindus need special protection. Politicians of all brands identify the north-east's separatist tendencies with the Christianity that is professed there.

South India may be excluded from such bigoted thinking. So may place where the political Left is dominant. But it would be unrealistic not to acknowledge that this still leaves out large segments of educated Hindus who are not at all communal in the sense of disliking Muslims or wishing to do them injury, but who are nevertheless convinced that the rights and claims of the majority must be accorded precedence.

If this trend is allowed to continue, a time may come when people will demand priority for the majority in all matters — admission to school or college, jobs, and distribution, business sanction, perhaps even bus travel or railway reservation. A not dissimilar situation used to obtain in erstwhile East Pakistan. The logical conclusion of such a policy of distinguishing and separating minority communities is too horrible to contemplate.

Whether India wants to follow suit is for the great Indian public to decide. But communal equality admits of no half-way house. Nor does quality guarantee harmony if equality itself is seen as a denial of the majority's prerogatives. The warning must also be sounded that society cannot split in one direction without fracturing in others too. Disintegration along religious lines can only give a further fillip to divisive ethnic, linguistic and regional forces. The republic may not fall to pieces, but internal pressures will intensify, exerting mounting strain on cohesiveness.

FEDERAL SYSTEM

The problem is not new; nor the solutions suggested. E.M.S. Namboodiripad's recent five-point programme to cope with the contradictions and complexities of a multi-faceted society, for instance, stresses the old but still valid need to evolve "a genuinely federal structure". Decentralization may not immediately appear to have a bearing on majority assertiveness; but a more flexible

system of governance would allow scope for adjustment at every stage and absorb the clash of local interests so that there is no major confrontation. It might also satisfy smaller minority groups who would otherwise feel emboldened to take advantage of a rift between India's two principal religions.

But, of course, no amount of structural revision will help if the feeling is allowed to grow that Muslims are not integral to Indian society, that they are here on sufferance, hostages for their own accommodation as well as for good conduct in Islamabad and Dhaka. There are too many minority groups too strategically scattered across the land for India ever to reflect only the majority's culture.

Courtesy: Sunday Statesman

WHIPPING UP A FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

This is the BJP's gameplan to achieve a
Hindu Rashtra

by Manini Chatterjee

It is indeed ironic that while Lal Krishna Advani, having launched the “biggest mass movement” in post-Independence history, unambiguously states that the Ram Janmabhoomi/Babri Masjid dispute is a political issue, every other party seems to be suddenly treating it as a religious one. The Chandra Shekhar government, its, Congress (I) supporters and even the Opposition Janata Dal are all now ready for solution if both contending parties — that is, the Muslim and Hindu religious leaders — agree. The Rajiv Gandhi formula, which the ruling party has welcomes, has formed the basis of the new solution. The crux of this solution is that if it can be historically and archaeologically proved that a temple stood where the Babri Masjid now stands and it was demolished to build the masjid in AD 1528, the site should be handed over to the Hindus. The last round of direct talks between the Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leaders revolved around this issue and both sides are busy collecting evidence to prove or disprove that a Hindu structure had existed when Babar’s general, Mir Baqi, descended on the site in the early 16th century. The whole debate has now

shifted to this plane with archaeologists, academics and historians in the fray, arguing in various voices about the evidence so far unearthed — was it a Buddhist shrine, was it a Hindu mandir, was it bits of a palace, was it built in the 11th century AD, can it be traced back to antiquity? And, tragically, as people miss the wood for the trees or, rather, the principles for the pillars, the dangerous political dimensions of the whole Ram Janmabhoomi campaign is being ignored much to glee of the BJP/RSS/VHP combine.

To realise the real danger of converting the Ram Janmabhoomi dispute into a religious rather than a political issue, it is necessary to understand the motives, methods and goals of the RSS which is controlling the movement. The battle for them is not just one between Hindus and Muslims but an assault on the modern, democratic, secular Indian state that was adopted by the country on gaining independence in 1947. The Ram Janmabhoomi campaign is only a symbolic battle and not the end in itself. The real goal of the BJP is to set up a Hindu Rashtra by whipping up a totally false consciousness among the majority community that they are second-class citizens in a “pseudo-secular” state. The symbol of the Ram mandir, rising above the ruins of a masjid built by Muslim “invaders” is being used to spread and strengthen this false consciousness. Instead of attacking this, other political parties are in the danger of succumbing to this campaign by first accepting that it is only a Hindu-Muslim question and, secondly, agreeing to the premise that if a temple had been demolished to build a masjid, the modern Indian state should help avenge this medieval wrong.

The success of the RSS-BJP’s Hindutva campaign cannot be gauged by the crowds drawn by Mr. Advani’s rathayatra or the saffron flags planted atop the Babri Masjid on October 30 but the ripidity with which they have been able to inculcate the false consciousness among middle-class, urban, otherwise secular Indians and the growing inroads this false understanding is making in rural India as well. The basic facets of this false consciousness are: India is an ancient country belonging solely to the Hindus which has faced repeated invasions by foreigners; the post-1947 Independent India has not given the Hindus pride of place in the country: Hindus in present-day India cannot be proud of being Hindus and are treated as second-class citizens; the Indian political establishment has pandered to the minorities, particularly the Muslims at the cost of the Hindus; Hindus are the most if not the

only partiotic people in the country while the nationalism of other communities are suspect; India can achieve greatness if the Hindus transcend class, caste, regional, ethnic and linguistic differences and rise up as one community and force all minorities to accept their culture. Nowhere is the Hindu defined and the socio-economic-political nature of the Hindu Rashtra remains equally vague. The Ram Janmabhoomi campaign provides an ideal symbol to spread the above tenets because it involves a nationwide revered Hindu god, a mosque built by a Mughal invader, and political parties who have so far refused to remove the mosque to build a temple instead. The refusal of the Indian state to allow the demolition of a mosque and place "faith" above law is being interpreted as pandering to the Muslims and insult to the Hindus and this lone example is being projected as the overall policy of the Indian state against a monolithic "majority community."

Even a cursory study of post-Independence India would show that almost all the allegations made by the RSS are false and even where some truth exists, it has been distorted to suit their political purpose. The first question is whether India is an ancient country belonging only to the Hindus. While India can be justly proud of being one of the most ancient countries with the world's oldest living religion, the essence of India is its diverse cultural, religious, ethnic facets. The nature of Hinduism itself — a polytheistic, rich and varied set of beliefs with its myriad rituals on the one hand and abstruse metaphysics on the other — does not allow for a monolithic political interpretation espousing the cause of the "Hindus." This apart, the India of today owes as much to the successive "invaders" from ancient times who came to conquer and stayed on to enrich the land they made their own.

The second argument of the RSS is that Hindus have not been given pride of place and are treated as second-class citizens. Hindus cannot be proud of being Hindus, they claim. They cannot, however, give any instance of Hindus being denied education or employment or any of the benefits accruing from the state apparatus. While it is true that discrimination exists in Indian society, nowhere are Hindus at the receiving end of this discrimination solely because of their religion. Where such discrimination exists, it is because of the caste or class to which they belong — categories which are ignored by the RSS in its all-embracing view of Hindus as a monolithic entity. The allegation that Hindus cannot be

proud of being Hindus is also untrue and there is no case of any government deliberately harming Hindu religious sentiments. For example, the periodic Kumbh Melas are the world's largest congregation of human beings and successive governments provide all the civic facilities to the millions who throng this mela. Apart from the Kumbh Mela, hundreds of religious fairs take place throughout the country with no restrictions put on them. Bengalis forget everything as they celebrate Durga Puja for four days each year while their brethren in Maharashtra turn festive during Ganesh Chaturthi: the Gujaratis have their Navratri, the Keralites their Onam and all of India its Holi and Diwali. Men and women chant their prayers every morning, worship in front of their deities at home or go to temples, ashrams and gurus without any interference from the state or society. Even new versions of an old religion have the freedom to flourish in India while they face hostile governments abroad. The Iskcon movement builds temples, Bhagwan Rajneesh and other assorted sants, Babas, gurus, open ashrams where the people flock for spiritual support to sustain their struggle through a difficult world. No government now or before has stopped all this. And so, to allege that Hindus are second-class citizens or Hindus cannot practise and be proud of their religion are blatant falsehoods which have no basis in reality.

The third implicit claim that only Hindus are true patriots and the minorities are outsiders because they are the progeny of invaders is also entirely baseless. Patriotism, stripped of rhetoric, is what a citizen does for his country. Any citizen who lives and dies in this country and works and spends his earnings in this country needs no certificate from politicians or religious heads about his patriotic credentials. Is the upper caste Hindu who gets the best deal possible from our system and then emigrates to the West more patriotic than the landless Muslim agricultural labourer in Bihar or the Christian fisherman in coastal Kerala, both of whom invest all their labour birth? Will any Indian want to forsake his heritage which includes the rich contributions made by outsiders who made this their homeland? In as ancient a country as India everyone's ancestors has been at one time or another an outsider with no electoral cut-off dates to determine whether the Hindu of the Hindi heartland is more ancient than his counterparts elsewhere. Even the BJP talks of planting its saffron flag on top of the symbol of power, Delhi's Red Fort — a structure which was built by

invader Babar's direct progeny. Would the Hindutva votaries who attack "Babar ke aulad" as outsiders polluting the purity of Hindu India be willing to give up the Taj Mahal?

When the RSS/BJP/VHP combine cannot find answers to these basic questions, they resort to their most effective campaign ploy — that all political parties pander to the minorities because of the considerations of a votebank and secularism in reality is only minorityism. This charge has evoked the maximum response among the middle-class Hindus because there are some instances to prove this charge. The governments reversal on the Shah Bano case by bringing in the Muslim Personal Law Bill is the most significant weapon in their armoury. The banning of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, the continuance of Article 370 in Kashmir and the setting up of a Minorities Commission are other instances of "pandering to minorities." The truth is that the Indian state has done nothing to favour the Muslims in terms of jobs or education. Large sections of this minority community continue to be among the most deprived and discriminated against in the country. The political parties have however tried to stall the fears of the Muslim leadership that their identity would be submerged in a predominantly Hindu country. Thus the "pandering" has been to preserve their identity and not in any positive discrimination for their socio-economic upliftment. This flawed policy has allowed the Muslim leadership, particularly the fundamentalists in their ranks a stranglehold over their community's interest with mainstream political parties preferring to deal with these fundamentalist leaders regarding "identity" rather than with the Muslims themselves about jobs, education and equal opportunities in a civil society.

Over the years, political parties have not taken genuine measures to improve the lot of the minorities but paid lip service to their cause by token gestures such as declaring Prophet Mohammad's birthday a national holiday or declaring Urdu a second language in UP on the eve of elections. These token gestures have not helped the Muslims but only provided propaganda ploys to the Hindu fundamentalists who can claim that Muslims are being pandered to at the cost of the Hindus.

Unfortunately, political parties in India have not launched a campaign to defeat the BJP's attempts at building a false consciousness about the status of Hindus in India. Instead, they have

helped the BJP by willy nilly interpreting secularism to mean the defence of minorities. While the defence of minorities is an important aspect of Indian secularism, the concept is much more than just that. Secularism is an essential part of democracy where the state does not interfere in the religious beliefs of its citizens. Secularism is also an essential component of justice and liberty. The rule of the land and the sanctity of the Constitution has to be upheld over the conflicting beliefs of contending communities.

The Ram Janmabhoomi/Babri Masjid dispute is thus not a Hindu-Muslim issue alone but one between the modern nation state and those who want to dismantle it. If Indians accept that the "wrongs" of history can be set right centuries later, there can be no end to "revenge." Any organisation which can manage enough muscle, money and men can make demands on the state on the basis of its beliefs and defy the laws and the Constitution. Even if no more mosques are demolished, it would still be a big victory for the Hindu fundamentalists who would have proved that the organised might of a group of people can bring the whole nation to its knees. The Ram Janmabhoomi campaign is equally dangerous for the future of Hinduism as well since it tries to impose an intolerant, monotheistic, monolithic outlook into the world's least dogmatic religion. It is therefore essential for political parties and the people at large to understand the true nature of the RSS/BJP campaign and counter its efforts in that direction. There are hundreds of temples in India and no one objects to a temple dedicated to Lord Ram in Ayodhya. But to allow the BJP to determine where exactly Ram was born only so that they can demolish a mosque is to hand over both the Hindu religion and the Indian republic for them to destroy.

Courtesy: The Telegraph

FROM RAM TO BABAR AND BEYOND

by Dunu Roy

The ninth general elections are over and a somewhat shaky government has come into power on what has been (predictably) called an "anti-Congress wave". Leaving aside, for the moment, the statistical questions of how many seats the Congress-I lost and what was the percentage shift in votes, one fact stands out starkly: the BJP has increased its presence in Parliament from two to 86 seats and has become a considerable force to reckon with. Most observers agree that the BJP has managed this feat on communal basis. So the new government, however well-meaning, is still left with a legacy of communalisation which it will have to sort out. What magic wand will it wave to cool down passions and prevent two communities from killing each other?

"History" is being summoned as a witness by both the contending parties, and scholarly historians find that neither has any foundations in recorded history. So, clearly, the Babari Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi dispute is not a historical question. It is a political one.

But what is the political answer?

For instance, if historians were to publicly put forward the facts their research have unearthed — that is, there is no archaeological, scriptural, textual, or historical evidence available to show

either that Ram was born at Ram Janmabhoomi or that the Babri Masjid is very ancient and important, would it make any difference to the opposing parties? Probably not. Because, the scholars in question may have academic authority they have no social, scriptural, political or even moral authority. Consequently, they are no match for the *sadhus*, *maulvis* and politicians arrayed against them.

Or, is it possible for a *rational* world-view to prevail in which an appeal is made for a rational understanding of the world. And men and women are shown that only on a purely materialist basis can the world be comprehended and transformed. Such a view would, however, have to combat the enormous force of religion - any and every religion — any and every religion. Given the fact that faith has very strong emotive and philosophical roots within the working people, it is unlikely that call for an essentially atheistic conception would evoke much response.

The other perspective could be to hold up a model of *modern secular democracy* and mobilise politically around it. Would such an approach work? To answer that it is necessary to examine the model itself and the nature of its mass appeal. The argument posed for affirming the “modernisation” model is that it formed the basis of the change from a colonial form to a national republican form of government. Now that its political system has been degraded steadily over the years, it is necessary to reassert it. But surely the question should be posed as to why the political system was degraded in the last 40 years? Why is a state that was intervening in the communalism in the years immediately, after partition, now acting as a party to communal violence of silently assenting to it? How is it that even medieaval Babar could afford to be tolerant of the “infidels” while the present modern political party finds it necessary to talk in non-secular terms? Perhaps the answers to these do not lie in the domain of politics alone. The roots must be sought in political economy.

A simple proposition may be put forward, as follows: the thrust of the modern secular democratic approach adopted in the fifties has made communalism almost inevitable in the eighties. To explain further: “modernism” was accepted as the direction in which the economy must move; but modernism had certain specific features to it. The three principal features were:

- (a) The encouragement of economic development for private profit
- (b) The growth of an infrastructure at public cost, but for supporting private profit: and
- (c) The creation of an extensive market and a labour pool to make production for profit possible.

All this, therefore, demanded in the beginning a secular democratic political structure primarily because of the way in which the movement for national independence sought to offer hope to the masses of a release from feudal and colonial bondage.

There are, however, two major contradictions between the political drive for modernisation (geared towards private profit) and a truly secular and democratic structure.

Firstly, an underdeveloped (and non-modernised) society can develop the basis for private profit only through the exploitation of a vast mass of producers. In other words, the rich get richer and the poor become poorer. Thus, such a society cannot promote egalitarianism — the first basis for democratic functioning. Consequently, the rulers must be able to keep inventing new techniques to stay in power. And the basis for all these techniques has to be to maintain a facade of democracy to conceal a non-democratic political structure.

Secondly, the political structure that promotes modernisation (in the sense of being able to make a profit out of any enterprise), must fall eventually before its own creation. Thus the political system itself become an “enterprise”, a business out of which profits can be made. It begins to follow that rules of any business enterprise in terms of the capital to be invested (in getting elected) and the rate of return (from commissions, payoffs, and grants). Such a system can, therefore, neither remain secular nor democratic. It will adopt any technique (anti-social, immoral, or even evil by it’s own stated values) in order to optimise the rate of return.

To sum up, the political system adopted for modernisation falls victim to it’s own profit-making thrust, and in order to maintain its political hegemony, the ruling class eventually promotes neither secularism nor democracy. Consequently, it has to

take recourse to greater and greater degrees of violence, repression, and crime to control an increasingly restive and dissatisfied working population. Which, in turn, further sharpens the contradiction.

To resolve, these contradictions the most commonly held argument is that of *further* modernisation. In other words, if the economic base is made secure, then the possibility of a modern secular democracy emerging is also easier. If there is enough produced and enough distributed then both profits as well as some form of social and political equality may be ensured. However, this is an argument which has no answer to the problem of how to move rapidly from a "backward" to "modern" economy. The recent mega-issues on the share market may indicate that capitalism has reached a take-off point in India, but from "taking off" to a relatively *distributed* "affluence" in the absence of a colonised world market, is a long way indeed.

There may, therefore, be much to argue in favour of an alternative viewpoint for resolving the contradictions. For instance if we are to consider the aspect of a "secular" society, then it should be important to note that it is not merely associated with "modernism" but there is evidence of harmonious social life in pre-modern societies. The very fact that communal violence has to be "instigated" today should indicate that it had little or no importance in the traditional every day existence, particularly of the working people. So it should be an important area of investigation to understand *how traditional communities have maintained a certain "secular" way of life.*

This traditional harmony (between castes and communities), rooted in diverse forms of production and production relations, is not something merely to be revived — in short, we do not plead here for a preservation of the past. But it has to be joined to a conception of the future society. In other words there is an alternative conception to "modernism" itself. A modern society which has both a different economic base as well as a secular, democratic structure built on that base. It may not be very clear what this alternative notion is. But that is precisely where the challenge lies for both academics as well as political activists. Some of the indications are already emerging from the environments, gender, and labour struggles in different places. How may one build these indications into a cogent and appealing praxis?

Let us attempt to first look at some of the fundamental features of the present economic system so that it may lead to a tentative understanding of what could be an alternative system. Some statistics culled from recent newspaper reports reveal what the central thrust of the system is. For instance, the external debt of the nation at present stands at a little over Rs. 90,000 crores. This would mean that every man, woman and child of the country owes over Rs. 1000 to some foreign financier! But this money was obviously taken at some time for investment purposes; where did it all go. An interesting indication is that in the two months prior to the elections almost Rs. 4000 crores worth of shares were offered on the stock market and snapped up on the day of issue itself. Some were heavily over subscribed. So obviously that kind of money exists as a saving or surplus with a body of private Indian investors. Even more curious is that behaviour of State investment. For instance, it is reported that Rs. 500 crores were spent on "celebrating" the Nehru centenary; while the Congress-I alone is said to have invested Rs. 70 crores on its electoral campaign. Doordarshan spent Rs. two crores on covering the elections, of which Rs. 16 lakhs were given to the psephologist team for three days of electoral reporting and analysis on television. If one puts these figures together it is transparently clear that *public* investment is almost surely filtering into a few *private* pockets. This is a strange variant of trickle-down theory!

From this, one can draw the conclusion that an *alternative* structure would have to engineer a system in which *public investment is for public betterment.... How may this be achieved?*

In conceptual terms it would mean four interrelated systems would have to be designed for:

- (1) The production of useful goods;
- (2) The distribution of these goods for consumption;
- (3) The collection of the surplus from the revenues; and
- (4) The reinvestment of the surplus for further production; and all for the purpose of public (or social) benefit.

This "benefit" itself may be defined in terms of:

- (a) Full employment;
- (b) Full growth of human potential;

- (c) Satisfaction of basic needs;
- (d) Preservation of a harmonious environment;
- (e) Provision of creative time; and
- (f) Provision of leisure time; for ALL human beings.

What all the above really boils down to is that a social management system has to come into existence which will attempt to resolve in a creative manner the various conflicts that exist in any society. The general tendency is to try and spell out these style of management either in the context of "modernisation" (what the new political economy is supposed to led to) or in the context of "fundamentalism" (what the older society was all about". The alternative view point sought to be discussed here is to learn how the working people have developed certain management systems born out of their own experience, and how these experiences may be generalised into a code that will assist in the reconstruction of a secular, democratic, and creative society.

It may be worthwhile to begin with some examples of people's creative responses to a communal (conflict) situation. For instance, in Amlai town of eastern Madhya Pradesh, the organised workers of a caustic soda plant had gone on strike to press for higher wages and bonus. The management attempted to break the strike by instigating tensions between the 'outside' permanent workers, the 'local' contract workers, and the other religious communities in the nearby villages and collieries. The Joint Action Committee of the three unions (including the BMS, an affiliate of the BJP) discussed the tensions and responded with a torchlight procession through the entire area, ending in a public meeting. Two issues were highlighted during the exercise: the first was that the unions would protect anyone who was attacked; the second was the entire population, irrespective of race, caste, or creed, was subjected to the common hazards emanating from the plant. The exercise was eminently successful, communal tensions were quickly defused, and the management was forced to negotiate with the unions.

A second example comes from a village in Gujarat. A plot of land was disputed by the two religious communities in a village. The Hindus wanted to build a temple and the Muslim wanted to establish a mosque. Before the tensions could grow, the village

elders met to debate the issue. Eventually they decreed that neither a temple nor a mosque should be built on the disputed plot, but that a teashop should be set up there. The argument put forward for this decision was that a shop would be a place where everybody in the village could gather for a cup of tea and a bit of gossip. Thus amity would be maintained in the village.

The third example is one which by now has become national news. The people of Faizabad, the constituency in which Ayodhya is located, have elected a communist candidate to Parliament, even though he was contesting against a Congress-I candidate supported by the BJP. Some of the people of Ayodhya, when questioned, are reported to have said that they voted for the CPI man, "even though he was godless", because the CPI had clearly taken a stand against the communalism "inspired by people from outside".

Three brief examples like these are totally inadequate to explain (or even illustrate) the creative mechanisms of how people think and act, but at least a hypothesis may be built upon them. A tentative hypothesis may be said to have five interdependent elements which are important ingredients of the people's traditional consciousness:

- (1) The level of information available would appear to be a crucial ingredient.
- (2) The extent of comfort people have about the size, familiarity and kinship relationships of the population involved in the decisions would also appear to be critical.
- (3) There is also the confidence in being able to informally monitor development and changes in the situation.
- (4) In addition, there is the confidence level in being able to formally enforce or correct the decisions taken.
- (5) Finally, there may be a strong element of a means-ends morality — that the methods adopted for resolving the conflicts should not themselves lead to further conflicts.

While obviously much more detailed research and experimentation would need to be done to establish (or challenge) this hypothesis of the secular behaviour of the working people, it may be consolidated somewhat by looking at some of the managerial

issues thrown up by popular movements or activities around the country, centred around other social and economic concerns. Thus, there is the experience of the public latrines that were built in a slum in Bombay by the Municipal Corporation. But the women were reluctant to use the latrines and preferred a vacant plot of waste land at the back of the slum. When questioned about this preference the women pointed to three major factors:

- (a) The plot was protected from outside by the rest of the slum-dwellings;
- (b) By tradition no male was permitted to defecate on that land; and
- (c) On the open space there was the possibility of socially exchanging information and discussing events.

None of these three factors were obtained in the new latrines by the road-side. So, while balancing this against the better sanitation offered by the latrines, the women opted for the vacant space.

The dynamics of this style of decision-making may be further traced in the case of the Sonali tea Plantation of North Bengal. The plantation had been abandoned with a huge debt by the owners and their managers. The workers (and their families), faced with the possibility of no work, eventually decided to manage the plantation themselves. Within a span of two years they managed to restore the plantation to efficient functioning and repaid the earlier debts. The essential decisions they took were:

- (a) to collectively defer their own wages except for essential necessities;
- (b) to nurture the plantation for longterm gains;
- (c) to vest the functions of correction of errant behaviour and disciplining with the collective body of the workers rather than with a managing committee.

Thus the workers were able to effectively manage a large and sick tea plantation. They were, however, unable to prevent the former owners from regaining control in the third year through the High Court.

In more recent times there is the example of the Kamani

Tubes Employees Union struggling to achieve control of the enterprise after family infighting between the owners reduced the Kamani Tubes to a financial mess. The Union eventually managed to wrest control through a Court order on the basis of a detailed working plan to revive the unit which the commercial banks were willing to finance.

According to the latest reports, the Union has been able to achieve production targets well ahead of schedule and to ameliorate many of the economic problems through which the workers had to pass during their long struggle. But it has still not been able to provide full employment to the total workforce. Also, it remains very much a victim of market forces.

The above three examples serve to some extent to bear out the hypothesis advanced earlier. They indicate that groups of people having organised for common good are able to manage their internal and external conflicts within the limits of the knowledge available to them and in the ambience of comfort provided by personal and professional relationships within the groups. These relationships also appear to provide for human considerations normally absent in formal governmental planning processes. And these considerations are often based on the traditions and what may be called *Virasat* (heritage) of the people.

Additionally, these examples serve to illustrate a fundamental difference between a "modern" style of management and, what may be called, "a working people's" style. While the former focusses on the collection and reinvestment of surplus (in other words, of accumulating capital) the latter has a strong tendency towards *the production and distribution of useful goods*. Thus the capital availability constraint that is so crucial in the present mode of the development may be overcome by the innovative organisational ability of working people.

Nevertheless, two further points need to be made. The first, with respect to the size of the group. The very fact that people must feel comfortable within known relationships before they can take up secular and democratic managerial functions marks the limit of the collective effort. Hence, the groups tend to remain small — generally not over a thousand involved individuals. This is borne out by other innovative organisational experiences. For instance, the novel experiments in water management at Sukhomajri, Pani

Panchayat, or Baliraja underline these trends. However, the nature of the environmental issues may be able to provide for larger generalisations, both in terms of linking up with other groups tackling similar issues of water management — such as the anti-Narmada dam organisations — or with groups involved with other correlated environmental issues such as displacement at Baliapal. This only goes to show that an alternative conception of development is struggling to be born.

The other point relates to the increasing participation of women in these organisations. This might seem, on the surface, to flow against the historical experience of the people, in which women have always been subjugated. But this may not be such a truism as it is held to be. The feminist movement, in particular, is researching into clues that the experience of domination being common to both men and women amongst the working people, there may be good social reasons why women in a patriarchal society have preserved a certain militancy born out of the necessity of surviving, for others as well as for oneself. Whatever be the historical reasons, there is no denying that women are beginning to occupy centre-stage in the people's movement. In the Chipko movement, it has been the women left behind in the hills to look after a decaying agriculture. In the Nipani area, it has been the women forced daily to commute from the villages to seek employment in the tobacco factories. During the anti-price rise movement in Bombay it was the housewife who took to the streets. And five years after the gas disaster struck Bhopal it is the women from the *bastis* who retain the strength to fight to the bitter end.

For both the participation in management of large groups as well as of sections hitherto considered to be "powerless" (such as women), availability of information may be a catalytic factor. In this context we have much to learn from novel experiment carried out in Chile when the pro-people Allende Government came into power. At that time a vast majority of the professional managers of the economy had fled the country. In order to promote the massive participation of the people in revitalising the economy, a national computer network was set up with terminals in every production unit. From these terminals anybody could monitor what was happening in different levels of the economy and take decisions regarding their own production or distribution activity. In addition, the computer provided for feedback from the people at a qualita-

tive level., in terms of what they were feeling (a range from happy to sad') which could again be monitored at a national level.

In the few pilot tests that were carried out before the Allende regime fell, the results were described as "extraordinary". we may not be able to develop a computer network all over India, but there would appear to be enormous scope for creatively developing an information collection and distribution system based on the people's experience. There is already an existing repository of experience that gives indications of how linkages may be built up, particularly through the market but with the focus on the production and distribution of useful goods. The Khadi Village Industries structure is, of course, one such primary organisation albeit it survives because of government subsidies. On the other hand, in the last two decades a fairly large network of development agencies and voluntary groups has promoted the sale of handicraft products in urban centres. There is, at least, one experiment of the sale of such products in an organised fashion in the rural hinterland itself. Then there is the incredibly large network of informal sector organisations operating on minimal capital investments (but with substantial profits for the key organisers) which are involved in activities like recirculation of plastic, collection of cloth and paper, supplying daily labour, and processing waste, etc., which provide models of interlinkages between various economic activities. The recent Hindustan Lever strike throws up another such example of planned management when the striking workers produced and marketed Lock-Out soap.

Similarly, information flows also have traditional channels which are extremely effective, particularly when the information is coded in symbols acceptable to the people. A most negative example of this, of course, was the *Ramshila* used to spread the distorted message of Ayodhya. But it has a positive counter-message, too, which is embodied in the fact that the anti-communal slogans of "*mandir-masjid...*" etc. may be found scribbled on walls in very many places by very many people. There are many examples of how word spreads across the land, few of which come to the notice of the organised media. For example, when diesel locomotives were introduced into the Railways, alarm systems were incorporated into the cabs to keep the drivers awake. But once some driver somewhere figured out how to neutralise the alarm system, the message spread rapidly throughout the Indian

RAMA AND BABAR

Hypocrisy of God's Agents

by Subir Ray

One aspect of the Babri masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi controversy is that many think that while Babar was an invader, Rama was a national hero and God incarnate. Can this claim be sustained?

Babar no doubt was an invader, but so were the Aryans. And Rama certainly was an Aryan. If the Babri masjid was built on the alleged ruins of Rama temple, so were many temples built on the ruins of an earlier civilization. Can we by that token treat Dravidians as more national than Aryans?

In the days when conquest brought glory to the king and his kingdom, suppression of an alien culture by the victorious king was considered to be a sacred duty and a privilege. The Aryans did it and so did the Muslims and the Mughals. Islam undoubtedly is an arrogant and intolerant religion. But then which religion is not? The religion that was practised in the days of Ramarajya was aryadharma and not Hinduism. And aryadharma was no less arrogant.

It is true that because of absence of a strong central ideology, the loosely structured aryadharma slowly merged and mingled with many regional customs and beliefs in varying degrees from time to time, but at the same time a large section of non-Aryans

was kept on the fringes of society as Sudras, Bratyas or untouchables living a life of subjugation and humiliation. Hinduism, which cannot in the true sense of the term be called a religion, has retained that feature of aryadharm through an elaborate hierarchical social stratification at the bottom of which live the untouchables.

POETIC GENIUS

Apart from the Ramayana, we have no record or historical evidence to prove the existence of Rama or Ramarajya. Valmiki was no court poet, and Ramayana is no paean of praise for any king. It is one of the finest and greatest of epics, a human drama unfolding the tragic consequences of inscrutable divine designs and unpredictable human failures. It is indeed a great tribute to the poetic genius of Valmiki that Rama came to be held in such reverence through the ages by the largest community in this subcontinent who believed that Rama and Ramarajya really existed and that Rama was God incarnate.

In its reach and spread and in its deep and stirring emotional and intellectual appeal, the Ramayana has no parallel as an epic in the history of mankind. No other epic has created such a pervasive mental milieu encompassing people in all walks of life, irrespective of their social status or levels of education. It was not Rama or Ramarajya as such, but the Ramayana that has become part of our rich heritage. It is for this reason that while that Ramayana has been the poet's delight and inspiration, the thinker's food for thought and the common man's most popular source of entertainment and enlightenment, Rama was only what Valmiki wanted him to be, and not a real historical person. Rabindranath Tagore very rightly said that Rama's birthplace was not in Ayodhya but in the poetic vision of Valmiki.

In contrast, Babar was one of our great historical personalities. He came here as an invader but made this country his home. He founded the Mughal empire, which richly contributed to India's social, cultural and economic evolution. We may have reservations about Islam as a religion, but it is undeniable that it had a significant and positive impact on our society. The Islamic message of universal brotherhood had certainly something to do with the rise of Sikhism and the first Bengal renaissance ushered

in by Sri Chaitanya. Babar too carried that message and unlike Rama, he stands in his own right in the history of our country.

Let us now turn to the character of Rama and Ramarajya. What kind of dharma was there where Kaikeyi, in spite of having committed a grievous wrong, was not punished by the people, while Sita who committed no sin, had to suffer humiliation on the demand of the same people?

What kind of dharma was there where the king's promise to his wife had more sanctity than the interest of the country which by all accounts would have been best served if Rama had ascended the throne? What kind of dharma was there where the people did not raise their voice against, such a wrong being done? Was it considered a bigger sin on the part of Dasaratha to break his promise to his wife than to banish Ram from the kingdom although he was not a party to that promise and had not done any wrong to anyone at that time?

Was the kingdom the personal property of Dasarath and did the people have no right to demand justice when justice was denied? What principles of justice rules that holy ramarajya where it was not at all considered a sin on the part of the king to deprive his son of his rightful place in the kingdom but it was considered a grave sin for Rama to disobey his father? What kind of moral rules were there that prevented Dasarath from facing the consequences of a broken promise instead of accepting the sacrifice from Rama?

UNKIND HUSBAND

And what kind of person was Rama himself? He did not hesitate to kill Bali from behind without any qualms of conscience. He treated Sita most shabbily when she came back to him after Ravana was slain. He told her publicly and in no uncertain terms that she had been defiled in the company of Ravana and was no longer fit to be his wife. She was even told that she could go to anyone, be he Lakshman, Bharat, Satrughna, Sugrib or Vibhishan, whoever she chose, but she could never be his consort.

He was not only most unjust and unkind to his devoted wife but haughty enough to consider himself holier than those to whom he indirectly offered his wife who according to him had lost her

chastity. How many of us today will forgive a man if he abandons his abducted wife? Even if she is raped, will it be right for her husband to forsake her? Only after the fire ordeal could she prove her chastity and was then accepted by Rama.

But it did not end there. At the time when she was with child Rama felt very disturbed by the report that the people of Ayodhya believed that he was setting a bad example by living with an unclean women. Rama was so concerned about his own reputation that he did not hesitate to banish his innocent and pregnant wife. And that, too, without her knowledge. The unkindest cut of all was when he at last agreed to take her back on condition that she proved in public that she did not lose her chastity and that her two sons, who were born during her exile, were his sons, Sita proved her innocence by going back to her earth-mother and never returning thereafter.

It was a novel kind of protest and a most tragic one. This tragedy stuns us all. We feel like breaking into tears. But we do not condemn Rama. We do not even question why Rama, who sacrificed the best part of his life to fulfil his father's promise, did not give up his crown and live with his wife who he believed was innocent. Did not Rama, as the king of Ayodhya, have a duty to do justice to Sita who, too, was citizen of his kingdom? Would any other citizen have been punished merely on the basis of such a report? Was she less entitled to justice than any other citizen? Or was she treated merely as an appendage to her husband to be jettisoned at will?

No, Rama was incapable of such deliberations. He had no conscience of his own. He did not even have an independent mind. He was a prisoner of the traditional teaching beyond which he could not see or think. In contrast Babar cannot be faulted on any of these counts. And yet we must worship Rama as a national hero and a god and reject Babar as a mere invader.

EMPTY SECULARISM

But why this sudden upsurge of enthusiasm for Ramjanmabhoomi? Why such a disastrous emotional storm over a non-issue? It is all because of our hollow secularism. We believe that secularism. We believe that secularism lies not in curbling religion, but in

protecting them even at the cost of rational thinking and human values. We do not pause, for a moment, to think that any religion once institutionalized becomes a dogma and as such cannot have moral values as it obstructs independent thoughts and conscience. It reduces its followers into marionettes in the hands of their high priests. In all such religions, fundamentalism is equated with authenticity and obscurantism with purity.

Inscrutable, are the ways of gods, it is said. But not so with their earthly agents. They understand even better than the gods the divine commandments which they easily translate into social laws and duties. In our secularist stance, we must watch helplessly when the chariots of the gods, driven by their earthly agents like mahants and mullahs, crush human rights in the name of religion. We must turn of a deaf ear to all protests against such oppression.

Yes, we are not only hollow in our secularism but hypocrites too. We profess equality of all religions but do not practise it. This is what has very aptly been called selective secularism. We have attempted, and so some extent succeeded, in bringing about reforms in Hindu society, but we would not dare do so with Muslims. In an unholy mephistophelean compact, both Muslim voters and our political leaders have sold their souls. They revel in their false gains in a Walpurgisian bacchanalia which is a sure way to hell. In the mad, mad, mad race to power our political and religious leaders vie with one another to get the best bargain for themselves at the cost of millions of Muslims who in their fanatic frenzy hug the menagerie of backwardness as a sacred sanctuary.

Many muslims do not realize that this selective secularism is doing more harm than good to them. They do not understand that concessions to their fundamentalism are only the price paid for their votes. They do not realise that there fundamentalism is leading them away from the mainstream of progress and pulling them down into the quicksand of spiritual death. They do not at any time question the iniquities perpetuated by fundamentalism. The worst victims of which are their womenfolk. And such iniquities are being protected by our government as rights to religion.

Even in some Muslim countries, polygamy has been prohibited, divorce laws have been reformed and better rights given to women. But we have kept our Muslim. Women in medieval

darkness. And to top it all, Rajiv Gandhi surpassed all his predecessors by passing the Muslim Women's Act following the hue and cry against the Supreme Court's decision in the Shah Bano case. The the Government felt no compunction in snatching away the hapless Muslim woman from the protective arms of our more humane laws and throwing them into the jaws of an unjust law. This is our secularism, a sham, a shame and a huge fraud on our people.

VOTE BANK

But why have things come to such a pass? Because we do not treat Muslims as our own and do not have much faith in their loyalty. In the heart of our hearts we naggingly acknowledge their pan-Islamic identity and fear its strength. At the same time we cannot win away the burgeoning Muslim population and that expanding vote bank. Hence we must treat them as honoured guests and show respect for their most retrogradesentiments. We must coax and cajole them for their votes with very little concern for their genuine welfare.

Hindus had every reason to feel betrayed by the glaring contradiction in the practice and profession of a party that had all along boasted of being truly secular. The increasing Hindu backlash is a protest against that. It is a protest against the arrogance of Muslim fundamentalism. This, some Hindus feel, must be countered with a more powerful Hindu fundamentalism to establish that, after partition, India belongs to Hindus, and that Muslims must accept that. The RSS ideologues believe, and rightly so, that Hinduism is not a religion, that it is a community of diverse faiths, customs and values held together by some kind of historical and geographical identity in a kaleidoscopic symbiosis.

This concept is based on a very perceptive analysis of Hindu society. None of the Hindu scriptures as we call them make any reference to Hinduism. We cannot identify any religion as Hinduism. From primitive totems to the Upnishadic brahman, all kinds of gods and faiths have a place in Hinduism. It may, therefore, be more correctly called what is known as the ethos of a race, community or a nation. Rabindranath Tagore, in one of his articles. *Atmaparichaya*, expressed a similar view. For the same reason, an eminent Muslim once said that he was both a Hindu and a Muslim.

CLEAR DEPARTURE

If this concept is correctly understood and conveyed, there should be no problem in treating all Indians as Hindus. But, in that case, there can be no such things as Hindu fundamentalism which would then be a contradiction in terms. But the RSS, which had correctly interpreted Hinduism, moved away from this concept and started to follow a dubious kind of fundamentalism. Its support for the anti-cow slaughter movement is a clear departure from that concept inasmuch as by doing so it is treating Hinduism as a religion and the sacredness of the cow as an article of faith, although support for this movement is not to be found uniformly in the Vedas and other scriptures.

But since cow slaughter has been prohibited in many States, this movement has lost much of its force. Hindu fundamentalist, therefore, needed a similar or more powerful slogan to match Muslim fundamentalists. Rajiv Gandhi and his party provided that in the Ramjanmabhoomi Babri masjid controversy.

This issue remained subjudice and dormant for a long time. To assuage the injured pride of the Hindus after the passing of the Muslim Women's Act. Mr. Gandhi revived the issue and offered this bombshell to Hindu fundamentalists on a platter. The secular Prime Minister and the secular Congress (I) tried to please the fundamentalists of both communities for their votes. In the process they created the most dangerous communal divide. The two communities are now on a collision course and if Hindus succeed in constructing the Rama temple on the disputed spot, there will be disturbances on a large scale. Even if Hindus emerge victorious, their victory will be pyrrhic.

This must be stopped. To begin with, the following measures may be taken: the introduction of a uniform civil and criminal code for all citizens: the declaration of the Babri Masjid as a historical monument to be preserved and protected as such: and stopping the exploitation of communalism or anti-communalism to score points in politics.

Courtesy: The Statesman

JUST A MINUTE, MR. NATIONAL HONOUR

by Narendra Panjwani

The Bharatiya Janata Party-Shiv Sena rally near Shivaji Park in Bombay to welcome L.K. Advani's rath yatra last Sunday was very impressive — not so much in terms of crowd size (which was modest), but in the division of roles between the Great Leader and the smaller, local leaders.

While the local *netas* just came on to the stage and spewed anti-Babar, anti-Muslim invader venom, Advani's entry was a piece of high drama. For some 15 minutes before his 'rath' materialised, there was much excitement and shuffling in the crowd: 'He is coming any moment now!'; 'please move to the side quickly and make way'. Our expectatios built up with each passing minute, and just when it seemed that the growing bubble of tension would burst out of sheer fatigue, there was a loud chain of exploding crackers which filled the horizon with smoke. When it cleared a minute or so later, what do we see but Advani smiling benignly as he stood waving to the crowd from the rath's deck. Given our recent and rather prolonged exposure to Doordarshan's *Ramayana*, this seemed verily how Lord Ram would have entered had he not decided to send us His emissary instead.

In keeping with this awe-inspiring arrival, Advani's whole speech, with its measured, non-hysterical tone, came across quite

simply as the voice of reason. He educated us about how he was merely continuing the good work started by the late Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel in Somnath way back in 1948, and how this initiative also had the post-hoc approval of Mahatma Gandhi. But alas, the fickle finger of fate conspired to abruptly put a brake on this nation-building mission by snatching him away from us in 1950. Subsequently, India under Nehru and his 'pseudo-secularist' followers had undergone 40 years of moral drift and minority appeasement. But now, by demolishing Babri Masjid and installing a Ram temple in its (rightful) place, he and his followers were resuming Patel's aborted project of restoring Hindu India's 'national honour'. 'If Ram's temple cannot be built in Ayodhya, where else can it be built?', he asked. Where else indeed.

The first thing to be noted is that this act of building entails first an act of destruction — of the Babri masjid. To assuage Muslim anxieties on this score, he said they are willing to put it back together into its original shape at any other site chosen by the Muslims. Even so, other than Lord Ram himself, no ordinary mortal can achieve this relocation without first demolishing the masjid. The second problem is one's sneaking suspicion that this BJP/VHP version of national honour will not be fully reclaimed by demolishing Babri masjid alone; that it will open the floodgates to a series of demolitions-cum-restorations because Babar was neither the first nor the last Muslim invader to 'defile' mother India. Consequently, there must be so many — probably hundreds — of mosques built on birthplaces of our innumerable gods. National honour, wounded as it has been for over a thousand years now, is surely not going to be adequately avenged and restored by one mosque which, moreover, is not even used as such by the invaders' descedants. Much more satisfying for that purpose might be mosques which are considerably dearer to Muslim hearts. As it happens, the VHP has already named two sites which it claims should belong exclusively to the temples located there — the Idgah adjoining the Krishna Janmasthan in Mathura, and the mosque next to the Vishwanath temples in Benaras.

And then, of course, there were the Christian invaders who trampled all over our national honour by building churches and cathedrals in the course of building the Portuguese, French and British Raj. It is they, even more insidiously than the Mughals, who corrupted the true Hindu spirit with that magic wand called

'Westernization'. Ever since then, we have the additional yoke of 'materialism' and godlessness which has entered deep into our national soul. Moreover, in banishing westernization and its vehicle — the English language — even 'maulana' Mulayam Singh Yadav will lend a hand in the national honour project (NHP).

Our reason for attributing these dangerous designs to Advani's campaign is based on the double voice in which the campaign expresses itself. While he presents a deeply gloved fist—gloved in terms like national honour and through impeccable heroes like Sardar Patel and Mahatma Gandhi — they are rather more forthright. For them this Ayodhya business seems really a small step in a 'dharma yudh' against that 'Mongolinvader' Babar, his predecessors and their progeny over the centuries.

And even if it were to happen that the current Leader were to balk at extending the dharma yudh after Babri Masjid, there are many other, far more militant leaders waiting in the fundamentalist wings. After all, the Bajrang Dal, the VHP, the Shiv Sena — as the RSS and BJP have periodically admitted — are not under the latter's command. They are allies, and therefore free to have their own definition of the scope of the dharma yudh. The RSS surely cannot be held responsible for their 'youthful excesses'.

In conclusion, some questions to Mr. Advani. While justifying his rath yatra in the name of Sardar Patel, why has he overlooked Patel's letter to then UP chief minister, GB Pant, in late-December, 1949, stressing that 'there can be no question of resolving such disputes (like Babri Masjid) by forces of law and order will have to maintain peace at all costs'. Patel was prompted to write this letter due to the public furore created by some people who entered the Babri mosque on the night of 22 December, 1940 and installed Lord Ram's idols there. Pant's government responded by putting padlocks on the building, on the ground that there was a danger of conflict if entry was permitted to either Muslims or Hindus. That is how the matter ended, until February 1986 when the padlocks were opened by a local court order.

Mulayam Singh Yadav's response to the revival of this dispute is one that Sardar Patel would have clearly approved of. Why, then, is he being derided by BJP camp followers as 'maulana' Yadav? And why is Advani going against Patel's stand on this very issue?

Another name Advani has used in this campaign is that of Mahatma Gandhi for his devotion to Lord Ram. Can any of us believe that the mahatma would have even conceived of destroying a mosque — for whatever purpose, least of all national honour? Mahadev Desai, his close friend, once reported Gandhiji's views on the *irrelevance* of the search for the original text of the *Gita* as follows: 'His attitude is that in the last analysis it is the message that abides, and he is sure that no textual discovery is going to affect by a jot the essence or universality of the message'.

In Gandhiji's own words : 'Even in 1888-89, when I first became acquainted with the *Gita*, I felt that it was not a historical work, but that, under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind..... This preliminary intuition became more confirmed on a closer study of religion and the *Gita*. A study of the *Mahabharata* gave it added confirmation. I do not regard the *Mahabharata* as a historical work in the accepted sense. The *Adiparva* contains powerful evidence in support of my opinion. By ascribing to the chief actors superhuman origins, the great Vyasa made short work of the history of kings and their peoples. The persons therein described may be historical, but the author of the *Mahabharat* has used them merely to drive home his religious theme'. So much for Gandhiji's views on the historicity of Krishna and, by extension, that of Ram.

One last question: Would Lord Ram — in whose name this campaign has been launched — approve of this act of destruction of another community's place of worship in order to construct a temple for Him? Would He not, given His infinite generosity, ask Advani not to make such a fetish of his alleged birthplace. surely a god is too vast and expansive an entity to be confined to some small spot of earth?

THEY SHALL NOT PASS

by Ashok Mitra

It is really beside the point what further farce the next few days unfold. There may be a few even more sickening instalments of intrigue, or some honest attempts to salvage the nation from greater indignity. Superficially, the President's role may appear as crucial. Or stray groups and individuals clinging to the belief that patchwork coalitions are the answer to everyone's daily prayer, may hold centerstage. Whichever way matters move, it will however be only a continuation of the vulgar phase the system has entered.

Apart from underlining the fact that this phase cannot be avoided, it serves little other purpose. The nation's need for catharsis will not disappear merely because a small group of self seeking politicians, totally devoid of principles, strut and fret in a particular manner in the fifty-odd square kilometers of space which is New Delhi. Both opportunists and obscurantists, who had been humoured along for the past several years, have now passed the limits of unreason. Yield some more ground, they will dictate terms on each and every issue which concerns daily existence, and either dark intolerance or vile unscrupulousness will be king.

Is it not time to confront them? India is a political concordat. In such an arrangement, to adopt a stance of obstinate intransigence need not be the prerogative of only one or two groups. A concordat implies an ambience of give and take. If you are determined only

to take, and to assert only your point of view however *outré* it might be, the concordat breaks down. In such extremity, if it is still felt that we must give ourselves a further chance, there has to be an assertion of harshness, and even ruthlessness.

The passion and ambitions which have brought the nation to the brink are however mostly rooted in the northern and central parts of the country. Not that the tormentors of trouble have not tried to spread their influence elsewhere. The basic point however remains. The epicentre of the frenzy — and the avarice to seat on the throne — is Aryavarta. For decades on end fundamentalist groups of assorted descriptions, hailing from Aryavarta, were treated with extraordinary deference. They have now migrated to the belief that this country is their legitimate inheritance, and whoever differs with them deserves to be liquidated. They have been joined by adventures, such as specimens from the farm lobby, or those intent to become Prime Minister or ministers, even if for a day, in open defiance of the mandate on which they got elected. They have come to assume that they, and they alone, coinstitute the nation. The fulminations of a Mahendra Singh Tikait, or of the rabble whose universe consists of mosques and mandirs, have the flavour of the quintessential provincial mind. But since the national government is located there, and the media too are concentrated there, the affairs of Aryavarta receive the widest coverage. The optical illusion is therefore hard to dispel. The impression spreads that the march of reaction is the march of history.

What about going into the facts, however? Eight hundred million people, distributed over twenty five-odd states and a number of Union territories, form this nation. They represent a vast ethnic and cultural diversity. They speak fifteen principal Languages, including English, besides several sub-languages and dialects. Go round the country and ask these ethnic and linguistic groups. With the exception of those whose mother tongues is Hindi, none others will bother much, or even marginally, over the supposedly central issues currently unseating governments in the nation's capital as well as in the so called cowbelt states. Of the twenty five-odd states, not more than half-a-dozen have been seriously affected by the mischief of communal strife that has been set afoot. Vast segments of the country remain tranquil despite instigation; the bulk of the nation is not even remotely on the same wavelength with the frenzy-makers. Even

within Aryavarta, with the exception of, perhaps, Madhya Pradesh, in each of the other states — Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and, in case you would like to throw it in, Gujarat — those who would like to withdraw into the recess of mythology and intolerance constitute only a fringe element.

The fundamentalists have to be brought back to a cognisance of this reality, should it still be possible to do so. They have till now proceeded on the assumption that they could blackmail the rest of the nation with impunity. They have slid into this conviction because no concerted attempt had taken place to resist them. They have been allowed till now to hog the headlines. But they will be grievously mistaken if they begin to weigh their importance in terms of the newspaper space they have come to occupy. Their axioms are not the nation's axioms. What they are currently engaged in is the obverse of democratic behaviour. Others belonging to the nation, they are demanding, must go along with their assertions because their might, they think, is right. Beginning with the Congress (I) strategy last year to coincide the shilanyas at Ayodhya with the inauguration of the party's election campaign from the same town, it was a continuous story of capitulation and mollycoddling until V.P. Singh, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Laloo Prasad Yadav decided to take a stand. Similarly, those who subsist on intrigues were allowed a free rein from the very first day the new government took over last year.

The frenzy-makers forget the realities of geography and demography. They do not make up the nation's majority; the nation's majority is not interested in such atrocious propositions at that, since, four or five hundred years ago, a mosque was allegedly superimposed on a temple, that mosque will now have to be either demolished, or its structure physically removed to a distance of at least half-a-dozen kilometers, whatever the national and international consequences. If provoked beyond endurance, the majority of the nation will say, as plainly as it is capable of saying, that, in its scheme of priorities, this particular matter has no importance at all, and the bluff of those who hold up the normal processes of the country on this score must be called.

For if a vociferous minority tries to enforce its will on the rest of the nation, just anybody can play the game. The fundamentalists want to travel back an incalculable number of millenia to an

India which exists only in mythology. And there is this other set, who think they can scuttle all principles and defy the mandate on which they got elected, in order to emerge as instant satraps. Should they remain adamant, and insist on imposing their unreason — and their ethical code — on the polity, that will be the end of the democratic experiment in the country. Others might then say with equal legitimacy, sorry, since the democratic arrangements is in any case ended, they themselves would like to travel back not some millennia, but only a couple of centuries, or at most five centuries, or a thousand years, to a state where they would be no their own, untrammelled by decisions taken on their behalf in New Delhi or by events and occurrences in distant Aryavarta. They, in other words, would want the status quo ante to be restored, as far as they themselves were concerned to what obtained before the British arrived and mangled with the then existing political geography.

True, things are moving with an astounding rapidity. Thoughts taboo till yesterday are coming into their own. Formations assumed to be stable and dependent are collapsing, supplanted by new formations. There is intense economic discontent in many part of the country, caused by inordinately slow growth, or because of the haphazardness with which the modest growth has been distributed between regions and classes. All kinds of far out ideas are capable of asserting themselves in such a milieu. If mythology — and a spirit of defiance toward the mandate of the electorate — are to be the determinants of the country's future governance, it should then be equally proper, it will be argued, to suggest that a relatively more proximate past should be the pattern for the future, for instance the historical past which immediately preceded the arrival of the British.

If you want chaos, here is a recipe of it. But the fundamentalists and the self-seeking crowd have to be told where they get off: if they want to have their kingdom, it will be a truncated kingdom, consisting of only a bit and slice of Aryavarta, the rest of the country will go a different direction. The rest of the country will repudiate the obscurantists, just as they will pour contempt on the power-hungry handful who, ensconced in New Delhi, have the audacity to assume that they could behave in whichever way they like and there is no accountability to the nation.

THE BJP'S GAME PLAN

by Nihal Singh

The Chandra Shekhar inter-regnum — it is little more than that — obscures a central fact of the emerging Indian policy. That is, the ensuing battle in the elections will be between the Bharatiya Janata Party and the rest. In addition to the regional parties, the rest consists of the Congress-I, the two communist parties and the two Janata Dals.

Despite their rhetoric, which sounds less and less convincing, the two communist parties, the Congress-I and the two Janata Dals are all basically centrist parties. The Marxists' move to campaign jointly with V.P. Singh in Bihar and the support the two communist parties are extending to the Laloo Prasad Yadav ministry are indicative of the fact that they have nowhere else to go.

The quarrels between the two Janata Dals are over personalities, not ideology or policies. The Janata Dals' as well as the Congress-I's wooing of the left is part of the Indian political ritual because, as Indira Gandhi decreed in her time, the Centre must necessarily be left in the context of Indian poverty and problems. The communists give the left cachet to a centrist party although even this is of doubtful future value in view of the communists' world collapsing all around them.

The regional parties have a narrow, well-defined role, despite the ambition of men like N T Rama Rao to project their parties

on a country-wide scale after the failure of the National Front. The non-regional and non-BJP parties are thus playing a parlour game. They exploit an incumbent's failures and mistakes which is not surprising given the nature of the country's problems in an era of rising expectations. Their own performance is then exploited by others to unseat them.

The V P Singh regime's record was remarkable only in the speed with which it brought itself down. In the process, the former prime minister hopes he has built a constituency of his own around the Muslims and the backward castes. His harping on secularism is for effect because all non-BJP parties subscribe to the Nehru model although their enthusiasm for it might vary, depending upon their outlook and political expediency.

It might even be argued that V P Singh's brand of secularism is flawed because he was building his Muslim vote bank. Even more pertinently, the militant secularism displayed by the U.P. chief minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav, might prove more harmful for the welfare of Muslims in the state as he sought to match the BJP's militancy with his own, inducing a sense of permanent fear among large sections of the Muslim community.

What is relatively new in recent times is not only the level of communal passions aroused in the country but the harsh pitch of political rhetoric. The art of modern propaganda was introduced by Indira Gandhi during her fight with the party's old guard in 1969. It was refined during Sanjay Gandhi's period and has never gone out of fashion.

All too often, Congress-I spokesmen give evidence of their apparent belief that the more strident and outrageous their propaganda, the better it will serve the party's interest. And what the Congress-I did yesterday, others do tomorrow. Thus we are being treated by the Janata Dal spokesman, Jaipal Reddy, to a string of hyperboles to describe the present situation. In the Dal, yesterday's colleagues have become today's enemies. Only Madhu Dandavate has had the honesty to say that the rot in the Dal set on day one, with the ruse of unanimously electing V P Singh as leader of the Parliamentary party.

In the communist party's book, V P Singh is good and Chandrashekhar bad. Why? Because of the latter's opportunism. It is a case of the kettle calling the pot black. The two communist parties'

support to prop up the V P Singh regime was nothing but opportunistic. Nor can the communists accuse Rajiv Gandhi of sheer opportunism in successfully splitting the Janata Dal. V P Singh, it might be recalled, was swearing undying loyalty to the Congress-I and Rajiv not so long ago. Let us then accept the fact that all politicians believe in the adage that consistency is the virtue of fools.

The accusations and counter accusations merely serve to blur the picture. That picture is of the inevitability of early elections and the non-BJP parties in the north being forced to flight on the one issue of the Hinduraj. The manner in which the BJP leadership is going about, it does not give the other parties any option. The BJP president, L.K. Advani, has discarded the camouflage of 'Hindutva' and the spirit of Hinduism that prevails in the country. He is for Hindu raj, period. And the best thing that Muslims and the other minorities can do to protect their interests is to support him in the realisation of the concept.

This quantum leap of the BJP needs explanation. Mulayam Singh Yadav has gifted Advani a number of martyrs to his cause. A video cassette of the police firing and deaths of kar sevaks at Ayodhya, suitably edited, is already doing the rounds of the country to keep passions high. And not to miss any point, the ashes of the dead are to be sent around to tell the people of the kar sevaks' sacrifice.

Not only does the BJP feel that it has hit a goldmine in espousing the cause of building a temple for Lord Rama at the expense of the existing mosque, but it seems convinced that it will translate this into votes by the thousands. The new, confident, almost arrogant, tone of the BJP leaders seems to suggest that they have already won the next elections.

The BJP leaders' reasoning seems somewhat similar to that of the late Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan, who used Islamisation of his country to ensure his rule, which lasted 11 years. The BJP's state model also seems to have been derived from Pakistan. In other words if the BJP has its way, the minorities in India would have to live on the sufferance of the majority.

The BJP is pulling out all stops because it is tired of being the pariah party. Having won 86 seats in the Lok Sabha on the coat-tails of a non-Congress-I opposition, it is loath to revert to its

former insignificant status in Parliament. Having been taunted by V P Singh on the Mandal report, it tested the Ayodhya waters, found them to be very salubrious for the party's interests and broke off with the National Front.

If the BJP is set on a gamble, it is, in its view, a gamble worth taking. At present, the party would seem to be suffering from a heavy dose of over-confidence, to the extent that Advani has publicly acknowledged the political nature of his rath yatra. Until the next elections are held, probably in march or April next year, the BJP hopes to spread the message of Lord Ram riding on the party's lotus symbol throughout north India.

The BJP is also banking on the assumption that the other parties, whatever label they give themselves, will cut into each other's votes as Chandrashekhar fights V P Singh and V P Singh fights Rajiv Gandhi and the communists fight Chandrashekhar and Rajiv Gandhi. The centrist forces are, in any case, in disarray and likely to remain so.

The success of the BJP's game plan will depend upon two main factors. Will the party's discipline hold in the face of the rather extreme orientation being given to its ideology, with grave consequences for the unity and integrity of the country? Second, is it possible for the Hindus of north India to submerge their caste, denominational and class distinctions to give solid blocks of votes to the BJP?

At present, dissension does not pose a serious problem to the BJP but as communal tension rises and disorder spreads, there might be a marginal thinning in the party's ranks. The RSS, which has seldom officially jumped into an electoral fray and on balance has often favoured the Congress-I in view of the BJP's poor prospects, seem to be more inclined to come out publicly for the BJP, with the Ayodhya issue having energised swathes of the north Indian belt.

The impact of the BJP's exploitation of Lord Ram is easier to determine in towns and cities than in the countryside. The party seems to have struck a responsive chord among urban Hindus. The video cassettes and urns with ashes are meant precisely to take in the rural population. If the BJP can light prairie fires in the country side, it would be home and dry.

That, of course, remains to be seen as Chandrashekar attempts to resolve the country's problems with a hobbled government. Rajiv Gandhi showed some political sophistication in absenting himself from the swearing-in ceremony of the new central ministers while seeing off the prime minister on his departure for the Maldives.

Courtesy: Independent

WHERE IS THE AHIMSA WE WERE NOTED FOR?

by K.F. Rustamji

The Ayodhya controversy has led to the obliteration of two small words which Gandhi had wanted us to follow — truth, and non-violence. Throughout the length and the breadth of the land, for the last three months, rumours and murderous slogans have swayed the people; terrible untruths have even been published in the Press, like the one that doctors had poisoned the patients in a hospital at Aligarh. To add to this we have lies on cassettes and tapes, meetings where errant nonsense is spoken to create disorder, loudspeaker wails to proclaim faith and enmity, black-boards put up at street corners with alarming news, the evasiveness of authorities about casualties and deaths, and media failure to inform us about the enormity of the tragedy that has befallen the country. Even the economic damage caused by three months of tension and curfew has not been properly assessed. In rural areas a sharp divide between the communities has appeared owing to false news and venomous slogans and there is much that has not been revealed. Only a few newspapers have tried to tell us the truth about what has happened. It may have been due to lazy reporters, afraid of rioting and police, or perhaps the editors felt that there was not need to correct bias when everyone was thinking that way, and wanted bias. In deadpan voices newsreaders told us night after night that the situation was “tense but

improving" while hundreds died, and millions lived in fear and hunger. As a nation we have lost the right to say "*Satyamev Jayate.*"

The non-violence that our country was noted for disappeared overnight in the frenzy generated by the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi agitation. A carefully crafted campaign by the BJP and VHP of rathyatras and *jeevan jyotis*, with a weak captive government at the Centre looking on indecisively, acquiring the Babri site and then surrendering it, and state governments unable to give a firm direction to their administrations, led us step by step into the dark nights of communal bloodshed. When October 30 failed to produce the anticipated capture and destruction of the masjid, there was a reaction in some cities, but the events of November 2 when 15 or so kar sevaks were killed by police firing, set the country ablaze. In its wrath the majority community turned on the minority, while in the latter community some thoughtless persons felt the time had come to seek martyrdom because they could not depend on the administration for protection. For the first time in independent India the whole country was racked by an overwhelming wave of arson, looting and murder mainly because the BJP/VHP who had organised the agitation, had lost control over what they had started and promised to keep peaceful, and administration was too weak to deal with it, except in Maharashtra, West Bengal, Orissa and some smaller states.

Ayodhya even turned some sections of the middle-class into looters. When a Dawood shoeshop was broken open and looted, youngsters turned up in cars and on scooters to take their pick, and it is said that when they went home and found the shoes did not fit they went again to scrounge for another pair.

In the attack on a Muslim architect's house, youngsters again appeared on the scene in private vehicles. They put all the property of the architect on the road and set it on fire. The fact that he had a Hindu wife made no difference. Friends in the colony helped the frightened couple to escape. Another such household was saved when a Hindu women, a neighbour, stood in front of the door and shouted, "Kill me first". At another place, a boy going to deliver milk to a family whom he had promised was stabbed to death. In retaliation, a young couple on a scooter was set upon and cut to pieces. Is this the ahimsa we were noted for — our *parmodharma*?

Yet these are not unexpected developments. For months people have been talking about the criminalisation of politics, the rape of democracy by dons, politicians and corrupt policemen. Now they have all latched on to religion, and have begun to peddle hysteria at the behest of those who claim a divine right to rule. Sadly, all this has been done in the name of Ram, whose image has kept us stable as a nation for centuries. And all this happens barely 40 years after the death of the man who shunned communalism, and was shot dead at prayer time. How the world had wept then!

We will never be able to beat the cycle of vendetta unless we place the full facts before the people. Let the carnage be brought out into the open with the stark brutality with which it was committed — with no cover-ups — no concealment of community. Let us bravely face any further trouble that may occur because we dare to tell the truth. But tell the truth we must. That is the only way in which a democracy can correct the damage. That truth about the carnage should include the wiles of politicians, the cowardice of police officers who did not go into the streets to lead their men but preferred to sit in control rooms to fight electronic wars, and also the meekness of distric magistrates who sat by their telephones to carry out the CM's orders; and we must also include indiscipline of the armed police of some states, which were not partisan as they have been said to be, but panicky, leaderless and unaccountable for their actions because no magisterial enquiry is ever held, no magistrate is ever present. The TV film that was made some time ago on booth-capturing left an impress on people's minds. The one on Bhagalpur was snipped and made to appear staged. The only video tapes that have left a deep mark on the public mind, and actually affected thinking people, are those made by communalists. If we care to tell the truth we must also say how the Bofors case was played up, how an election put up a party that disintegrated very soon, opening up the political arena to communal bloodshed.

There is no court before which we could arraign those who shaped the calamity. If we did, there would be wrangling about procedure and jurisdiction in which all the legal firebrands of the land would participate and the case would drag on for 15 years perhaps 40, like the Babri Masjid case. If I were in a position to prosecute the case, all that I would plead before the judge is that those who organised the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation, and those who on the pretext of protecting the mosque played their own

game of communal incitement should be sent on a joint 'Bharat Darshan' tour to see how the land was ravaged, with a TV crew to record their reactions.

Let them stand together in Bhagalpur and put flowers on the mounds on which cauliflowers grow today with such profusion because they are fertilised by human blood. Let them take a tour of Hyderabad and Ahmedabad where you can get a riot at the drop of a hat -- only 50 dead, 500 injured, only 15 days of curfew. Let them visit Aligarh and Agra and hear from the people about the faith they have in the administration. Let them see some of the gutted *mohallas* in UP where the stench of human flesh still lingers like a reeking pall. Let them see the empty hotels all over India, meet the weeping waiters, and see why the foreign tourists have kept away from the land they had read and dreamt about. And together they must visit the hospitals where the victims lie about on the floor and in the spare space in the compounds children with dark knife wounds, women with their guts turned out by gunfire, and boys without an arm or a leg; all of them our sacrifice to the Moloch of disorder. And then let them ask the poor what continuous curfew meant to their nasty and cramped lives. Unattended childbirth, dying without a doctor, no shoulders to lift the bier, no milk for the babies, no food for the millions of daily wage earners, and all the time the fear of arrest, police raids, and 'enemy attack'. What they fear most in the night are the religious slogans which are the precursors of doom. If we cannot hate this kind of thing, we can never love anything at all. For God's sake let us ask the administrators to use the curfew weapon with some regard for the suffering it causes.

Should we say that there is no hope for peace in the land as long as the cycle of vendetta is not broken? All the old politicians seems to be unequal to the task of governing the country. Should we hope for a new generation of politicians, pure in their motives, brash in their methods, eager to conciliate, and eager to care for the impoverished people of the land. Or should we expect a dictatorship because we have failed to work up the right line in politics, have no way to fund elections, or stop politicians from leaching the big boys of business. A dictatorship would be easy to establish, but would it last in a country that has tasted crowd power, has powerful unions like the Post and Telegraph and Railways, and

in any case it to big and poor to be ruled by a Zia, an Ershad, or someone worse.

The last election was fought on the basis of corruption. The next one will be fought on an equally emotive issue — communal bloodshed. The BJP/VHP combination is in a combative mood and it can win if it caste away the cloak of religion. The Left and the secular parties are playing for time. If Mr. Chandra Shekhar, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi and Mr. Sharad Pawar can stay together they may be able to form an alliance and in a three to one contest they may win, and be able to put an end to the present instability. The rioting over Ayodhya will not help the BJP. The kar seva did. Their hopes of an election are going down, and will recede further as the full impact of the communal carnage is exposed.

Courtesy: The Telegraph

MULAYAM'S RAM BHAKTI VS. ADVANI'S

by Sudheendra Kulkarni and Javed Anand

Bombay, Oct 6: The Maharashtra capital became the ideological battleground last week for communalism versus secularism, as the two opposing juggernauts rolled into the city. On Sunday came the BJP president, Lal Krishna Advani, on his whirlwind Toyota-Ramrathyatra to what was undoubtedly a tumultuous welcome. He and tens of thousand of his followers pledged not to rest till they had built the Ram temple on the disputed site at Ayodhya. Mulayam Singh Yadav arrived two days later to give Bombayites an opportunity to know first-hand how equally firm the Uttar Pradesh chief minister is in his resolve to ensure that not a single brick of Babri masjid is moved out of place until the court has given its verdict.

Thus, the battle was well and truly joined with Bombay becoming one more venue for a dress rehearsal for a Mahabharat in the making. On Tuesday evening, the Hindutvavaadis tried all that they could to disrupt his meeting at Nardulla Tank in Bombay — a venue adjacent to the Prabhadevi Temple situated in the heart of an area that the Shiv Sena treats as one of its strongholds. But the resistance only seemed to further strengthen the resolve of Mulayam Singh — a *vajra manav* (hard as diamond) as Mrinal Gore described him, or a *Mard-e-Ahang*, *Mard-e-Mujahid* (man of steel, fighter par excellence) as the Muslims referred to him throughout

the procession the next day to celebrate the birthday of Prophet Mohammed.

Undaunted by the disruptive tactics, in one of the most stirring anti-communal speeches the city has heard in a long time, a spirited Mulayam held forth for 80 long minutes to hammer home his principal message that behind the apparent mandir-masjid conflict hegemony between two diametrically opposed schools of Ram *bhakt*s to usher in India two radically opposed and mutually antagonistic concepts of Ramrajya.

Mulayam described himself as a more committed devotee of Lord Ram than the Advanis and the Bal Thackerays could ever claim to be. Said Mulayam, "Hanuman was the greatest *bhakt* of Ram and I am the greatest *bhakt* of Hanumanji. *Maine apne jivan mein jitna Hanuman Chalisa padha hai, inke baap dadon ne bhi nahin padha hoga. Gau mata ki sirf baat yeh karte hain, par seva ham karte hain.* I have several cows at my home and the first thing I do when I get home is to enquire about their welfare. I would like to know how many cows Advaniji has."

"Yes, I believe in Ramrajya," he declared, "but in Gandhiji's and Rammanohar Lohia's vision of it, not the kind envisioned by the RSS, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal and the BJP."

Thus, according to Mulayam, the country is headed for a replay of history as the two schools of ram *bhakt*s prepare for what could turn out to be a bloody battle to the finish, as the already growing chain of communal riots — Bombay, Gonda, Gujarat and Karnataka have already had a frightful taste of it — clearly indicates.

Dismissing claims that he was merely trying to appease Muslims in order to widen his electoral constituency, Mulayam claimed that his trusting approach to Muslims flowed directly from his concept of Ramrajya where people from different religions were treated as equals in every respect. "I am neither pro-Muslim, nor anti-Hindu, but only a pujari of *insaaniyat* (humanism). Ishwar and Allah both teach respect for all human beings and not the massacre of human beings," affirmed Mulayam.

National unity based on inter-communal harmony was as integral to his faith as mutual discord and bloody butchery was to a sectarian Hindus with their notion of Hindu Rashtra, said Mulayam. He warned of the cataclysmic consequences of the demo-

lition of Babari masjid and the construction of a Ram mandir in its place even before the court gave its ruling. "The day that happens Kashmir will be lost to India. Also, with Sikhs still harbouring hurt feelings because of Bluestar and the November 1984 riots, even Khalistan could come much closer to reality," he argued. His religious inclination, in other words was essential to keep India united, while the BJP-VHP-RSS mode of the thought was a sure prescription for many further partitions of the country.

"That is why I keep repeating, please stop this constant suspicion of Muslims, otherwise its consequences would be extremely dangerous for the country. Because I say this, my detractors have started calling me a 'Maulana'. But I would like to tell them that for me it is a matter of great honour to be called a Maulana because it shows me up as a champion of Hindu-Muslim unity," said Mulayam.

After the disruptionists at the Nardulla Tank meeting had been taken away by the police, the U.P. chief minister started his speech by stating, "In my understanding of Hindu culture, a guest is treated as equal to God (*Atithi devobhav*). I have come to your city as a guest and they treat me like this. Is that how they propose to defend Hindu religion to be expected, Mulayam's allusion fell on deaf ears. For, on Thursday, *Saamna*, the Marathi daily mouth-piece of the Shiv Sena, replied with an editorial under the following heading, "Pahune mhanuni aala, jode khavani gela," (He came claiming to be a guest and went back with chappal beatings).

Emotions of the highly charged audience reached a peak when Mulayam stated, "I know this is the most difficult moment, personally and politically, of my career. But as they say in U.P., *jiski zabaan ka bharosa nahin, uske baapka bharosa nahin* (he whose word cannot be trusted is not his father's son). Mulayam Singh will not go back on his stand. Why just the chief minister's chair, if I have to lose my life in this battle, so be it."

The contrast between the reception accorded to Mulayam Singh by the Hindutvavaadis and the city's Muslim community could not have been more striking. The streets, lanes and by-lanes of of the Muslim-populated areas of Byculla, Nagpada, Bhindi Bazaar, Mohammad Ali Road and Crawford Market were filled chok-a-blok on Wednesday afternoon as lakhs of Muslims opened their hearts and shouted their lungs out to welcome the U.P. chief

ministier as he led the annual Khilafat Committee-organised procession to mark Id-ul-Milad.

All along the route, women peered out of their windows, a welcome look evident from their gestures and some even donned their burqas to line the streets. Children and elders, rich and poor, educated and illiterate vied with each other to shower—literally so—their affection on him with garlands and rose petals. Slogans of *Naara-e-Taqbeer*, *Allah-O-Akbar* were liberally peppered with Mulayam Singh Yadav Zindabad all along the route.

In the course of the four-hour-long cavalcade, Mulayam Singh wore by turns dozens of traditional Muslim caps placed on his black mane by his Muslim admirers. The last cap he wore, a white one in embroidered cotton, sported these famous lines from poet Iqbal scribbled hurriedly on lit in blue ink: "*Hindi hain hum vatan hai Hindustan hamara*" on one side, and "*Saare jahan se achcha Hindustan hamara*" on the other.

Mulayam's visit was invested with a certain historicity which harmonised well with the message he was spreading. The two days he was here coincided with the birth anniversaries of two of the greatest shapers of human thinking—Mahatma Gandhi (October 2) and Prophet Mohammed (October 3). For the elders among organisers, the moment was a throwback to the halcyon Khilafat days of Hindu-Muslim composite nationalism. All through the cavalcade, they were announcing on the megaphone how the foundation for the traditional of the annual Khilafat procession was laid by Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar and Mahatma Gandhi.

Interestingly, saffron was not altogether absent in the procession. Indeed, leading it right upfront was one Asharafi Chhote Khataukar Baba, a Muslim seer in saffron overalls. He was surrounded by his small band of followers who were holding the banner of their organisation, *Jamaat-e-Insaaniyat*. Asked about the mystery behind the colour of his attire, this septuagenarian president of the organisation replied, "Our Guru Maharaj (who, he said, is also a Muslim and is based in Satara, Maharashtra)) has asked me to wear this dress, because our organisation is open to the entire *Insaaniyat*."

A follower of Gandhiji's teachings, the Muslim seer said he met and talked to the Mahatma at an all-religion prayer meeting in

Delhi in 1947. "Mulayam Singh is a good man. He is saying the same things that Gandhiji used to say."

There was not a sign of cynicism visible on a single face in the milling crowds. The occasion proudly wore its spontaneity and genuineness — one banner on a coarse cloth read, "Welcome My Love Singh", while another, a huge one this in national tricolours, strung on a rope going across the terraces of two tall buildings flanking the Mohammad Ali Road, proudly announced; *Khwaja (Mohinuddin Chisti) ka Bharat Mahan*".

"Never has the attendance been so enthusiastic and charged with so much excitement," observed Abdus Salam, a young Congressman from Andheri-Chakla. A friend of his butted in to quip, "As long as Mulayam Singh is the chief minister, nobody will pull down the masjid." "No, that's not the only reason," retorted Salam. "The real thing is that the minorities can feel safe again with Mulayam Singh and V.P. Singh in power. For the first time since independence, we have a leader who speaks to forthrightly, who is honest enough to state publicly that Muslims were massacred in many places."

Another Muslim processionist said, " They have called him Maulana Mulayam Singh. But, truly, every Muslim should with respect call him Maulana."

At both his public functions, Mulayam Singh exhorted: "Don't ever look upon Indian Muslims with suspicion. The consequences will be dangerous. Treat them with love and affection, and their generosity will be unmatched. " The proof of his words lay in the adulation he himself received from Bombay's Muslims last Wednesday.

Courtesy: Sunday Observer

UTTAR PRADESH : A STATE DIVIDED

by Smita Gupta and Vidya Subrahmaniam

The communal divide is complete in Uttar Pradesh. The concerted campaign by various fundamentalist Hindu organisations and the blatantly pro-Muslim exhortations of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav have combined to tear into shreds the state's already fragile social fabric. Not only are the common people divided along communal lines, but officials, policemen, politicians and the media are also sharply aware if and, indeed, swear by, their religious identities. Their first loyalty seems to be to their religion rather than to their vocation.

If the near-fascist Hindu propaganda, unleashed by the RSS-VHP-BJP combine and effectively carried into the villages by the likes of Uma Bharati and Vamdev Maharaj, sowed the seeds of militancy in the average Hindu, Yadav's belligerent counter-offensive made the Muslims feel that only a head-on armed combat with the Hindus could keep them safe.

The madness of communalism left no one untouched. The notoriously anti-Muslim Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), which has in the past been accused of murder in Meerut and Moradabad began to gain sympathy even among members of the state police. In Agra, for instance, a combined PAC-UP police force devastated the predominantly Muslim locality of Mantola, leaving a trail of widows in its wake.

The administration, too, played a blatantly partisan role. Apart from being affected by the usual malaise of following their political masters rather than protecting the local populace, officials were known to go to the extent of warning journalists not to enter Muslim localities. In Meerut, a junior official told *The Independent* correspondent not to enter the wholly Muslim area of Islamabad as it was "dangerous". This was despite the fact that no resident has ever harmed a journalist there.

In several districts, even collectors and superintendents of police (SPs) had either a pro-Hindu or pro-Muslim stance. For instance, in Bulandshahr district, the Muslims set great store by the collector whereas the Hindus rooted for the SP.

The press played its partisan role to the hilt, and in many cases actually fuelled the riots. The most glaring example was a report in *Aaj* on December 10 that 29 Hindu patients had been massacred by Muslim doctors in the hospital adjoining Aligarh Muslim University. This concocted report resulted in students at Banaras Hindu University setting fire to the Urdu department and the spread of riots from Aligarh to neighbouring Khurja, which had until then a history of communal amity.

Strangely, this communalisation cut across even party lines, the exception being the BJP, which owes its existence to its Hindu identity. Whether it was the Janata Dal, Janata Dal (S) or the Congress (I), party members supported or attacked the Ramjanmabhoomi movement depending on their individual religions. In Aligarh, Janata Dal (S) President Panna Lal sounded more like a Ram votary than a follower of Mulayam Singh. His colleague in the same district and general secretary of the state unit of the Janata Dal (S), Khwaja Halim, took a diametrically opposite line, saying the mosque should stay.

Similarly, the Hindus in the Congress (I) were vocally pro temple, arguing that the sentiments of the majority community could not be ignored. Nirmal Khatri, the party's candidate from Faizabad — the district under which Ayodhya falls — was sore that his popularity had dipped due to his party's association with the anti-Hindu Yadav. Anand Singh, the Congress MP from Gonda, went a step further, playing host to a vast number of *kar sevaks* at his residence.

The countdown to October 30 in Ayodhya began several

months ago with an orchestrated multi-media, multi-tiered blitz by the Hindu outfits who were vigorously backed by the Hindi press. While BJP President L. K. Advani's *Ram rath* tore relentlessly through the country on its way to Ayodhya, raising the communal temperature wherever it went for nearly a month, the *Ramjyoti yatras* actually visited the villages of Uttar Pradesh. The audio cassettes of Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Ritambara blared venom against Muslims from every *paan* shop, and Hindu propaganda material was slipped under every door.

At the same time, districts around Ayodhya were being prepared for the big event — the *kar seva* on October 30. A band of handpicked RSS activists fanned out into the villages with the message that the villagers should receive the *kar sevaks* and help them evade the police net.

Meanwhile, Yadav went on the rampage with his war against Hindu communalism. His statewide *Sadbhavna* rallies were conducted ostensibly to promote communal harmony, but if there was one overriding message in the chief minister's speeches it was that the Muslims were under attack from the Hindus and that they should take up arms in self defence. He also never missed an opportunity to challenge the Hindus to build their temple on the disputed site: "*Masjid par ek parinda bhi par nahi maar sakti* (I will not let even a bird fly over the mosque).

The administrative measures taken by Yadav to prevent the *kar sevaks* from reaching Ayodhya also alienates the Hindus in a big way. For nearly a month before October 30, the state was cut off from the rest of the country and even travel between districts became impossible as trains on major routes were cancelled. Added to this was the crackdown on all those suspected to be *kar sevaks*.

This state of artificial emergency threw normal life out of gear and affected families that had had no interest in either *Ramjanmabhoomi* or the *kar seva*. Finding themselves unable to attend funerals and weddings or even admit the ailing to hospitals, these families turned anti-Yadav and also became fiercely pro-mandir.

The impact of this Hindu -Yadav double bombardment on the two communities was electric. Even those Hindus in rural areas who had hitherto been untouched by *Ramjanmabhoomi* con-

troversy and had not heard of L. K. Advani, now began to self-righteously use phrases like "Muslim appeasement", and "pseudo-secularism". It was clear that while the Hindu propaganda had made them belligerent, Yadav's assertions had left them feeling at the same time both defiant and vulnerable. Their one point programme now was to deflate the chief minister's ego.

As for the Muslims, the protection of the Babri Masjid became a do-or-die affair. It became a symbol of their identity, which was in danger of being swamped. On the one hand, the new Hindu militancy made them feel more insecure than before, and on the other, Yadav's boastful assurance literally provided them with the licence to take the law into their own hands. Not surprisingly, recent raids by security forces in UP have shown alarming recoveries of illegal weapons from Muslim homes.

The events of October 30, when triumphant *kar sevaks* did the near impossible by clambering atop the mosque and November 2, when some of them were shot by security forces only laid the ground for the riots which were to devastate the state soon after. The planting of saffron flags atop the mosque was seen by Hindus as a conquest; as a vindication of their superior strength. But to the Muslims this act became a harbinger of things to come, of the many battles to be fought.

The result communal violence spread like a bush fire engulfing western UP — Meerut, Etah, Aligarh, Bulandshahar, Khurja, Agra and now once again in Aligarh. Apart from Meerut and Aligarh, none of the other towns had even known communal riots, even in 1947. And unlike riots in the past, where those affected attributed the conflagration to vested political interests, this time people openly admitted their hatred and distrust of each other.

It is now evident that the Ramjanmabhoomi/Babri Masjid issue and its proponents have done what the Partition, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League could not do to the Hindu and Muslim psyche. It is also evident that with this communal polarisation, the political history of this state, as perhaps the country, is about to be rewritten. Among the Hindus, the battle is certain to be between the BJP-sponsored Ram Mandir and the Janata Dal's Mandal Commission card. The Muslims, along with being anti-BJP, are also likely to be anti-Congress, which they see as a camouflaged Hindu party.

What is the political fallout of this massive communalisation?

The Bharatiya Janata Party: There is no doubt at all that the BJP has been the biggest gainer of the Ayodhya controversy. Along with its chief L. K. Advani, the party is today a household word in a state where until six months ago, it despaired of ever making inroads.

In June this year, the party was able to win only one of the 15 Vidhan Parishad seats it contested. A year ago, the successful *shilanyas* notwithstanding, the BJP had been routed in Faizabad district. Its overall tally of eight out of 85 Lok Sabha and 58 out of 424 assembly seats while an improvement on its previous score was nowhere as spectacular as it promise to be should an election be held tomorrow.

There is virtually a BJP wave in central and eastern UP, particularly in the districts surrounding Ayodhya. In this entire belt it is virtually impossible today to find a caste Hindu who is not a BJP supporter. In village after village, the upper castes — especially those who had voted Congress last year — declared that Ram was supreme and building his temple their main concern.

In these districts, even the backward communities have been carried away by the Ram wave. Within the backwards, women and a good section of the Yadav's in particular appear to be quite swayed by the propaganda that the proof of pious Hindus lies in their support to the temple.

The picture is slightly different in western Uttar Pradesh. The BJP is not in as commanding a position as it is elsewhere in the state, But, compared with the past, it has certainly made massive inroads. The message of Ram has stopped just short of the villagers, having reached the *kasbas*, the urban-rural settlements that dot the tehsils.

The BJP has not been able to influence western UP as much as it has the rest of the state due to a variety of factors: first though many of these districts housed jailed *kar sevaks*, and many local Ram sympathisers were also arrested, the people neither felt the direct impact of the preparations for the *kar seva*, nor believed that they were participating in the sort of romantic anti-establishment

gesture that those in eastern and central UP believed to be doing. Second, the large population of Muslims and Jata makes the entire area so much less likely to fall prey to the Ram mantra.

On the other hand, it is western UP that has borne the brunt of the communal riots, all of which flared up in this area. And indeed, what the *kar seva* was not able to achieve, the communal conflagrations are beginning to accomplish for the BJP here.

The Janata Dal: If the BJP, as of now, is at the top in Uttar Pradesh, V. P. Singh's Janata Dal is clearly no washout either. The former prime minister's recent public rallies in Ghazipur, Gorakhpur and Lucknow demonstrated that he still retains a hold in the state.

V. P. Singh's gesture of forsaking office to protect the Babri Masjid has not gone unnoticed among the Muslims, despite Yadav's strong bid for their affections.

V. P. Singh also has a fair chance of securing the scheduled caste votes—given their disillusionment with the Congress (I) and their indifference to the Mandir issue. Moreover, V. P. Singh's pro-preservation image goes down well with this group. As for Yadav, several units of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the main forum for the scheduled castes, have threatened to quit and join the V. P. Singh-led Janata Dal, if the BSP leadership insists on their supporting Yadav in the assembly.

However, it is not as yet clear how much V. P. Singh will gain from the Mandal card since the Janata Dal has split and the more privileged among the backwards are rooting for Ram.

The Janata Dal (S): This party is in an unenviable position, with its chief not being able to defend either his dependence on the Congress-I or the complete collapse of law and order in the state. Yadav, until a few months ago, was the uncrowned king of UP and his support among the Muslims had earned him the sobriquet of "Maulana Mulayam". Students of Aligarh Muslim University who had last year accorded him a historic reception today say, "We had called him the messiah of the Muslims, but by not controlling the riots he has now become our killer". The scheduled castes and the OBC's also saw him as their saviour as he came from their ranks.

Today, Yadav's name is mud amongst both Hindus and

Muslims in the state. If his Sadbhavana rallies offended the Hindus, his alliance with the Congress(I) has earned him the wrath of the Muslims.

The Congress(I): Having lost its identity as a secular nationalist party, the biggest loser in all this has been the over 100-year old party that is now seen as a weak imitation of the BJP.

The one year that it was out of power appears to have done the party no good, despite the fact that the National Front government did not cover itself with glory. At one time, immediately after the collapse of the V P Singh regime, Congress members were hopeful that they could project the party as the only one capable of providing stability. But the tie up with a thoroughly discredited Yadav has virtually sealed the Congress (I)'s fate in the state.

The association with Yadav has also given the party a distinctly anti-Hindu image, while its previous record of allowing the opening the lock of the Babri Masjid and the performing of the *shilanyas* has made it suspect in the eyes of the Muslims. The upper caste Hindus, particularly the Brahmins, have crossed over to the BJP. The backwards were never with the Congress, and are not with it now.

This is the position in Uttar Pradesh as of now. But political fortunes can change depending on when the elections are held, how the Ramjanmabhoomi issue is tackled and what emerges as the final election issues. Having tasted blood, the BJP would like to keep the Ayodhya issue alive until the elections are held, but because of the party's new found popularity, the Congress (I) and Chandrashekhar both will try and postpone the elections.

Their effort will be to reach a settlement before the election dates are announced. Should this happen, the BJP is likely to lose some of its base to the Chandrashekhar-Congress(I) combine which in turn would expose V. P. Singh's ineffectual efforts in this direction. Finally, much also depends on whether the Congress(I) can overcome its current inertia and launch a vigorous campaign against the misrule of the Janata Dal and the communalism of the BJP and make stability the clinching issue.

THE HINDUISATION OF FAIZABAD

The districts surrounding Ayodhya — Faizabad in particular — are unrecognisable today. The hysteria whipped up by the Hindu outfits has worked like nothing else in changing the social, cultural and political configuration of the region.

Faizabad (the district in which the town of Ayodhya is located) had managed to withstand the onslaught of the shilanyas in 1989, emerging as a symbol of secularism. Today, it is a veritable Hindu abode. In the last elections the district has trounced the BJP, electing CPI's Mitrasen Yadav, a non-believer. Three of the six BJP candidates had lost their security deposits in the assembly elections from here.

Today, the alerted situation has brought in its wake credible changes. The compulsion of survival in this new, frenzied pro-Hindu climate forced the Congress(I) candidate Nirmal Khatri to court arrest against the administration's ban on the parikrama that preceded the October 30 kar seva. Khatri claimed that as a Hindu he was offended by the ban. Even the CPI's Mitrasen Yadav has been careful to see that he does not in any way hurt Hindu sentiments.

Among the local populace there is complete unanimity that the Ram temple should be built. Speaking to *The Independent*, a resident proudly recollected how on the eve of the kar seva the women threatened not to light the kitchen fires in defiance of their husband's orders that they remain indoors. In the days that followed, the women, cutting across caste and economic ranks, grouped themselves into a single front. They also marched to the residence of the district commissioner to protest against the violence.

It did not stop here. In an unprecedented act academic Y. R. Tripathi, the principal of the local degree college, led his professors into Ayodhya to perform kar seva. Tripathi also played host to self-proclaimed godman Chandraswami at his residence.

Today, it is difficult to find a single impartial observer in district Faizabad. Dr. R. S. Tiwari, a reputed scholar of the area known for his moderate views, is completely for the BJP and cannot bear to hear a word against its president, L. K. Advani. His talk is prepared with pet BJP phrases like "appeasement". This

despite the fact that just a year ago, he had voted for V. P. Singh's party in preference to Advani's.

The Muslims here are at once insecure and militant. They are now more determined than ever to hold on to the Babri Masjid.

Who has brought about this change? Was it Advani? Was it Mulayam Singh Yadav? Or did the competition between them to outdo each other result in this situation?

Courtesy: The Independent

READY FOR THE NEXT ROUND

By Radhika Ramaseshan

If the events in Allahabad last week are any indication, it is evident that the union government is tackling with short-sightedness and shocking flippancy an issue that has irrevocably changed the face of national politics. On their part, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and its cohorts are as earnest as ever about intensifying their agitation for a Ram temple on the contentious site in Ayodhya and seeing it through to its "logical" conclusions.

The VHP conducted a programme from January 14 to 17 on the banks of the Sangam, first to immerse the ashes of those killed in police firing in Ayodhya on October 30 and November 2, and then to formulate a future course of action. Two kilometres from the VHP gathering was another nerve centre of activity, straining to achieve pretty much the same objective. Overseeing its operations was the controversial godman Chandraswami, resplendent in silk robes bordered with gold braid and thick gem-studded gold chain, his corpulent frame propped up by two aids who had to virtually heave him on to the dais.

Chandraswami was there at the behest of the central government which has, in a bid to split the Hindu community, assiduously sought to project him as a rival builder of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Whereas the VHP could not even obtain the 20 acres of land it had sought from the district administration for holding the meeting of the Marg Darshak Mandal (its apex decision making

body) and a sant sammelan, and had to use the land allotted to Shankaracharya Basudevanda of the Babri-Ashram (the only Shankaracharya supporting the movement), Chandraswami had no problems procuring ten acres for a parallel meeting of sants held from January 12 to 14 following a reported message from the prime minister's office.

Further evidence of the official patronage bestowed on Chandraswami came from one of his closest associates, Acharya Prabhakar Mishra. The former vice-chancellor of Darbhanga University said: "Chandrashekharji is very keen that the temple should be built and has given the green signal to Swamiji. He has promised him full security in Ayodhya in case the VHP tries to disrupt his plans."

Chandraswami announced at the meeting that he would start constructing the temple on an auspicious date between February 8 and 20. This then is Delhi's answer to resolving the Ayodhya dispute. From the beginning, Chandrashekhar has maintained that the issue is above "reason and the law," and that it is an "emotionally charged" one. But by propping up Chandraswami centrestage, he has laid bare his political motives. The prime minister is obviously keen to see that the VHP-BJP combine does not appropriate the credit for constructing the temple and pocket the precious Hindu votes in the process.

An alleged formula, finalised at Bondsai, Chandrashekhar's Haryana farm house, and endorsed by both the prime minister and Rajiv Gandhi was the subject of intense discussions at the Allahabad meetings once its contents were disclosed in Hindu daily. The essence of the plan, which visualises constructing a temple around the contentious shrine, starting from the spot where the shilanyas was held in November 1989, is again revelatory of electoral considerations. Hindus would be happy that the temple they had so fervently sought has been built, while Muslims too could rest assured that the masjid has not been tampered with.

To put the stamp of "all round acceptability" on his mission, Chandraswami announced the formation of a 21-member committee which would include sants and Muslim leaders. The final confirmation of official patronage to Chandraswami came with the announcement that Rajiv Gandhi would visit Allahabad on the afternoon of January 14.

State patronage to Chandraswami had the VHP deeply dis-

tressed and speaker after speaker at their meetings lashed out against the godman, with frequent allusions to his alleged international deals involving some Gulf countries and his reported sexual liaisons. Finally, one of the speakers pointed out that Chandraswami was being given excessive publicity by being named so frequently. The VHP's fears were, ultimately, unfounded because they still held the trump card: mass support. The VHP's functions drew crowds in tens of thousands, while Chandraswami had to strenuously drum up popular support.

This was obviously at his meetings which were predominantly attended by student leaders from different universities in the state. Vijay Sharma, a student leader from Lucknow University said Chandraswami had, of late, been approaching them with proposals to generate self employment, but he, like several others around him, hadn't a clue as to what they were about. The sundry who were present had all come to see Rajiv Gandhi. When he failed to turn up at the eleventh hour, most of them walked out much to the chagrin of the organisers.

Though local Congressmen denied it. It was widely believed that Rajiv Gandhi was advised not to come as his audience would not compare with the crowds that VHP ceremony for the immersion of ashes, conducted at the same time, had attracted. Instead, petroleum minister Satya Prakash Malviya arrived, and before an audience of a mere 100, read out a message from Chandrashekhar in support of Chandraswami.

Hindu religious leaders too have been critical of Chandraswami's entry into the fray. Swami Swaroopanand, the Shankaracharya of Dwarkapeetha and Jyotirmath, who was also allegedly backed by the Congress when he made an unsuccessful attempt to conduct a shilanyas ceremony at Ayodhya in May last year, is one of them.

Although, Chandraswami claimed to have mobilised the support of some "leading mahants" of Ayodhya, even a pliant mahant like Sita Ram Saran Das, who is committed supporter of the Congress-I and dead against the VHP, refused to back Chandraswami for "fear of damaging his own credibility."

Therefore the VHP's boast — "if it is not the security forces, then it will be the people of Ayodhya and Faizabad who will physically prevent Chandraswami from entering their town even if it

costs them their lives" — is not an idle one. Besides, the overwhelming response to their functions in Allahabad should save set to rest whatever apprehension the VHP had about rival groups or individuals.

Over 20,000 people followed those men who carried the urns containing the ashes of the Ayodhya "martyrs" along the two kilometre stretch from the VHP camp on parade ground to Killa Ghat on the banks of Jamuna. In spite of severe restrictions of entry, the earlier condolence meeting of the VHP was also attended by over 10,000 people. With the annual Magh Mela currently on in Allahabad, pilgrims have come in droves and a township of tents has sprung up on the bank of the Sangam. Before the VHP's condolence meeting began — and this feature was observed during the subsequent sant sammelan too — the whole place was agog with activity. But once the meeting was underway the crowds gravitated to the venue.

The VHP obviously proposes to capitalise on the support it has mobilised. But the Allahabad meeting revealed certain departures from past strategies and practices. For one, whether it was a sign of collective maturity or a tactical manoeuvre, its leaders did not dwell at length on the killing in police firing in Ayodhya.

It was a significant that not one speaker mentioned the death toll which was played up by a vast section of the UP press as mounting to hundreds and thousands, lending credence to the hunch that even the VHP does not dispute the official estimate of 16 deaths. Neither did the speaker call for programmes that might result in the kind of bloodshed that took place on November 2.

As Nriya Gopal Das, vice-president of the Ramjanmabhoomi Mukti Nyas (a VHP-sponsored trust) and the mahant of the Maniram Chaoni temple in Ayodhya, where most of the kar sevaks who came for the Ayodhya programmes of October 30 and December 6 were put up, pointed out: "It was very difficult for us to control the kar sevaks during our 40 days of satyagrah. The younger ones especially were all set to indulge in violence and it was with utmost patience that I had to convince them every evening not to do anything drastic. If we have more such programmes it will be very tough to restrain the militant elements. Moreover a head-on confrontation with the administration will mean more firing, more killings. Even if this helps our movement we are

ultimately answerable to the Hindus for the killings. They will blame us."

The other perceptible change was the shift in focus from Ayodhya to Delhi. In the past, Ayodhya was the focal point of all the activities of the VHP, whether it was the shilapujan and shilanyas programmes of 1989, or the Ram jyoti and kar seva programme of 1990. Ayodhya, the disputed site, was the ultimate goal. But this phase has come to an end with the immersion of the ashes in the Sangam. A second phase has begun, in which the VHP will train its guns upon Delhi.

Explaining this change of stance, Ashok Singhal, the general secretary of the VHP, said: "It is the government which is the main obstacle in our path of temple construction. Our aim is to, launch an agitation as a result of which the government will either bend to our will or break." The most important feature of the new chapter will be the siege of the Lok Sabha on April 4. Singhal warned: "We are expecting one crore supporters on that day. And if the government acts tough like Mulayam Singh Yadav did, it should recall what happened in Ayodhya on October 30. We can surmount every barrier."

The VHP is also planning to storm the UP legislative assembly, although the date has to be finalised. Another strategy is to launch a signature campaign throughout Uttar Pradesh to begin with. In every constituency, the VHP plans to collect more signatures than the number of votes polled in favour of the MP or MLA representing it in the last elections. He will be shown the list and asked to either sign it or resign.

Another contingency plan by which one lakh people will be mobilised in Ayodhya at very short notice is also being worked out. The modalities of this phase of the agitation will be finalised at the next meetings of the VHP in Udaipur in the last week of this month and then made public.

The VHP's proposed head-on collision with the government in the capital itself is, obviously, a move to project the temple issue as a national one instead of one confined to the Hindi heart-land. It is also an attempt to thwart whatever move the government makes to steal the thunder from the VHP in the incipient stages.

Chandraswami was, of course, persistently reviled at every meetings. The Akhanda Parishad, a monolithic body of sadhus

and sants, headquartered in Haridwar, has been pressured to issue a statement that any sadhu found hobnobbing with Chandraswami will be expelled. Already action has been taken against two belonging to Ayodhya. The Marg Darshak Mandal passed a resolution that the Ramjanmabhoomi Mukti Nyas alone has the right to build the temple.

The change in the VHP strategy also reflects its need to make the Ayodhya dispute an electoral issue. Hence the choice of Delhi as the new battleground. Obviously the VHP has no intention of contesting the polls on its own. So why is it keen to work in this direction? Confident of spelling the collapse of the present government on this issue just as they had the previous two, Singhal only went as far as to say: "We will try our best to see that a government which supports the demand for a Ram temple is installed." He ruled out the Congress-I, which along with the Janata Dal-S, is also another target of the VHP's renewed agitation because it is supporting the Yadav government in UP.

On Tuesday, at a press conference in Lucknow Singhal finally confirmed that the VHP will fully support the BJP. It is reliably learnt that the BJP, in a bid to expand its base, is going to field many more candidates in the next election, and is working out the modalities of an electoral arrangement with the VHP.

Other more pressing issues like escalating prices and the threat to the fragile economy of the nation by the Gulf war, are outside the realm of the VHP's concerns. On the other hand, every speaker at the Allahabad meeting welcomed the war as "an instrument which will further our cause." The reasoning was that Indian Muslims would wholeheartedly back Saddam Hussein and interpret the event as "symbolic of the assertion of Islam." And that this, in turn, would come in handy for the VHP to further damn Muslims as a community of "predators and aggressors." In any case, the Hindu vote will certainly favour the BJP-VHP combine, even as the union government twiddles its thumbs and stakes Ayodhya to the likes of Chandraswami.

Courtesy: Independent

'POLITICAL PARTIES SHOULD STAY CLEAR OF AYODHYA'

by Sumir Lal

Nanaji Deshmukh, who has abhorred active politics for the last 12 years, dropped a bombshell last week when he announced that he would embark on a country-wide campaign to convince opinion-makers about the fallacies of the "pro-minorities" now being practised.

This campaign was to be in tandem with a mass programme of the BJP. In this interview, he dispels speculation that this move heralds his return to party politics:

What has provoked you into launching this programme?

I was working on my project of social uplift in Gonda when the riots broke out there (two months ago). I saw that despite so much effort at development, the people could kill each other with such little provocation. Then it occurred to me that development alone was not the answer as long as this type of communalism was there.

We have been a secular people since time immemorial. The Christians came to our country, the Muslims came, the Jews came and the Parsis came.

Nobody is suffering because they are in a minority. But only in the case of the Muslims a hue and cry is raised, and when it is questioned they call it a majority communalism. In the Shah Bano

case the Rajiv Gandhi government acted under pressure from the fundamentalist Muslims and they called it secularism. This type of secularism will not do.

If the Hindus can be secular, then all others also must be secular.

Therefore, I have decided to devote 50 percent of my time to educate the people, persuade the people, to become truly secular, discrimination of anybody is not desirable.

Now in Kashmir, 50 temples have been destroyed. Has anybody, anyone from the minority community, come forward to say that this should not have been done? Has any other "secularist" come forward? People talk of protecting the minorities: Has anybody come forward to help the minorities of Kashmir who are being hounded out?

Is this what you are going to say during your campaign?

I am going to meet intellectuals. These are the opinion-makers. I shall hold seminars, discussions and dialogues on the kind of secularism we should practise. Is the kind of secularism we have practised in the last 42 years desirable?

What will be the role of people like Girilal Jain, Nani Palkhivala and Arif Mohammed Khan whom you mentioned in your press conference?

I can't say. they said they agree that this should be done, and I should prepare a programme and they are ready to cooperate. I have met more than 50 people, including Muslims. They have all agreed that this must be done otherwise there will never be peace in our lives.

What exactly have they agreed on — just that there should be a debate or...?

They have agreed that there should be a debate and there should be no discrimination, of any sort, against anybody. This is a reasonable position and I don't think any sensible person will disagree.

The whole trouble is that after 1952 caste consciousness has increased to such an extent that the entire society has been divided. Will we ever be able to develop this country? Having a national integration council is fine, but at election time will you continue to divide the people on the basis of caste, religion, region and language?

When exactly are you going to embark on your programme?

Perhaps the end of February. I will first meet people who are outside politics, mainly intellectuals who really feel for the nation and who feel that there must be mutual respect. I will tour for two months.

Are you going to be touring by your self or in a delegation?

No, I will be alone, I am not representing anybody.

A lot of what you are saying tallies with the BJP's views. So wouldn't your campaign amount to one on behalf of the BJP?

It is not a political campaign, it cannot be, if anything correct tallies...for example, Islam says it is un-Islamic to pull down a temple and build a mosque in its place. Even I say so. So then you should say, see, Islamic people agree with you.

But your campaign can be mistaken as one on behalf of the BJP?

No, it won't be because the people who are cooperating with me do not belong to the BJP. Certainly, I belong to the RSS, but in this case I am not even acting for the RSS; only as a citizen.

When your address these seminars and discussions, how exactly are you going to define secularism?

We must have goodwill for a person who has a different faith. And we should not unnecessarily blame or denigrate persons who are honoured by a particular community. There should be common feeling, secularism means mutual respect.

But don't you think Hindu fundamentalists are just as guilty of this as their counterparts from any other community?

Hindu fundamentalism can be changed because it is not strict. These people say that if you do not accept our faith, you are a Kafir. Why should this be? If everybody is Allah's creation, then all Allah's creations should be loved. And India has to lead in this matter.

Russia, China, all other countries have failed. For 70 years they thought that religion is a useless thing, but now they are suffering for it because that sort of tolerance was not there. Here we have that tolerance. But it should not be limited to a particular community.

Here humiliations have taken place, just to show that we are victorious finish the centres of sentiment of the people. So we shall

have to educate the people, we cannot just accuse them of being fundamentalists.

But can you justify the very provocative actions and statements by VHP activists?

You see, I have not been a member of any political party of campaign for the last 12 years. I was a politician, but I left because I thought it was dividing society, the real work was being neglected.

So I concentrated on development activities in many places. But now I feel the right type of secularism is a must because we must all have good feelings for each other, must ensure that no one is hurt because of us. For that purpose, one should act without any motive.

So there is no chance of your taking on the leadership of any party?

Leadership? Not even membership. I don't want to be a partyman. I want to be a simple citizen of this country.

Now when you talk at these meetings and seminars, there are bound to be questions on the Ayodhya dispute. What is your solution for Ayodhya?

I have already written about it. In an article published recently, Deshmukh has virtually argued the BJP case that the Babari Masjid was built at the express order of a foreign invader on the site of a temple, and Indian Muslims should not be "incited" to identify with him instead of with the national hero, Ram).

But given the present political and communal atmosphere...

(Interrupting) it is precisely because of this atmosphere that I have come forward.

No, my question is that given this atmosphere, even if we accept the justification of building a temple, don't you think it will provoke...

(Interrupting) just now, before you arrived, a Muslim delegation from Ayodhya-Faizabad came to me and said, "Nanaji, just leave it to us, we Hindus and Muslims will sort it out." They are meeting many people.

I told them, I agree with, you should sort it out yourselves. They said, what is the problem, namaz was never held there. I said, very good, tell all these outsiders to leave you alone.

You see, it is politicians and the politics of the Muslim community that are misguiding these people

But if you agree that the local people of Faizabad should sort it out, then what about the role of the BJP which has made it a national issue?

You should speak to the BJP. I can't answer for the BJP or Congress or Janata Dal or Janata Dal (S). I'm not their representative; I left politics before the BJP came into existence.

Do you agree with or do condemn the BJP's role in Ayodhya dispute?

I am not condemning anybody, no party, no individual. I am condemning the attitude. If I condemn somebody, I will not be able to change his attitude.

My question is, since you say that it will be good if the local people sort out the dispute themselves as they have said they want to but the BJP...

(Interrupting) I have requested that politicians should keep away from this dispute, political Parties should keep away from this dispute, the government should also keep away from this dispute. Let the Hindus and Muslims sit together and decide.

By political parties, you mean every political party?

Every political party. A political party is a political party. If any political party interferes, I don't think this dispute will ever be solved.

MASJID PILLARS RAISE A CONTROVERSY

by Anupam Goswami

Eminent historians of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, Professor S. Gopal, Romila Thapar, and K.N. Panikkar have objected to the manner in which the VHP has used historical and archaeological evidence to support its demand that a Ram temple be constructed in the place of the Babari Mosque in Ayodhya.

In particular, they have criticised the hypothesis of Dr. S.P. Gupta, former director of Allhabad Museum, who has argued that

archaeological excavations in Ayodhya suggest that the Babri Masjid is the site of an earlier Hindu temple: Dr. Romila Thapar explains her stand in this interview.

Dr. S.P. Gupta has questioned your competence to interpret his evidence dug up during excavations at Ayodhya, on the ground that neither you nor Professors Gopal and Panikkar "have any understanding of the science of archaeology", do you agree?

It is very strange that this criticism has come from Dr. Gupta, who seems to forget that some years ago he decided to work for his Ph.d. under my supervision, when could have chosen any other guide. So presumably, if my credentials to understand archaeological findings are to be doubted, his have to be doubted somewhat more.

What is your main objection to Dr. Gupta's argument that pillar bases discovered during excavation at Ayodhya suggest that the Babri Masjid was erected on the remains of a Hindu temple?

Dr. Gupta says that these pillars were found during excavations supervised by Prof. B.B. Lal (the former director-general of the archaeological survey of India) during 1975-80. However, Prof. Lal has made no mention of such pillar-bases in the official reports of the excavations which have been published in the journal of Indian archaeology — a review.

However, Dr. Gupta has stated that the report in question were only a brief recapitulation of what had been excavated at Ayodhya and that the final report, yet to written, will take note of the pillar-bases.

The journal to which I refer publishes precise details about all ongoing archaeological research and is taken to be the most important update of the discipline by all Indian archaeologists.

In the issues for the year 1976-77 and 1979-80, Prof. Lal has described finds of his excavations in the Ram Janmabhoomi area around the Babri Masjid and has noted the discovery of seals, coins, terracotta figures and pottery. However, there is no mention of pillar bases. Prof Lal found no significant evidence relating to the age of Gupta kings. Indeed, Prof.Lal has emphasised in his report that "the entire late period was devoid of any special interest."

Why do you disagree with Dr. Gupta's argument that the Babri Masjid is built upon and uses materials belonging to a 11th century temple which existed at the same site?

The pillars of the Babri Masjid on which Dr. Gupta rests such a premise were not constructed in the 11th century alone. Pillars with similar “late Pratihara” or “Gahadvala” style of carrying continued to be built right up to the end of the fifteenth century. This has been admitted by Dr. Gupta.

Indeed, the debris that Dr. Gupta reports as being found in association with the pillar bases had been described as “Islamic medieval glazed ware with blue and white floral paintings”. The earlier-known sample of this blue and white Islamic ware has been dated in Persia itself to the 15th century. There is no question of this style coming to India earlier than that. It is illogical that material belonging to the 15th century. There is no question of this style coming to India earlier than that. It is illogical that material belonging to the 15th century could form the basis of pillars supposedly constructed in the 11th century.

But Dr. Gupta has asserted that the earliest remains of Islamic glazed ware found in India go back to the 11 century?

We are not talking of any variety of Islamic glazed ware. The particular type mentioned by Dr. Gupta — blue and white glazed ware — could not have come to India before the 15th century.

The fact remains that there are at least 14 carved pillars inside the Babri Masjid. What is one to make of that?

Many historians — competent historians, if I may add — have agreed that the motifs of the carvings on these pillars do not in any way relate to the Ramayana or to the mythical hero Ram. The sculpture referred to by Dr. Gupta, such as figures of the yakhas, devakanyas or the purana ghata, are found in much of Indian architecture, even secular buildings. They can be found in old Jain and Buddhist constructions also.

Dr. Gupta has discovered that the directional alignments of the pillar bases excavated outside the Babri Masjid and that of the pillars inside, are the same. What do you make of it?

The directional alignment of most constructions which exist in proximity to each other tends to be similar. It is dependent on the elevations and nature of the terrain.

Do you agree with Dr. Gupta’s opinion that the pillars existing inside the Babri Masjid were part of a much larger structure of 84 pillars, mention of which is found in ancient Sanskrit texts?

The number of pillars by itself doesn't determine the size of any building. The more determining factor is the placement of these structures. The Ayodhya excavations have not offered any evidence about the placement of these pillar bases.

The archaeological evidence provided by Dr. Gupta has been substantiated by precise historical information that Babar was involved with the construction of a mosque in Ayodhya.

No one has contested that Babar was in the area Ayodhya when the Babri Masjid was being built by Mir Baqi, who claimed Babri as a patron. But we dispute that the recently disclosed evidence from the archaeology of the pillar bases at the site proves the existence of a temple, and that this temple was dedicated to Ram.

Courtesy: The Times of India

SECTION II
ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS

B. B. LAL'S REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGY OF RAMAYANA SITES PROJECT

....Accordingly, a project, called 'Archaeology of the Ramayana Sites', was planned and initiated by the present writer in 1975 when he was working at the Jiwaji University, Gwalior. There was, however, an interruption and it was only in 1977, after the writer had joined the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, that the project was put on a regular basis. Until 1987 it was operated jointly by the Institute and the Archaeological Survey of India. The latter gave full financial support for the field-work and also deployed its officers and staff. Since November 1987, it is the Survey alone that is supporting the project by providing facilities for the preparation of the reports, which are likely to cover five volumes.

In the Ramayana story, the principal place is Ayodhya, the capital of King Dasaratha whose son, Rama is the hero of the epic. Located on the right bank of the Sarayu (Fig. 1) in Faizabad District, Uttar Pradesh, the site covers an area of over one sq. km...

Under the research project in hand, excavations have been carried out at five of the aforementioned places, namely Ayodhya...

Results of the Excavations

Ayodhya — Judging from the size of ancient settlements, the

mound at Ayodhya is fairly large. It covers an area of about one square kilometre and rises at places to a height of about 10 meters...

...The excavated trenches consistently revealed that the earliest settlement at Ayodhya did not go back prior to the early stage of the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) Culture. In these early levels a few stray shards of a late stage of the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) were also encountered, but sure enough there was no independent horizon of the PGW. Nor was there any such horizon of the Black-slipped and Black-and-red Wares...

Without any interruptions, the habitation passed on to the Sunga, Kusan and Gupta periods...

A reference here may also be made to an inscription on a ston slab, discovered not from our excavations but long back in a suburb of Ayodhya, known as Ranopali. Ascribable to the second half of the first century B.C., it refers to the construction of a ketana (shrine) by Dhanadeva who has been mentioned as Kosaladhipa, i.e. king of the Kosala'... From this inscription it is clear that Ayodhya continued to be the capital of the Kosala kingdom during the early centuries before and after the Christian era.

In the Janmabhoomi area, the uppermost levels of a trench that lay immediately to the south of the Babri Masjid brought to light a series of brick-built bases which evidently carried pillars thereon. (This relates to the 11th century A.D. - Editor). In the construction of the Babri Masjid a few stone pillars had been used, which may have come from this preceding structure. However, in order to confirm this and to obtain a full plan and other details of this earlier structure, it would be necessary to carry out further excavation in the area.

Likewise, horizontal excavations is also necessary of the earliest levels in the Janmabhoomi area, since it is only through such an excavation that one can get the plan of houses and other buildings of the period around 700 B.C. when, as the evidence discussed in the following pages indicates the Ramayana episode is likely to have taken place....

A look back at the result obtained from the above...would show that the earliest time when all these sites were under occupation was that of the Early Northern Black Polished Ware, which would be assignable to circa 700 B.C. The two earlier periods, viz., those of the Ochre Colour and Black-slipped Wares,

encountered at Srīngaverapura are limited only to that site and occur nowhere else. Thus, if the Ramayana episode has any basis in historical reality, the archaeological evidence, available to us suggests that it could not have taken place earlier than circa 700 B.C.

But the archaeological evidence, such as it is, is still mute about the basic question, viz., the historicity itself. No contemporary inscription testifying to it is available to us. Nor is any such evidence likely to turn up since we have not come across any inscription prior to the fourth century B.C. ... But then does the Archaeological evidence completely fail to provide any clue whatsoever which might help us in solving the riddle of the historicity of the Ramayana even partially? The position is not so bad as it appears to be...

To sum up. The archaeological evidence... does indicate that the Ramayana is not the figment of some body's imagination but may have had a kernel of truth as its base...

Thus, the description of houses, town-planning, etc. would correspond more to the period of the transcription of the text—from second century B.C. to second century A.D. than to the actual period of the episode itself, which appears to have been around 700 B.C. ...

EXTRACTS FROM B.B. LAL'S EXCAVATION NOTES AT AYODHYA

Ayodhya (26°48'; 82°14'), Dt. Faizabad, situated on the right bank of the Saryu. According to the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, the date of the original composition of which has been matter of debate which is generally believed to have been finalized in the early centuries of the Christian era. Ayodhya was the capital of the Kosala kingdom, one of the kings of which was Rama regarded by Hindus as an incarnation of Visnu. The city also finds reference in Buddhist and Jain texts. It is believed to have been the birth-place of the first and fourth Jaina Tirthankars, and Buddha is also stated to have stayed here for some time. Thus, traditional and literary associations have cast a halo around the place. To check up archaeologically the antiquity of Ayodhya and other sites associated with the *Ramayana* story the ASI and the Indian Institute of Advanced Study under the direction of the present author have jointly embarked upon a project which is still (1978) under way. Earlier the Banaras Hindu University had also laid a couple of trenches here.

The ruins at Ayodhya have a circuit of about 4 to 5 km and rise at places to a height of about 10 m above the surrounding ground-level. Exploratory trenches have so far been put at about half-a-dozen spots which include the famous Janma-bhumi area

and lands close to Hanuman Garhi, Sita-ki-Rasoi, Asharfi Mahal, etc. Since areas close to the river, which might (or might not) reveal a still earlier occupation yet remain to be thoroughly examined, the final word about the antiquity of the site has to wait. On the basis of the excavations carried out so far, it appears that the site came under occupation at a time when the NBPW [11.16] of a very fine quality and in a variety of shades — steel-grey, blue, silvery and golden — was in use. It is now possible to distinguish at least two stages in the history of this ware, and the first occupation at Ayodhya would belong to the earlier stage. Alongside the NBPW, grey ware with simple linear decorations in fugitive black colour — evidently a developed form of the PGW [11.14] — was also in use. The houses were made of wattle-and-daub or of mud. The use of kiln-burnt brick for house construction was not in evidence. Both iron and copper were in use. Although no ¹⁴C dates for the earliest levels of Ayodhya are yet available, those obtained from other sites like MATHURA, NOH, etc., on the one hand and KAUSAMBI on the other show that with proper MASCA correction [5.3] the beginning of the NBPW may go back to *circa* 7th century B.C., if not earlier.

As time passed, but still within the NBPW period, houses began to be constructed of kiln-burnt brick and terracotta ring-wells [14.15] also came into existence. An interesting find of *c.* 4th-3rd century B.C. was a Jaina figure in grey terracotta, being amongst the earliest, if not the earliest, Jaina figure found so far. The successive levels of the site yielded various coins [3.1] such as punch-marked, uninscribed cast copper and inscribed copper, for example those of king Muldeva, and several terracotta sealing, for example those of kings Vayudeva, Vijayamitra, etc. The occupation continued in this manner up to *c.* 4th century A.D.

A noteworthy discovery from levels ascribable to the 1st-2nd century A.D. was that of the Rouletted Ware [11.21], which may be taken as signifying trade with e. India where the ware has been found in greater quantity, though no doubt it occurs in abundance only farther s. along the e. coast. The Sarayu, which joins the Ganga near Chhapra, must have been the chief course for this trade. Indeed, large boats laden with cargo are known to have moved up and down the river until recently.

The trenches excavated so far have shown no evidence of oc-

cupation between the 5th and the 10th centuries, although inscrip-
tional evidence from other parts of the country would suggest that
the site was under occupation during the Gupta period. Likewise,
the Chinese pilgrims, Fa-Hien and Hiuen Tsang are stated to have
visited the place respectively in the 5th and 7th centuries A.D.
Within a couple of centuries after the re-occupation of the site
around the 11th century the usual medieval glazed wares ap-
peared on the scene. Since the medieval ties the site has struggle on
in one way or another, many of the now-standing temples having
been erected during the past two centuries only.

— B.B. LAL

From: *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology* Ed. by A. Ghosh
(Former Director General, Archaeology) Vol. II ICHR, Delhi 1989.

ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF DEMOLITION OF 'MANDIR'

*Joint statement of Thapar, Gopal and Panikkar of
JNU*

It does seem peculiar that fifteen years after the excavation of a site adjoining the Babri Masjid and claimed as the site of the Ramjanmabhoomi new evidence should now be introduced as having been earlier excavated at the site. So far there has been no reference to this evidence in any of the excavation reports published after the excavation by the Director of the excavation. Prof. B.B. Lal in *Indian Archaeology — a Review 1976-77 and 1979-80*, nor in any of the subsequent papers presented by B.B. Lal at various academic seminars. One wonders why, if there was such evidence, B.B. Lal is only revealing it now? Could it be that because of the politics of the Ram Janmabhoomi, it is being claimed as fresh evidence?

In his excavation reports, B.B. Lal mentions those who excavated along with him and curiously, despite his insisting that he was part of the team, the name of Dr. S.P. Gupta, is conspicuously absent. B.B. Lal states that the site was first occupied in seventh century B.C. and continued upto the third century A.D. A possible fortification wall, and what might have been a moat cut across the Janmabhoomi area. He then mentions that among the finds were

half a dozen seals, seventy coins and over a hundred terracotta figurines. He makes special mention of pottery of the rouletted ware generally associated with the Roman trade of early Christian era. He adds that it is rather remarkable that the Gupta period is not significantly indicated at this site, a fact also noticed in the first session's dig in 1975. He continues "After the early historic deposit 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 floor have been met with, but the entire late period was devoid of any special interest.

These earlier statements contradict his present claim to having found that pillar-bases of what may have been a temple at the site, a claim made by him recently in the *RSS Magazine Manthan* (October, 1990). Could it be that the requirement of VHP politics have occasioned this new claim? This claim cannot now be examined by other scholars since the excavated site has been filled in. A reexcavation of the same site becomes extremely difficult given that the sequential layers have been disturbed by this covering up. Archaeological evidence is not self explanatory; it has to be interpreted. The interpretations of the same date by different archaeologists can vary. This is why it is necessary preferably, to leave the excavated site open and at any rate to keep a meticulous and exact record of the excavation so that it can be made available to other archaeologists.

CONTRADICTIONS

As regards the statement by Dr. S.P. Gupta, that too carries contradictions.

1. The fact of the pillar bases running behind the wall surrounding the mosque does not mean that they necessarily run under the mosque as well, as is claimed, since there is space between the wall and the mosque and the pillar bases may have terminated just behind the wall. It is equally possible that no more pillar bases will be found even if there were to be excavations below the mosque.
2. The debris associated with these bases is said to have contained glazed pot sherds of the blue-and-white Islamic

style. This style of pottery first comes into use in Persia in the fifteenth century and therefore, cannot date to an earlier period in India. Thus the evidence of the pottery would point to the bases being constructed not earlier than the fifteenth century and possibly even a later period. Whatever the style of the stone pillars incorporated in the Babri Masjid, the pillar bases cannot be dated to the eleventh century. In his article in *Manthan* B.B. Lal has said that the pillar bases were found in the uppermost levels of the trench: this would certainly not make them as early as the eleventh century A.D. since the uppermost levels would be comparatively recent. If the contention is that these were pillar bases of the stone pillars used in building a temple then the temple cannot be dated to earlier than the fifteenth century since the debris in the bases would be of the earliest period. Therefore, the carved stone pillars which S.P. Gupta dates to the eleventh century clearly do not belong to this temple, if in fact, it was a temple.

BRICK PILLAR BASES

3. Brick pillar bases do not in themselves indicate the presence of a temple. The structure supported by such a base could be of any kind. The pillar bases may well have held up a brick structure with arches, the kind of structure common in medieval times, which may have been a hall adjoining the mosque. The size and shape of bricks used on construction in India varied from time to time and a study of the actual bricks used would have been an additional factor in dating the pillar bases.
4. The photographs of the stone pillars and the doorjamb in the article by S.P. Gupta, come from sites, some as far as a kilometer away, and these can hardly be used to illustrate the supposed temple at the site of the Babri Masjid.

Quoted in S.P. Gupta's article does not allow one to assume the existence of a unique temple at this site. The decorations on the

pillars are not exclusive to temple architecture for even domestic architecture would have had the same decorative motifs. Load bearing pillars do not mean that they are necessarily in the position as when they were first used. It is feasible to bring pillars from elsewhere and use them as load bearing pillars in a new construction.

To sum up. There is no evidence that the brick bases supported a temple and that this temple dedicated to Rama, was destroyed and replaced by the Masjid. It is quite plausible that there was a temple somewhere in the vicinity perhaps dating to the eleventh century A.D. which gradually fell into disrepair and disuse, as temples did, and that some of the material from this was picked up to be used in the construction of the mosque. What is being contested is the claim that the recently disclosed of pillar bases at the site proves that there was a temple dedicate to Rama and meant to mark the birthplace of Rama, which was destroyed by Babar and a mosque built on the same site. The evidence does no support this claim. To that extent the evidence from archaeology bears out the evidence from other sources

The VHP, which was earlier arguing that historical evidence did not matter as the site of the Ramjanmabhoomi was a matter of faith, has once again shifted its ground and is now contending that the issue should be decided by archaeological evidence.

We would like to re-iterate that the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi dispute is not a question to be historical or archaeological evidence. The fundamental aspect of this issue is that the destruction of the mosque and its replacement by a temple, as a means of getting even with Muslim rule, is a return to the politics of medieval times — and therefore an action which we cannot endorse, either as historians or as citizens of India.

ROMILA THAPAR ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDING IN AYODHYA

Eminent historians of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, Professor S. Gopal, Romila Thapar, and K.N. Panikkar have criticised the hypothesis of Dr. S.P. Gupta, former Director of the Allahabad Museum, who has argued that archaeological excavations in Ayodhya suggest that the Babri Masjid was the site of an earlier Hindu temple. Dr. Romila Thapar explains her stand....

...Dr. Gupta says that these pillars were found during excavations supervised by Prof. B.B. Lal (former Director-General, Archaeological Survey of India) during 1975-80. However, Prof Lal has made no mention of such pillar-bases in the official reports of the excavations which have been published in the *Journal of Indian Archaeology - A Review*.

The *Journal*... published precise details about all on-going archaeological research and is taken to be the most important update of the discipline by all Indian archaeologists.

In the issues for the year 1976-77 and 1979-80, Prof. Lal has described finds of his excavations in the Ram Janmabhoomi area around the Babri Masjid and has noted the discovery of seals, coins terracotta figures and pottery. However, there is no mention of pillar-bases. Prof. Lal found no significant evidence relating to the age of the Gupta Kings. Indeed Prof. Lal has emphasised in his

report that "the entire late period was devoid of any special interest."

The pillars of the Āabri Masjid on which Dr. Gupta rests such a premise were not constructed in the 11th century alone. Pillars with similar "late Pratihara" or "Gahadvala" style of carving continued to be built right upto the end of the fifteenth century. This has been admitted by Dr. Gupta.

Indeed, the debris which Dr. Gupta reports as being found in association with the pillar bases has been described as "Islamic medieval glazed ware with blue and white floral paintings". The earliest known sample of this blue and white Islamic ware has been dated in Persia itself to the 15th century... There is no question of this style coming to India earlier than that. It is illogical that material belonging to the 15th century could form the basis of pillars supposedly constructed in the 11th century..

Many... competent historians... have agreed that the motifs of the carvings on these pillars do not in any way relate to the Ramayana or to the mythical hero Ram,. The sculpture referred to by Dr. Gupta such as figures of the yakshas, devakanyas or the purna ghata are found in much of Indian architecture, even secular buildings. They can be found in old Jain land Buddhist construction also.

The directional alignment of most construction which exist in proximity to each other tends to be similar. It is dependent on the elevation and nature of the terrain.

The number of pillars by itself does not determine the size of any building. The more determining factor is the placement of these structures. The Ayodhya excavations have not offered any evidence about the placement of these pillar-bases.

... We dispute that the recently disclosed evidence from the archaeology of the pillar-base at the site proves the existence of a temple, and that this temple was dedicated to Ram.

MASJID SITE MAY BE BUDDHIST

By Arvind N. Das

The eminence grise of ancient Indian history, Prof. R.S. Sharma, has strongly dismissed the validity of evidence regarding the existence of an eleventh century Ram temple at Ayodhya in an interview with Pranava K. Chaudhary of TOINS in Patna.

On the other hand, Prof. Sharma draws attention to several historical sources that suggest the existence of Buddhist monasteries in Ayodhya. Prof. Sharma cites Huan Tsang, the Chinese traveller, as saying that the number of Buddhist monks in Ayodhya was 3,000 and that of non-Buddhists was small.

Huan Tsang spoke of the existence of an old monastery that had long been the centre of Buddha's teaching in the kingdom of Ayodhya (Si-Yu-Ki, Vol. I, London 1966 Pp. 224.-25). Huan Tsang suggested the dominance of Buddhism at Ayodhya in the seventh century and states that there were about 100 monasteries and 10 deva (Brahminical or other) temples in the country of Ayodhya.

Earlier, in the 5th century A.D., Fa Hsian spoke of Buddha's twig tooth-brush (Daṇṭa-kashtha) growing to a height of seven cubits as Saket. Fa Hsian said that although the Brahmins destroyed the tree it grew again on the same site (James Legge. A record of Buddhistic kingdoms. Oxford, 1886. Pp. 54-55).

This historical evidence of the flourishing of Buddhism at Ayodhya and the existence of the Babri Masjid on a mound, typical of the archaeological remains of Buddhist stupas in Mohenjodaro and elsewhere, provides a strong indication to historians and archaeologists that the archaeological remains in Ayodhya could well belong to Buddhist monasteries that were destroyed by a Brahminical onslaught.

The existence of Buddhist motifs like *salabhanjika* (a woman plucking sal leaves) and *danda* (staff) even on the pillars on which Dr. S.P. Gupta has erected his archaeological case strengthens the conclusion that the monument in the vicinity of the Babri Masjid was Buddhist.

It is significant that responsible officials of the archaeological survey of India (ASI) in Delhi were not prepared to comment on the Ayodhya excavations. They pleaded that they are government servants and were even reluctant to provide published material from the ASI library.

An ASI director who pleaded anonymity said that the ASI officials were cagey because they were not sure of the government's intentions in suddenly developing an interest in scholarly date. They were also apprehensive, he said, of the vindictive attitude of RSS sympathisers in the ASI establishment.

However, noted historians and archaeologists have rejected the interpretation that the Babri Masjid was built on the remains of a Hindu temple.

Prof. V. N. Mishra, the eminent scholar of pre-history and Director of Deccan College in Pune, said that he found the evidence adduced by Mr. S. P. Gupta "inadequate" and "unconvincing".

Prof. Mishra pointed out that an archaeological enquiry has not revealed ancient Ram temples anywhere in Uttar Pradesh. However, Prof. Mishra said that the issue of the Ram Janmabhoomi was one of religious faith and that archaeological and historical facts had little to do with it.

Prof. R. S. Sharma gave his views after consulting Dr. C. Margabandhu, the director (exploration) of the ASI, Mr. R. C. Singh and Dr. Sita Ram Ray, former directors of archaeology of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar respectively. Prof. Sharma said, "The archaeo-

logical claim about the presence of a temple near the present Babri mosque is in all likelihood baseless and concocted"

He pointed out that Dr. Gupta was neither a member of the team led by Prof. A. K. Narain, who excavated in Ayodhya in 1969-70, nor of that led by Prof. B. B. Lal, who intermittently dug some sites in Ayodhya during 1975-80.

"If Dr. Gupta had done any research on the site after the aforesaid excavations there is nothing to show that as exposed layers and antiquities were *in site*. Evidently the site was considered insignificant and hence not preserved. "How can one study the trenches which are either covered or destroyed by heavy rains characteristic of the middle Ganga plains?" asked prof. Sharma.

In any case, Prof. Sharma feels that it is strange that the importance of the research Dr. Gupta did about 15 years ago should strike him only now.

The presence of an eleventh century temple is neither mentioned in Indian archaeology — a review, 1969-70, 1975-90, or in any other publication of that time. According to IAR, 1976-77, pp. 52-53, the site was reoccupied after the third century around the eleventh century, but the archaeological report pointedly notes that "the entire late period was devoid of any special interest". The IAR 1969-70, pp. 77 mentions occupation through "the Shunga, Kusana and Gupta periods to medieval times", but does not speak of any temple.

Prof. Sharma points out that the site notebook relating to Ayodhya must be in the custody of the archaeological Survey of India. However, Mr. R.C.Singh, the former director of U. P. archaeology, who has read the site notebook, did not find any reference to a temple at the site to the best of his memory.

Both Prof. Sharma and Mr. Singh say that notebook can be again consulted to confirm this position, but according to available scholarship the presence of any temple in the eleventh century near the Babri mosque is not attested archaeologically, nor can it be attested epigraphically.

According to eminent historians and archaeologists who have studied reports of the several excavations at Ayodhya conducted by Prof. B. B. Lal and others, the main argument advanced by Dr. Gupta hinges on the artistic characteristics of the pillars and

jamb, but whether the pillars used in the mosque were brought from a distance of one kilometre or were taken from the structure very near the mosque cannot be determined.

Dr. Gupta says that two pillars exactly similar to those used in the mosque are found in the graveyard kilometre away. The black basalt stone pillars mentioned by Dr. Gupta are attributed to the eleventh century. But according to Prof. Sharma and other scholars, they seem to have been produced in eastern U.P. under the influence of Palas, for the specimens of the Pala school of art are found in Gorakhpur, Deoria, etc. They suggest that on this basis, the black basalt stone pillars may be dated somewhere between the ninth and the twelfth centuries.

The artistic characteristics of the pillars and jamb as described by Dr. Gupta include *surnaghata* (vessel filled with water), *mukuta* (crown) and *dvarapala* (gateman). Prof. Sharma said that these are common features of early Indian art and architecture. What is significant in this is that several other traits such as the presence of *ganas* (attendants of Shiva), *trisula* (trident), etc. which are typical of Shaivite shrines.

Therefore, Prof. Sharma concludes that the archaeological evidence, far from speaking of Ram of a Ram Janmabhoomi temple, does not suggest the existence of even a Vaishnavite temple.

Prof. Sharma says, "There were ten incarnations of Vishnu of which Ram was the seventh. As far as I know, the *dasavatar* panel is found at some places between the sixth and twelfth centuries, but no temple exclusively dedicated to Ram is found in northern India during this period. In fact, it does not appear in Ayodhya till the sixteenth century.

The historians and archaeologists interviewed said that though archaeological reports of excavations are completely silent about them, Dr. S. P. Gupta mentions two rows of pillar bases, but he gives neither the length of the rows nor the distance between them.

He argues that brick bases were used for erecting stone pillars. This, they say betrays utter ignorance of architecture, as rammed stone pieces are used for this purpose. Even if we concede the existence of the two rows of pillar bases, they do not give any clue to the existence of a temple and may either indicate a verandah or a shed. The rows do not fit any of the temple architectural

plans of five known types viz. square, triangular, rectangular, apsidal and quadrangular.

Prof. Sharma and other scholars of pre-history and proto-history also deny that the inscriptional evidence regarding the construction of a Babri mosque indicates the destruction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya.

According to Prof. Sharma, there is nothing in the Babri Masjid to show that a Ram temple was demolished and a mosque raised in its place. "Muslim populations in Ayodhya and Faizabad areas appeared around the fourteenth century, and there was every reason for building a mosque. However, references to the construction of such a mosque is not found in *Babarnama*.

They occur in an appendix inserted by Mrs. Beveridge, who translated Babr's autobiography from Turkish into English in 1921. She refers to an inscription according to which a mosque was built by Mir Baqi at the command of Babar in AD 935, corresponding to the period September 15, 1528 to September 5, 1529.

"The identity of Mir Baqi is not known from any source and the inscription does not refer to any temple whatsoever," he said. Therefore, Prof. Sharma concludes that the conjecture that a Ram temple existed and was demolished in Ayodhya is absolutely without any foundation.

Courtesy: The Times of India

THE EVIDENCE

by S. Srinivasan

Since the VHP and the BMAC came to the negotiating table, they submitted a number of documents, to establish their claim over the disputed Ram Janmabhoomi - Babri Masjid site. What do these documents say?

While a negotiated solution to the Ram Janambhoomi - Babri Masjid dispute seems to be as elusive as ever, the current round of discussions between the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC) has apparently notched up a singular achievement in that it has brought the two sides to the negotiating table. Though not many are expecting that a dramatic solution will emerge out of these talks, they at least take solace in the fact that the battle is not being fought on the streets alone.

Mr. Jawed Habib, a leading BAMC member, described the talks as a positive step "as in any democratic society one would expect differences to be sorted out in a civilised manner through a dialogue". The VHP, which has joined the talks as a reluctant partner after having started the battle, is using the opportunity to its advantage. For one the VHP is able to put across its viewpoint by its adept use of the media; second, the exercise is providing breathing space to its cadres to reorganise themselves; and third, they would save themselves from the charge of being unreason-

able by keeping away from a dialogue. Mr. Morpant Pingle, a key RSS man in the VHP, however puts it in a different way. According to him the current round of dialogue has helped the two sides in identifying the issues which could be further narrowed down by the groups of experts.

In the past too, the government has sought all details from the two sides in support of their respective claims, but this time they are being processed much more systematically. The chief minister of Maharashtra Mr. Sharad Pawar, who is playing a key role in bringing the two sides to the negotiating table, feels that the talks were proceeding "rationally". The officials in the home ministry dealing with the issue express similar sentiments. Undoubtedly they are doing a tight-rope walk as any confusing signal could derail the talks. After the first round of discussions on December 23, and the subsequent submission of documents and rejoinders, the talks reached a virtual breaking point. The VHP harsh tone brought the discussions to the verge of collapse.

However, minister of state for home Sobodh Kant Sahay, quickly brought peace and managed to bring the two sides back to the negotiating table. The government itself refrained from making any comment, except quoting the VHP: "The historical details of the events that became the subject matter of the *Ramayana* are not what is at stake in this debate. The point is whether it is a traditional Hindu sacred place, not why it is one. Therefore, all documents pertaining to those aspects of the matter other than the existence of a temple, which was forcibly replaced by the Babri Masjid, are really beside the point". It has also been said that while the VHP has submitted "one-by-one rebuttal, the BMAC has not submitted a point-wise rebuttal. Instead, it has further presented photocopies of a mass of literature in support of its claim".

The VHP's documentation, in fact, has been methodical, while the BMAC has submitted a huge pile of literature without summarising the contents. Mr. Javed Habib admits this and says, "We don't have the infrastructure which the VHP has". Besides, the VHP has put its own sets of preconditions for the talks; it wants that there should be no tripartite talks but only discussions. It has advised the government to desist from getting directly or indirectly involved in the talks. It has also set the condition that no document submitted by the VHP in support of its claim be used as

evidence by any court of law or committee that may be formed to resolve the issue. Finally, following the preliminary round the VHP came up with another condition: that the talks should be for the entire Babri Masjid complex and not for only a part of it. The VHP has submitted evidence on the basis of religious, historical and archaeological documents and revenue and legal records.

The two sides define the problem through their own perceptions. For the VHP, it has been a matter of presenting historical evidence to prove that a Hindu temple was demolished to make way for the Babri masjid. On the other hand, the BMAC is attempting to establish that the Masjid was built on undisputed land and that prayers were offered till some Hindus installed some idols in the mosque in 1949. Therefore, the BMAC maintains that the VHP should not only prove that a temple was destroyed to make way for a mosque but also that the spot was the birth place of Lord Ram.

The first set of evidence presented by the VHP deals with the sacredness of the site. The BMAC has submitted documents presenting several other viewpoints which say that Ram was a mythical character and that Ayodhya was not the city of Ram. The VHP, after the January 10, meeting, claimed that the historicity of Ram was not open to rational discussions and the BMAC agreed to this. The BMAC said that their intention was not to hurt the sentiments of Hindus but merely to state that another viewpoint also existed. But it did not agree to the contention of the VHP that the BMAC withdrew all its comments made at the January 10 meeting. Following are the evidence submitted by the VHP and the BMAC on various issues.

* On whether Ram was an incarnation of Vishnu, a literary creation or a historical figure.

VHP: It refutes the argument put forward by some that Lord Ram is a mythical, and not a historical, and that it cannot be proven that he was born at the Janmabhoomi site in Ayodhya, by pointing out that such proof is not required in accordance with the international standards applied to this kind of an issue.

The VHP has also provided literary evidence to substantiate

its claim about the sacredness of the city of Ayodhya by quoting from Valmiki's *Ramayana*. It says, the "Hindu veneration has been for the site itself, which, as much as the temples or images standing thereon, (if any), is in itself considered an object of worship".

BMAC: It has put forward excerpts from the *Ramayana* as interpreted by C. Rajagopalachari and Periyar E.V. Ramaswami to give an alternate viewpoint. These books have quoted Jawaharlal Nehru as saying that the *Ramayana* is the story of Aryan expansion to the south. Periyar has further expounded on this by saying that the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were the foremost among the manifold romances fabricated by the Aryans to lure the Dravidians into their snare. The BMAC has also quoted from C. Rajagopalachari's *Ramayana* to say: "The *Ramayana* is undoubtedly a great love story". It also draws attention to the *Ramayana: A True Reading* by Periyar which likens the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* to the *Arabian Nights* and the *Panchatantra*. It criticises the "magical and supernatural" elements in the epics. Many other documents on similar themes have been quoted by the BMAC.

* On whether the temple existed in Ayodhya:

VHP: Quoting the "evidence on the spot" on the basis of archaeological excavations conducted in the area to the immediate south of an adjacent to the Babri Masjid from 1975 through 1980 by the Archaeological Survey of India under the direction of Prof. B. B. Lal, the VHP says it has "revealed the existence of a series of burnt-brick pillar bases at regular intervals. These are found arranged in parallel rows in the directional alignment in which a number of blackstone pillars are existing in the mosque. Archaeological evidence of a 'robber's trench' clearly proves that some of the bricks from the pillar bases were intentionally removed by those who destroyed the temple...". The note further says that "it is therefore clear that the evidence of the pillar-bases, the pillars and the glazed wares is conclusively in favour of the thesis that a temple had existed at the 'janambhoomi' from the 11th to the 15th century, and that it was destroyed in the 16th century to which the Babri Masjid belongs".

BMAC: It has quoted *Rama, Ramayana* and *Babar* by P. S. Sridhara Murthy (published by Dalit Sahitya Akademi) in which he says that "after the death of Yashovarman of Kanauj, Ayodhya was ruled up to the end of 10th century AD by Jain Kings of Gurjara Pratihara dynasty". It further said, "when Mohammad Ghazni's sister's son, Syed Salar Gazi, came for conquest, the Jain king Srivastava repulsed him in 1032 AD, Ayodhya was a Jain city when Muslims came into the earliest contact with it in the 11th and 12th centuries". About the glazed pillars the book says that these cannot be considered reliable as some of the arguments were based on gazettes. For instance, it says, "the pillars used in the Babri Masjid have been described as 'Buddhist' in the Oudh Gazetteer in 1877. The 1905 gazetteer omitted this description without furnishing any reasons". The book further says that "therefore gazetteers are a very poor source of history as they are written by officials and not by historians"

*On whether Babar visited Ayodhya and destroyed a temple to build a mosque over it:

VHP: Quoting a number of Muslim writers, the VHP says that those who have recounted the regional history of Awadh since the 17th century have said that "on the basis of Babar's order the *janmasthan* of Sri Ram Chandra at Kot Ram Chandra, Pargaha Haveli, Awadh, which comprised not only the private apartments (Mahal Sarai) of King Dashartha and Sri Ram but also a temple and a kitchen popularly known as *Sita Ki Rasoi*, were demolished and a mosque constructed thereupon in 1528 AD under the guidance of the commander Mir Baqi and the patronage of a Muslim faqir named Sayed Musa Ashikan". The VHP then quotes Abdul Fazl, writer of *Akbar Nama/Ain-e-Akbari* (late 16th century), who says that Ramnavami was celebrated in a big way but it does not give any details about the disputed building. Another document, *Safiha-i-Chahal Nasaih Bahadur Shahi*, written by the daughter of Bahadur Shah Alamgir during the late 17th and early 18th century says that "the places of worship of the Hindus situated in Mathura, Banaras and Awadh, etc. in which the Hindus have great faith were all demolished for the strengthening of Islam, and at all these places

mosques have been constructed. These mosques have been exempted from Juma and Jamiat (Friday prayers)". Another book, *Shahada* by Mirza Jan (1856), says that the temple of Janmasthan was the original birthplace of Ram, adjacent to which is *Sita Ki Rasoi*. Hence, the VHP concludes that Babar built a mosque at this particular site.

BMAC: Mr. Javed habib, BMAC leader, says that most of these books referred to by the VHP, are not authentic on content and only depict popular literature and, therefore, cannot be of historical value. The essays in these books are self-contradictory, express doubt on many occasions and instead of verifying and confirming facts, they often use phrases like: "It is believed to be...". The BMAC says Emperor Babar's personal diary which came to be known as *Babar Nama* leaves out only the period when the mosque is said to have been built. It quotes Mrs. A. S. Beveridge's translation of the original Turkish text into English records: "We stayed a few days on that ground (near Aud) in order to settle the affairs of Aud". Babar mentions here that he stayed "near" Ayodhya, not in Ayodhya.

In *Digambari Gate to Babri Masjid*, a book which is to be released soon, the author, Sher Singh, criticises Mrs. Beveridge for misquoting H. R. Neville in her translation of *Babar Nama*, in which she says that in "1528 AD Babar came to Ayodhya and halted here for a week. He destroyed the ancient temple (marking the birthplace of Ram) and on its site built a mosque still known as Babar's mosque".

Sher Singh says that Neville has been quoted out of context. He says Neville never stated that the ancient temple marking the birthplace of Ram was destroyed. On Babar's visit to Ayodhya, Sher Singh says that he led the Bihar expedition in 1528 and defeated the Bengal army in May 1529 near Patna. For this expedition, he set off from Agra and not from the confluence of the Gogra and Sirda rivers. Therefore, he could not have passed through Ayodhya.

The VHP has provided several other official records, district gazettes, and revenue records to prove its contention. These have been contradicted by the BMAC. In the case of judicial records, the VHP has restricted itself to historicity -- whether a temple existed

or not. The BMAC has, however, provided more legal documents. It has cited the First Information Report filed at the Ayodhya police station on December 23, 1949 to prove the point that some idols were put in the mosque on that day and before that for 400 years it was used as a mosque.

The documents submitted by the two sides are in Hindi, English, Urdu and Persian. Both sides say that the documents have been quoted out of context by the other and that there are several contradictions inherent in the documents. For instance, the BMAC says that the gazettes cannot be treated as historical documents. Many documents had several discrepancies which raise doubts about their authenticity. For instance, while the VHP claims that it has quoted from the book written by the daughter of Bahadur Shah Alamgir, the copy says that she was in fact his grand-daughter. The *Hadika-Soudha*, quoted by the VHP, is "confusing", according to the BMAC and even the language used was as shallow as the language generally used in pamphlets.

Since both parties rejected outright each other's documents, it seemed the talks would fail. Although it was clear that the VHP was only buying time by agreeing to participate in the "academic discussions", the government argued that since both sides were expressing doubts about the authenticity of the documents, they should allow experts drawn from among themselves to verify the evidence.

Courtesy: The Telegraph

EVIDENCE LACKING — HISTORIANS

Three prominent scholars from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Prof. Romila Thapar, Prof. Sarvapalli Gopal and Prof. K. N. Panikkar, have sharply reacted to the stand taken by the former director, Allahabad museum, Dr. S. P. Gupta, in an article published in the *Indian Express*, dated December 1, "Ram Janmabhoomi - Babri Masjid: Archaeological evidence".

The archaeological evidence given by Dr. Gupta that category of stone pillars used to support the present structure of Babri Masjid were in fact a part of a unique temple, does not hold good, the JNU scholars maintain.

In a joint statement Prof. Thapar, Prof. Gopal and Prof. Panikkar says:

It does seem peculiar that 15 years after the excavation of a site adjoining the Babri Masjid and claimed as the site of the Ramjanmabhoomi, new evidence should now be introduced as having been earlier excavated at the site. So far, there has been no reference to this evidence in any of the excavation reports published after the excavation by the director of the excavation, Prof. B. B. Lal in *Indian Archaeology a Review* 1976-77 and 1979-80, nor in any of the subsequent papers presented by B. B. Lal at various academic seminars. One wonders why, if there was such evidence, B. B. Lal is only revealing it now? Could it be that because of the politics of the Ramjanmabhoomi it is being claimed as fresh

evidence?

In his excavation reports, B. B. Lal mentions those who excavated along with him and curiously, despite his insisting that he was part of the team, the name of Dr. S. P. Gupta is conspicuously absent. B. B. Lal states that the site was first occupied in the seventh century B. C. and continued up to the third century A. D. A possible fortification wall and what might have been moat cut across the Janmabhoomi area. He then mentions that among the finds were half a dozen seals, 70 coins and over a 100 terracotta figurines. He makes special mention of pottery of the rouletted ware generally associated with the Roman trade in the early Christian era. He adds that 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. He continues: "After the early historic deposit, there is a break in occupation, with considerable debris and pit formations before the site was again occupied around the 11th 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".

These earlier statements contradicts his present claim to having found the pillar-bases on what may have been a temple at the site. A claim made by him recently in the R. S. S. magazine, *Manthan* (October 1990). Could it be that the requirements of VHP politics have occasioned this claim? This claim cannot now be examined by other scholars since the excavated site has been filled in. A re-excavation of the same site becomes extremely difficult given that the sequential layers have been distributed by this covering up. Archaeological evidence is not self-explanatory: It has to be interpreted. The interpretations of the same data by different archaeologists can vary. This is why it is necessary to leave the excavated site open and at any rate to keep a meticulous and exact record of the excavation so that it can be made available to other archaeologists.

As regards the statement by Dr. S. P. Gupta, that too carried contradictions.

1. The fact of the pillar bases running behind the wall surrounding the mosque does not mean that they necessarily run under the mosque as well as is claimed, since there is a space between the wall and the mosque and the pillar bases may have

terminated just behind the wall. It is equally possible that no more pillar bases will be found even if there were to be excavations below the mosque.

2. The debris associated with these bases is said to have contained glazed potsherds of the blue-and-white Islamic style. This style of pottery first comes into use in Persia in the 15th century and, therefore, cannot date to an earlier period in India. Thus, the evidence of the pottery would point to the bases being constructed not earlier than the 15th century and possibly even a later period. Whatever the style of the stone pillars incorporated in the Babri Masjid, the pillar bases cannot be dated to the 11th century. Lal has said that the pillar bases were found in the uppermost levels of the trench: This would certainly not make them as early as the 11th century A. D. since the uppermost levels would be comparatively recent. If the contention is that these pillar bases of the stone pillars used in building a temple, then the temple cannot be dated to earlier than the 15th century since the debris in the bases would be of the earliest period. Therefore, the carved stone pillars, which S. P. Gupta dates to the 11th century, clearly do not belong to this temple, if, in fact, it was a temple.

3. Brick pillar bases do not in themselves indicate the presence of a temple. The structure supported by such a base could be of any kind. The pillar bases may well have held up a brick structure with arches, the kind of structure common in medieval times, which may have been a hall adjoining the mosque. The size and shape of bricks used in construction in India varied from time to time and a study of the actual bricks used would have been an additional factor in dating the pillar bases.

4. The photographs of the stone pillars and the doorjamb in the article by S. P. Gupta, come from sites some as far as a kilometre away and these can hardly be used to illustrate the supposed temple at the site of the Babri Masjid. An early British observer, Carnegie, has mentioned that similar pillars have been found elsewhere and these are not, therefore, confined to the locality of the Babri Masjid. The evidence being quoted in S. P. Gupta's article does not allow one to assume the existence of a unique temple at this site. The decorations on the pillars are not exclusive to temple architecture, for even domestic architecture would have had the same decorative motifs. Load-bearing pillars do not mean that

they are necessarily in the position as when they were first used. It is feasible to bring pillars from elsewhere and use them as load-bearing pillars in a new construction.

To sum up: There is no evidence that the brick pillar bases supported a temple and that this temple dedicated to Rama, was destroyed and replaced by the Masjid. It is quite plausible, that there was a temple somewhere in the vicinity perhaps dating to the 11th century A. D. which gradually fell into disrepair and disuse, as temples did, and that some of the material from this was picked up to be used in the construction of the mosque. No one has contested that Babar was in Ayodhya at the time and that the Babri Masjid was built by Mir Baqi who claimed Babar as a patron. What is being contested is the claim that the recently disclosed evidence from archaeology of pillar bases at the site proves that there was a temple dedicated to Rama and meant to mark the birthplace of Rama, which was destroyed by Babar and a mosque built on the same site. The evidence does not support this claim. To that extent, the evidence from archaeology bears out the evidence from other sources which are silent about the existence of such a temple.

The VHP which was earlier arguing that historical evidence did matter as the site of the Ramjanmabhoomi was a matter of faith, has once again shifted its ground and is now contending that the issue should be decided by archaeological evidence. However, the evidence on which they are relying, does not support their contention.

We would like to reiterate that the Babri Masjid - Ramjanmabhoomi dispute is not a question to be decided by historical or archaeological evidence. The fundamental aspect of this issue is that the destruction of the mosque and its replacement by a temple, as a means of getting even with Muslim rule, is a return to the politics of medieval times -- and, therefore, an action which we cannot endorse, either as historians or as citizens of India.

Courtesy: The Indian Express

MYTHS VS FACTS : MALKANI VS HISTORIANS

I- K.R.Malkani

15 December, 1989

I refer to extracts from a booklet by historians S. Gopal, Romila Thapar and Bipan Chandra (November 20) "proving" that Rama, Ayodhya and Ramjanmabhoomi were all myths. The JNU historians argue on this basis that "beliefs are claiming the legitimacy of history"; that Valmiki's Ramayan "could have been fictional"; that "there is no archaeological evidence" to show that the Ajoydhya area was inhabited thousands of years ago when Rama is believed to have lived. etc.

Assuming that all the above "facts" are correct-which they are not-they do not disprove the Hindu belief in, and devotion to, Rama and Ayodhya and Ramjanmabhoomi mandir. Our historian friends are wrong to think that any body is seeking any "legitimacy of history" for Rama. History might be very important for historians: it is their profession. But Ram is the soul of India, the quintessence of Indian culture, he is the embodiment of the highest ideals of Indian society. the historicity of Rama is irrelevant for Ram's devotees.

Indeed there are more truths hidden in the myths of mankind than in the "facts" of historians. Let JNU authors listen to the phi-

losopher of history, Arnold Toynbee: "History, like the drama and the novel, grew out of mythology, a primitive form of apprehension and expression in which the line between fact and fiction is left undrawn. It has, for example, been said of the Iliad that anyone who starts reading it as history will find that it is full of fiction, but equally, anyone who starts reading its as fiction will find that it is full of history." The same with the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and Shrimand Bhagwat. The important thing is not "facts", but their significance.

The tragedy is the failure of our historians to understand and appreciate the Hindu point of view. All that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad wants is the restoration of only three specially sacred sites, which were desecrated, to close the chapter of "old unhappy far off things and battles long ago". But there is no appreciation of this approach. I have a question to those good friends who want the status quo in Ayodhya to be preserved as a "national monument". Would they agree to making "national monuments" of all mosques which can be shown to have been built with temple materials?

II-S Gopal & Others

23 December, 1989

K.R. Malkani must really make up his mind. In his letter (December 15) he first asserts that the story of Rama's birth at Ayodhya is true without bothering to counter the evidence we have provided in our pamphlet establishing otherwise. He then shifts his ground and appeals to the truths hidden in myths.

While historians recognise the relationship between myth and history, they do not equate the two. Even Toynbee, whom Malkani quotes with approval, does not suggest that. And no myth, however strong, can be narrowed down to a precise geographical location. How can a legendary Rama be claimed to have been born at a particular spot in Ayodhya.

There is a contradiction in Mr. Malkani's reasoning, of which he does not seem to be aware. If it is a question only of belief and a site has to be arbitrarily picked, which pick one where a mosque stands especially when there are other places in Ayodhya claiming to be Ramjanmasthan. We would agree that "the important thing is not "facts" but their significance". Therefore, could it be that the object in picking this site is simply to use "myth" for communal

confrontation?

Mr. Malkani accuses us of failing to understand and appreciate the Hindu viewpoint. To us this viewpoint is better represented by the openness of the Upanishads rather than by the worship of bricks. Let us also not forget that there is no single "Hindu" viewpoint.

Finally, Mr. Malkani poses a question: would we agree to making national monuments of all mosques built with temple materials? It is wholly irrelevant today how a mosque was built, whether with temple materials or not, as indeed it would be wholly irrelevant to Hindus whether in the past their temples were built with materials from Buddhist or Jain structures. The destruction or conversion of places of worship, if and when they have occurred in the past, were specific to the political culture of those times. We reject any attempt at recreating that political today by using historical evidence and myths. We would like to reiterate what we said in the pamphlet that the central issue is that of communalisation of contemporary politics.

III-K.R. Malkani

5 January, 1990

Apropos of my letter (December 15) and that of historians of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) (December 23), I repeat that we can never know whether Sri Rama also existed as Raja Rama. Nor is that terribly important. Hindu gods do not have to be historical figures. Shiva and Vishnu, Rama and Krishna are beyond and above history; they are expressions of the Indian idea of God.

However, historians can neither prove nor disprove the historicity of Raja Rama for he is believed to have lived some 7,000 years ago. The remains of his Ayodhya, if any, would be well below the subsoil water level - just like the lower four of the seven vertical sites of Mohen-jo-Daro-well beyond the archaeologists' spade. That is where the historians' history stops.

On the other hand, Rama as avatar has been adored in India for thousands of years. And this is the important thing - and not the theories of historians. Indeed Bhagavan Rama has been adored not only as Saguna but also as Nirguna. And so even Kabir, a Nirguni, sang ecstatically: 'Kabir kutta Rama ka; Motia mera naam'.

The Ayodhya controversy did not begin yesterday; it is older than British rule in UP; it is older than the politics of politicians, whether Hindu or Muslim. Indeed, during the uprising of 1857. Muslim leaders had handed over this site to Hindus; it was the British who gave it back to Muslims. They were interested in promoting and perpetuating the Hindu-Muslim problem.

Our historian friends think that forcible mass conversion of mandirs into mosques stands on a par with using a Sanatani temple as a Buddhist or Jain temple, or vice versa. If they can believe that, they will believe anything. The material factor here is the use of force - or its absence.

The historians refer me to the openness of the Upanishads, which is fine. I would like to refer them to the Puranas and other Dharma shastras, which constitute the blood-stream of our society.

We are all agreed that politics should not be communalised. But I accuse the secular zealots of that particular sin. By overlooking Muslim communalism, they have encouraged and legitimised it. By ridiculing Hindu sentiments, they have given Hindu society an acute sense of grievance. The result is all-round communalisation of politics.

I submit that 12 percent Muslims will never feel secular in India even if 85 percent Hindus feel besieged and insecure, internally and externally. It is, therefore, important for the peace of the land that our historians and other sundry intellectuals come down from their pedestal of assumed intellectual superiority and try to understand and appreciate the Hindu point of view

IV-Mulk Raj Anand

15 January, 1990

Mr. K.R. Malkani dismisses the historical facts concerning the Ram Janmabhoomi site in Ayodhya, researched into and published by JNU historians. Are we to follow him and accept 'primitive' myth as truth and dismiss history as the 'profession of historian'?...

True that the religion is invariably based on myths and legends. And quite a few of our gods like Shiva have been worshipped with human sacrifice by the Tantriks, and by exalted Shivaitesas Natraj, dancing in the circle of fire, as the metaphysical

symbol of the rhythm of the cosmos. The once gracious Durga is currently worshipped as the dreaded goddess Kali by ritual sacrifice of goats...

The myth of Rama, the 'soul of India', was dishonoured by Valmiki himself, when he showed the embodiment of Dharma, as the cruel husband, who sent his queen Sita to the test of fire to prove her chastity.

Ayodhya as the alleged birthplaces of God King Rama is no more than a latter day make believe of populist Hindu politicians to spite the Muslims, who inherited a mosque...

V- S.Gopal & Others

15 January, 1990

Apropos of Mr. K.R. Malkani's letter of January 5, the adoration of, and belief, in Rama, has...nothing to do with the points at issue.

Mr. Malkani speaks of the belief that Rama lived some 7,000 years ago and his Ayodhya is, therefore, beyond the reach of archaeology. Mr. Malkani is obviously unfamiliar with the Puranas to which he refers us. The Treta Yuga in which Rama is believed to have lived would take us well beyond 7,000 years. We also know from prehistoric sites that archaeology can throw light even on such periods. Mr. Malkani...should leave history and archaeology alone.

As for the use of force in transforming religious structures, there was certainly enough of that, for example in converting some Buddhist and Jaina sacred places to Shivaite shrines.

In conclusion... what should be obviously by now, that we are opposed to all forms of communalism. Far from ridiculing Hindu sentiments we are concerned that the wide diversity of such sentiments be recognised and that they not be manipulated for communal purposes. It is astonishing that Mr. Malkani should suggest that the Hindus-85 percent of the population-feel besieged and insecure.

VIEWS OF K.N. PANNICKER**CO-CONVENER****JNU COMMITTEE AGAINST COMMUNALISM**

...On the basis of present archaeological as well as literary evidence it was difficult to say whether there was a temple at the site. There was no mention of a temple in Persian and Hindu chronicles. "It is not true to say that there was a temple there". If there was any, it would have reached the consciousness of the Hindus...

...In 1855 a group of Muslims claimed that there was a mosque inside Hanuman Garhi temple in Ayodhya and they forcibly entered the temple but were driven out by Hindu Bairagis... The Bairagis in turn entered the Babri Masjid in retaliation and then went back to the temple. An enquiry was later conducted by a Hindu, a Muslim and a British officer and several witnesses were called but none of the witness ever referred to the mosque as a temple.

...The first reference to a temple was found in a gazette issued by P. Carnegy in 1865 who based his fact on "population belief" of that time. Later the Mahant of the Hanuman Garhi temple started claiming the area as his property and filed several litigations.

... The present controversy was created by the BJP to create a constituency for itself.

Courtesy: Muslim India

VHP OFFERS NO PRIMARY EVIDENCE ON AYODHYA DISPUTE

Less than 200 year old 'Belief' against over
450 year old Masjid

Comments by People's Democracy — 3 February, 1991

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has been playing a double game on the Ayodhya dispute. On the one hand, it has been asserting that the question of the disputed site being the supposed birth-place of Ram, is... an article of faith which cannot be subject to judicial or any other...scrutiny, and that they are not going to rest content till they demolish the Babri masjid and construct a temple in its place. On the other hand, they have also been claiming that they have provided to the AIBMAC and the Government sufficient archaeological and documentary evidence which conclusively establish...that the mosque at the disputed site was built after demolishing a temple at the same spot...

The main contention of the VHP is based on three arguments:

1. Sacredness of the site of Ayodhya.
2. Persistent faith in Ram as documented in classical Sanskrit literature, and
3. Spot evidence at Ayodhya in the form of archaeological

remains such as burnt-brick pillar-bases, (pillars) covered with black stone casing having a large number of images of gods and goddesses, such as yakshas, devakanyas, dvarpalas and ganas, and sacred motifs such as the pur-naghata, lotus hansa, all of which belong to the "Hindu iconography".

Of these, the first two are totally irrelevant to the main issue. It is not denied that Brahmanical tradition, embodied in classical Sanskrit writings, mentions Ayodhya and Ram. However, not all the texts cited can be regarded as pre-15th century...Also...there are many works dealing with Brahmanical pilgrimage centres and written between 10th and 16th century, which do not mention Ayodhya as a pilgrimage centre of any distinction...The existence of a temple dedicated to Ram at the spot where the Babri masjid stands today...

It is...intriguing the VHP...is conspicuously silent on the crucial question. No historical sources have been given to substantiate the claim of the aforesaid five Vishnu temples at Ayodhya.

As for the alleged archaeological testimony, there cannot be a more definite contradiction of the existence of the temple than is available in the authoritative report of Shri B.B. Lal. His assessment is published in *An Encyclopaedia of Indian Archaeology...Vol. III...* (Indian Council of Historical Research, 1989).

The contention about brick pillars, black stone pillars, etc. is questionable. When the pillar bases are not mentioned in any archaeological report, how are they postulated now? The alleged "Hindu" motifs on black stone pillars also do not bear the test of critical scrutiny. A great majority of these motifs are connected either with Shaiva, Jain or other Non-Vaishnavite sects. There is no specific evidence to connect them exclusively with the tradition of Ram worship or even with the Vishnu.

...Was the site recognised as the exact site of birth of Lord Ram when the mosque was built in Babar's time? If there was no shrine of Lord Ram here, it could not just have been so recognised.

PRIMARY EVIDENCE.

The VHP has spoken of the relevance only of primary evidence and not of later inferences or beliefs, however great the men

who held them, including Jawaharlal Nehru. And yet...the VHP is not able to give a single piece of evidence most remotely assignable to the period of full two hundred years of the construction of the mosque in any language — Sankrit, Hindi or Persian.

The primary evidence is, on the other hand, of a totally contradictory import.

...The inscription of Mir Baqi, which gives the date of the construction of the mosque (AH 935/AD 1528-29), and the second inscription outside the mosque both...show that it was a case of simple construction of the mosque, and not the destruction of any previous idol-temple or any building. If the mosque had really been built to humiliate Hindus and desecrate a shrine of Lord Ram, is it believable that Mir Baqi would not have claimed that this had been done, or that an idol temple had been destroyed? Why should the builder of the mosque have hidden the real purpose for which he is supposed to have built the mosque, more so since that VHP believes that the builder was an idol-breaker by belief and ambition? If desecration of a Hindu shrine was seen as an act of merit, it should have surely been proclaimed. That this was not done, is surely the strongest proof of that the builder destroyed no temple and neither performed nor claimed the merit of destruction.

Abul Fazl, Akbar's greate minister, his *Ain-i-Akbari*, written seventy years of the construction of the mosque, while mentioning Ayodhya as a pilgrimage centre, nowhere mentions that an exact site of Ram's birth here existed, let alone that a mosque existed here. This is admitted by VHP itself. Even more curious is this omission when Abul Fazl...mentions the graves of Prophets Ayyub and Shis in Ayodhya in the very Persian extract given by the VHP itself.

...Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*...(was written) in Akbar's reign. Could he...have let it pass without even one expression of regret that the very spot of Lord Ram's birth had been desecrated, and the shrine denied to the devotees by an act committed within a few decades before he was writing? Two imagine this is to put an unacceptable strain on one's credulity.

The whole 17th century passes without the VHP being able to produce a single testimony of any sort about its case....The learned scholar historians of the VHP should have looked up Sujan Rai

Bhandari's description of Ayodhya in his *Khulasatut Tawarikh* (Persian text, edited by Zafar Hasan, p. 43; English translation by Sir Jadunath Sarkar in *India of Aurangzeb*, p. 31), a work written in 1795. This author carefully mentions Hindu places of worship, and mentions in its account of the Suba of Awadh, that Ayodhya was the seat of Lord Ram...and that Ayodhya was a great religious centre of the Hindus. Yet he too gives not the slightest hint of any shrine on the exact site of Lord Ram's birth that had earlier existed and had been then destroyed. Thus still the close of the 17th century, till two hundred years of the erection of the mosque had passed, no belief existed that the Babri Masjid or any other mosque had been built on Ram's birth-site.

We may now consider the VHP's "key" evidence — passage attributed to "Sahifa-e-Chahal Nasaih Bahadur Shahi, written by the (sic) daughter of Bahadur Shah Alamgir (sic) during the late 17th — early 18th century."

...There has been no emperor "Bahadur Shah Alamgir" in Indian history. Aurangzeb Alamgir ruled from 1659 to 1707 and his son Bahadur Shah from 1707 to 1712. Thus the text could not possibly have belonged to Aurangzeb's reign and so to the 17th century; but only to a latter time. The authoress, if she was "a" (not "the") daughter of Bahadur Shah, could have written anytime within a life span after 1712, the last year when she could have been born. The VHP is unable even to furnish the name of this erudite princess, so that she cannot simply be traced! The extract from her so-called work *Sahifa-Chihal Nasaih - i - Bahadur Shahi* is said to have been copied by the author of a much later Urdu work only in...1817. The *Nasaih* is an obviously late fabrication, since the name of the authoress is not given and the fabricator was ignorant enough to confuse Bahadur Shah with "Alamgir"! It is well-known that such "counsels" were frequently fabricated in the names of kings and saints. No such work as *Sahifa-i-Chihal Nasaih-e-Bahadur Shahi*, or with any possible variable forms of the title, or any work of a similar nature by any Mughal princess, appears in D.N. Marshall standard and comprehensive bibliography, *Mughals in India — A Bibliography Survey*, Bombay, 1967, nor in any volume of C.A. Storey's *Persian Literature — Bibliographical Survey*...

The European priest Fr. Joseph Thieffenthaler, who de-

scribes Ayodhya in 1785, was of course still later and cites no source.

To conclude, there is absolutely no evidence from within two hundred years and more of the construction of the Babri Masjid that it was constructed on the site of any temple, let alone on the desecrated remains of the shrine of Lord Ram's birth-site. Later legends about such a site and shrine are no substitute for historical evidence...Even if the matter rests on faith...such faith is no more than two hundred years old at the extreme limit, while the mosque was built more than 450 years ago. The proposal for its destruction is an act of barbarity absolutely unworthy of the great Indian civilisation.

HISTORIANS: JOINT APPEAL OF 43 HISTORIANS

We, the undersigned historians, are of view that there is no conclusive evidence to prove that there was a temple dedicated to Ram at the site of the present-day Babri Masjid, which temple was destroyed and replaced by the Masjid. Furthermore, we are of the opinion that the Babri Masjid should neither be demolished nor shifted. Such an act would be a return to the politics of medieval times and futile attempt to change historical events. We are of the firm view that the mosque should be preserved as a national monument which is more than four and a half centuries old.

Let us not repeat the barbarity of medieval ages under the guise of establishing a new identity, whether traditional or modern.

R.S. Sharma

D.N. Jha

Gyanendra Pandey

Rifaqat Ali Khan

Romila Thapar

Mrs. Suvira Jaiswal

V. Ramakrishna

Ms. Indu Banga

O.P. Jaiswal

P.V. Ranade

Amalendu Guha

N. P. Verma

S.R. Singh

Irfan Habib

K.M. Shrimali

Suraj Bhan

Pratima Asthana

P.S. Gupta

H.C. Satyarthi
C.P.N. Sinha
M.Athar Ali
Asghar Ali Engineer
Satya Prakash Gupta
Sunit Sarkar
Barun De
R.K. Shukla
S.N. Sinha
Azhar Ansari
B.D. Chattopadhyaya
K.N. Panikkar
Satish Chandra

H.C. Verma
Bipin Chandra
Mushirul Hasan
Ms. R. Champak Lakshmi
Arjun Dev
J.S.Grewal
Anirudha Ray
R.P.Singh
Anis Syed
A.P.Sharma
Ms. Shireen Moosvi
A.O.Rafiqi

SECTION III
DOCUMENTATION

BJP'S CONCOCTED 'GANDHI FORMULA' FOR AYODHYA DISPUTE

by Jivanji Desai

INTRODUCTION

Readers will recall that on December 3, The Times of India, carried an item about (BJP General Secretary) K.L. Sharma's letter to the Prime Minister in which he had talked of Gandhiji's views on the Ayodhya dispute, and urged the letter to solve the dispute along those lines. The letter contained two paragraphs from an article alleged written by Gandhiji. According to Sharma he himself had seen copy of the Hindu weekly Harijan Sewak of July 27, 1937, where the said article was published.

...On December 4, The Times of India Research Bureau came out with the definitive information that Gandhiji had written no such article at any time...

According to The Times of India: "Despite repeated requests from The Times of India Research Bureau, the BJP central office was unable to produce a copy of the original Harijan Sewak or Navjivan which, according to them, carried the dubious article".

This supposed article by Gandhiji is thus a blatant lie concocted to gain credibility and acquiescence for the BJP-VHP line of

demolition of about 3,000 mosques all over the country, and construction of temples on their sites. It is also a glaring example of what lowly depths the communal organisations can descend, to press their claims...

...As far back as 1950, ...Jivanji Desai, of the Navjivan Trust, the publishers of Gandhian literature, had to debunk exactly the same claim made by one Ramgopal Pandey 'Sharad' of Ayodhya. The only difference is that Pandey had claimed to have quoted the same so-called Gandhi article from Navjivan of July 27, 1937 while... Sharma, had changed the journal to Harijan Sewak, while retaining the same date. According to the The Times of India however, there was no issue of Harijan Sewak dated July 27, 1937 either, the closest issues being dated July 24 and July 31 1937.

...We are giving below a translation of Jivanji Desai's article entitled "Concocted Letter and Article" that was published in the Harijan Sewak, July 13, 1950. Text of the Article

...Shriram Janmabhoomi Virodhiyon ke Kale Karnamey (Black Deeds of the Ramjanmabhoomi Opponents) this is the title of a book by shri Ramgopal Pandey 'Sharad' (Sahitya Ratna) and published by Shriram Janmabhoomi Sewa Samiti, Ayodhya Between p.3 and p.6 of the book, the author tells:

"We had written a letter to the Mahatmaji on May 15, 1937 a.d. regarding the Shriram Janmabhoomi, and its translation is being given below."

The writer has, in the letter, mentioned the Shriram Janmabhoomi versus Babri Masjid dispute and solicited Puja Gandhiji's opinion. Then the author tells.

"I received the following letter in reply:

W a r d h a

Dated 20.5.37

Dear Shri Sharadji,

Received your letter dated 15.5.37 addressed to Puja Shri Bapuji. In this regard, Bapu will express his opinion in the Hindi Navjivan or harijan. Blessing from Bapu.

Yours

MahadevDesai

(Private Secretary),

Puja Shri Mahatma Gandhi)

"The following article from Bapu was published in Navjivan of 22.7.37. We are giving below its full text:

"A friend from Ayodhya has written a letter to enquire about the Shriram Janmabhoomi of Ayodhya. In this regard, I am putting my views below."

"It is a very heinous sin to forcibly take over place of religious worship. During the Mughal times, many places of worship, which were sacred to the Hindus, were forcibly taken over, and many of them were looted and destroyed. Many of them were converted into masjids. Although both mandirs and masjids are places of worship of God, and there is no difference between the two, yet the way of prayers and traditions of both Hindu and Muslims in worhsip are quite different.

"From the religious viewpoint, a Muslim will never tolerate A Hindu placing an idol in a masjid where he had been praying for long. Similarly, a Hindu will never be able to bear that a mandir where he had all along been worshipping Ram, Krishna, Shankar, Vishnu and Devi, is converted into masjid. As a matter of fact, such events, wherever they occur, are a symbol of religious slavery. Both Hindus and Muslims should try to settle such disputes among themselves. Places of Muslim worship which are under the control of the Hindus should be returned to the Muslims. Similarly, Hindu religious places taken over by the Muslims, must be voluntarily handed over to the Muslims. This will end the differences and strengthen Hindu-Muslim unity which will prove a boon for a religio-centred country like India.

M.K. Gandhi"

About the Author's Own Letter: If a man says that on such and such a date he had written a letter to Gandhiji, even Gandhiji cannot say that he may not have written it. At the most, he (Gandhiji) can say that he has not received such a letter. For those after him; it is impossible to say anything with certainty. But whatever the author has written later, indicates that his letter's contention is only a concoction. For is undoubted that both Mahadevbhai's letter dated 20.5.37. and the quotation from the Navjivan article said to be written by Gandhiji, are forged.

In this respect, it will be worthwhile to remind the readers that the Young India and both the Gujarati and Hindi editions of Navjivan were closed sometime in 1932. The English Harijan

started in 1933 and its Hindi edition since then has been known as Harijan Sewak.

Then, how could Mahadevbhai write that "Bapu will express his opinion in Hindi Navjivan or Harijan?" As far as we know, Mahadevbhai was not in the habit of introducing himself as "Private Secretary, Pujya Shri Mahatma Gandhi", below his signature. And around the date 20.5.37, Gandhiji, Mahadevbhai, etc., were not at all in Wardha, but were living in the Tithal Kshetra of Gujarat. Therefore, the said letter is completely concocted and false.

There being no paper run by Gandhiji called Hindi-Navjivan as on 27.7.37, the article taken from it is equally concocted and false. Too be sure as to whether the author had mistakenly mentioned the Hindu Navjivan, we went through the files of Harijan Sewak and the English Harijan also, and came to know that all this is really concocted. The Sahitya Ratna author tried to give currently to a falsehood, but if only he had studied Gandhiji's style a bit, he would have known that Gandhiji never signed himself in Hindi as "M.K. Gandhi". That the articles languages not Gandhiji's can be gathered from a little familiarity (With it). This is an example of how a liar gets himself trapped. No reader must believe this falsehood in the name of Gandhiji...

SARDAR PATEL ON BABRI MASJID

by A.G. Noorani

Sardar Patel's letter on the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi question has strangely gone unnoticed. It is of enormous relevance today.

In order to appreciate its significance one must recall the context. It is set out 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 a 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 Constabulary) 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 Shakri 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."

Here is Sardar's letter in full

New Delhi

9 January 1950

My dear Pantji,

The Prime Minister has already sent to you a telegram expressing his concern over the developments in Ayodhya. I spoke to you about it in Lucknow. I feel that the controversy has been raised at a most inopportune time both from the point of view of the country at large and of your own province in particular. The wider communal issues have only been recently resolved to the mutual satisfaction of the various communities. So far as Muslims are concerned, they are just settling down to their new loyalties. We can reasonably say that the first shock of partition and the resultant uncertainties are just beginning to be over and that it is unlikely that there would be any transfer of loyalties on a mass scale. In your own province, the communal problem has always been a difficult one. I think it has been one of the outstanding achievements of your administration that, despite many upsetting factors, communal relations have generally improved very considerably since 1946. We have our own difficulties in the UP organisationally and administratively as a result of group formations. It would be most unfortunate if we allowed any group advantage to be made on this

issue. On all these grounds, therefore, I feel that the issue is one which should be resolved amicably in a spirit of mutual toleration and goodwill between the two communities. I realise there is a great deal of sentiment behind the move which has taken place. At the same time, *such matters can only be resolved peacefully if we take the willing consent of the Muslim community with us. There can be no question of resolving such disputes by force. In that case, the forces of law and order will have to maintain peace at all costs.* If, therefore, peaceful and persuasive methods are to be followed, any *unilateral action based on an attitude of aggression or coercion cannot be countenanced.* I am therefore quite convinced that the matter should not be made such a live issue and that the present inopportune controversies should be resolved by peaceful (methods) and *accomplished facts should not be allowed to stand in the way of an amicable settlement.* I hope your efforts in this direction will meet with success.

Your sincerely,
Vallabhbhai Patel

The Hon'ble Pandit G.B. Pant
Premier of United Provinces
Lucknow

Lucknow
13 January, 1950

My dear Sardar Sahib,

I do not know how to thank you for all the trouble you took in coming over to Lucknow almost immediately after your return from Bombay in response to my request without any previous notice. I was reluctant to approach you, especially because of the strain which you had already undergone in the course of your recent trip to Bombay...I have to thank you for your letter about the Ayodhya affair. It will be of great help to us here. *Efforts to set matters right in a peaceful manner are still continuing* and there is a reasonable chance of success, but things are still in a fluid state and it will be hazardous to say more at this stage.

With best regards.

Yours sincerely,
G.B. Pant

The Hon'ble Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

Government of India

New Delhi

(Sardar Patel's Correspondence; vol. IX, pp. 310-132)

Clearly, Sardar did *not* endorse "the move which has taken place" — the take-over of the Babri Masjid on December 23, 1949. He was against the use of force. He emphasised the need for Muslims' "willing consent" and deprecated "unilateral action." The take-over was on "accomplished fact" but there was need for settlement all the same.

Pantji did *not* endorse the take-over either. He was for "efforts to set matters right in a peaceful manner". The wrong yet remains to be set right. There is danger now of graver wrongs being perpetrated in the name of sentiment.

Courtesy: Mainstream

MANDIR-MASJID CONTRO- VERSY AND LONDON TIMES

by Arun Gupta

Prolog: The following is to be found in a VHP pamphlet: "Even Mahatma Gandhi who was one of the greatest secular personalities of India wrote in Navjeevan on 17 July 1937 - 'Mosques built after destroying temples are the sign of slavery and Muslims should hand over the same to Hindu society'."

I have been searching the complete works of Gandhi to verify this quote, so far unsuccessfully. The date given is not correct, and I am trying to stike lucky by guessing the occassion that might have prompted Gandhi to make that statement. The V.H.P. sheet says that there were riots in Ayodhya in 1934. Perhaps Gandhi made a comment then.

So, when exactly were the riots? I go to the University of Pittsburgh Library and look at the newspaper indices. I find the index to the times (of London), and look under subject heading India, 1934. There is an entry for riots in Ayodhya.

I ask the librarian whether they have the Times in microform. He looks, and tells me, in fact, they have it starting 17something. Great!

I take a little while to locate the film, and some more to figure out how the viewing machines work. There is a copying facility, you just press a button on the machine and get a photocopy of the

screenful you have brought up.

In the times, March 29, 1934, I find the following small paragraph:

Three persons were killed and 20 injured in a Hindu-Moslem riot at Ajodhya, near Fyzabad, UNITED PROVINCES. Three mosques were damaged and many houses burned to the ground by rioters-Reuter

(It doesn't sound like a fight over a temple, does it ?)

Anyway, my purpose is served. I look at Gandhi's works for this period; strike out! He was in Bihar aiding in relief efforts; an earthquake had hit there. He was too busy to comment about anything else.

Then I realize: I have the complete 19th century in my reach. I am Pitt, with no access to my computer, but I remember the VHP paper mentioning 1855. I look at the index for 1855-56 - paydirt!

What I find is in my subsequent posts. As I type these lines, I haven't read what I've found myself, I've just skimmed, and taken copies. As I type them in, I'll find out more.

At first glance, however: i) the posting may raise some tempers, ii) there was a fight in Ayodhya to be sure. Whether it was over the Ramjanmabhoomi temple is not clear.

Some comments: i) I wasn't very careful in noting the source the newspaper quoted or the date on the source. I have the date of newspaper, of course. ii) There were some references in the index that I didn't find in a quick scan of the microform. I didn't bother to do a careful search. iii) The whole job just took me 3 hours on a Sunday afternoon ! The modern library is a great invention !!

The first mention of "religious wars in Oudh" was in the Times, Oct. 2, 1855. (The newspaper quotes the Bombay Times, (overland survey) of August 29th.)

The English were just considering annexing the region at about this time.

"A religious war appears to be raging in Oude betwixt the Mahomedans and Hindoos, the King's troops having joined the former against the latter, without the slightest regard apparently to the wishes of authority. This state of matters will in all likelihood hasten on the crisis that has long been looked for. The Governor-

General has meanwhile given orders that not a man shall be moved from Cawnpore, a station formerly belonging to Oude, and close upon its western frontier. The force here stationed at present consists of two battalions of artillery, one regiment of cavalry, and three regiments of infantry, or 4,000 men in all. We have three regiments at Lucknow itself, and, were military operations to become necessary, a force abundantly sufficient for the occupation of the kingdom could be provided whenever required in a short space of time. The Governor-General is understood to have made up his mind on the subject of the indispensability of annexation. The reported interference with the affair of Oodipore has been explained away. It is not against the Rana that our troops were to take the field, but to assist him, at his own earnest and long-continued entreaties, to bring to order his own rebellious nobles.

[news from other parts of India deleted]

"In Oude events are taking place which point to the absorption at no distant time of that decrepit State into the Anglo-Indian empire, and to the completion of one more step towards realizing the prediction of the old Lion of the Punjab, that the map of India would soon be coloured red throughout. In the city of Fyzabad, the ancient capital of Oude, the Hindoos possess a fortified temple, dedicated to one of their gods, which is the resort of many thousands of the pilgrims annually. In dangerous proximity to this temple is a mosque, which for prudential reasons had long been abandoned by the Mussalmans and had fallen into ruins. Of late, however, they had been wishing to repair and use it, but were prevented by the strenuous opposition of the Hindoos. After various threatening appearances, the storm broke out on the 28th of July, when great number of Mahomedans, armed and prepared for resistance, flocked to the temple and profaned its sacred precincts. The Hindoos, 3,000 or 4,000 in number, attacked them fiercely, and a desperate engagement followed ending in the total route of the Mohamedans, of whom 113 were killed with a loss to the Hindoos of only 17. The excitement spread rapidly throughout the country. The measures of the Prime Minister were marked by firmness and temper, and all might have ended well but for the fanatical obstinacy of the King. Instead of an arbiter between the rival parties, at once and with equal hand redressing grievances and repressing violence, the debauched and worthless tyrant has, by the last accounts from Lucknow, announced his intention of

coming forward as a partisan and heading the faithful in a religious war. Troops were ordered to march upon Fyzabad, raze the temple to the ground, and erect a mosque upon its ruins. The British resident, Colonel Outram, threw the great weight of his personal influence and high character into the scale of justice and prudence, but without effect, and at present the interference of the British Government and the deposition of the King appear almost inevitable."

My Comments: i) The beneficiaries of the mess were the British, of course. The first paragraph:

>>hasten on the crisis that has long been looked for.

indicates that they were just waiting for an excuse. I would not be at all surprised if they didn't have a hand in the plot. Lends credence to the JNU contention that the whole thing is an invention by the British.

ii) If you believe the report, and that it is about the current site of dispute, then the mosque and temple existed side-by-side, the Hindus worshipped in the temple, and kept the Muslim from the mosque. It doesn't seem that Babri-masjid site itself was holy to the Hindus, does it?

The next reference I dug out is dated *The Times*, October 20 1885. (I did not check whom the newspaper was quoting)

"The anticipated disturbances in Oude consequent upon the desperate fight between the Hindoos and Mussalmans at Fyzabad have been avoided, for the present at least, by the firmness of the Prime Minister, backed by the weight and influence of Colonel Outram. While appearances were still threatening, and the intention of the King to head the troops of the faithful, confidently announced by the fanatical head of the Ulemah, had not been formally contradicted or revoked, the President kept the brigade continually under arms. Order was thus preserved in Lucknow, notwithstanding the exaggerated and exciting reports from Fyzabad, and the loud cries of "Deen, deen!" ("The faith, the faith!") incessantly raised by the fanatics. Before the firmness of the Resident even the chief of the Ulemah quailed. At a meeting of Ameers in the house of the Minister it appeared that the fear of annexation by the Company overcame the desire of vindicating the

honour of the faith. The arrival of an English officer — Major Banks — a short time before, with despatches for the Resident, had given rise to much alarm, and the Ameers had sense enough to see that violent opposition to the wishes of the British and an armed attack upon the Hindoos would render nearly certain the annexation which they believed to be contemplated. Hence all idea of resistance and violence was abandoned, and the attention of the meeting was directed by various influential speakers to the best means of averting the threatened evil. Bribery and agitation were, we are told, recommended and determined upon — the former to a large amount. The people were pacified partly by bribes and partly by representations of the power of the English Government and of certain ruin consequent upon offending them. The Moulvie, as we further learn, was despatched to Fyzabad with the King's firman, to effect a compromise. On his arrival he had an interview with the principal Brahmin of the temple. A long conference ensued, and at length an amicable arrangement was come to on the basis of an apology by the Moulvie on the part of the King for the insult offered to the temple and the payment of a sum of money for its purification. By the last accounts the large bodies of men collected on either side were quietly dispersing. During these proceedings the King is represented as having been in a continual state of stupefaction from opium or bhang. The Prime Minister and the English Resident, with his assistants, were the real masters of the situation."

Hmm, I should look up the proclamation annexing Oude (given in the Times in 1856) to see whether this unrest was part of the excuse given for the annexation.

Following October 20th, there are two references in the index to the Times that supposedly mention Oude: November 10 and 12. However, in the November 10 newspaper, in the page and column number named by the index, I find a letter, about an attack on a Col. McKenzie, and party, in Secunderabad. The newspaper had previously reported the attack, and had now come upon a first-hand account by one of the women wounded in the incident. Scanning the rest of the paper, I found nothing, as also with the Nov. 12 issue,

The next report I have is from The Times, Nov. 15, 1885.

INDIA
(FROM OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT.)
BOMBAY, OCT. 17.

“Though no event of much public importance has occurred since I last wrote, the state of affairs in Oude and the insurrection among the Santals continue to occasion much disquietude. I mentioned the apprehensions entertained that the celebration of the Mohurram at Lucknow might at the present juncture be attended with acts of violence, and even, perhaps, be the signal for a general rising of the Mahomedans against the Hindoos. These apprehensions were, happily, not realized, the festival having passed off, in the capital at least, with no more than the usual amount of turbulent demonstration. In the northern part of the kingdom, however, near Khyrabad, a riot took place between parties of the rival religionists, in which several lives were lost on either side, but finally the Mussallamans who were the aggressors, were severally beaten by their opponents. Meanwhile the rage and fanaticism of the more violent of the Mahomedan population was being concentrated at a place called Sehowlee,

[my copy is bad, the last 2 vowels could be oo or aa]

some 25 miles from Lucknow, where Moulvie named Ameen Ali, had established himself with the avowed intention of moving upon Fyzabad and destroying the Hindoo temple of Hunooman, the monkey god. It was, as you will remember, by an attack upon this temple some six weeks ago that these disturbances were initiated.

[Whatever the VHP says, the whole mess was not about a Ram-mandir.]

“The desperate and successful defence of their sanctuary by the Hindoos, which was no less exemplary than their subsequent moderation, kindled a flame which was smothered for a time, but not extinguished, by the exertions of the more thinking and temperate among the King’s counsellors. With the Hindoos, the outrage on their faith appealed at once to the courage of the Rajpoots and the zeal of the Brahmins and devotees. The Mahomedans, smarting under the consciousness of the defeat, and believing the report industriously circulated among them that the temple in question was erected on the site of a musjid, or mosque,

were wounded alike in their pride of race and in their devotion to the Prophet. For men thus roused a fitting leader soon appeared in the person of Ameen Ali. This man, the Moulvie, or high priest of a small town not far from Lucknow, immediately, on hearing of the fight at Fyzabad, proclaimed a crusade against the infidel, and declared his intention of placing himself at the head of such true followers of the Prophet as should resort to him, and avenging the death of the martyrs who had fallen in the attack on the temple. A considerable number of fanatics had joined his standard, and he appeared to be on the point of action, when, as if abandoning his plans, he suddenly repaired to Lucknow. There he was officially reported to be under a strict surveillance which would render his escape impossible. But it is believed that his supposed detention was part of a ruse to which the King and his Durbar were privy, devised in order to gain time more fully to rouse the passions of the Mahomedans, so as largely to increase the number of his adherents, and, perhaps, to extend the area of his projected rising. It at least appears certain that while the Moulvie remained in the capital, so far from soothing measures being adopted, stimulants of the most powerful and exciting character were unceasingly applied. Inflammatory pamphlets, like that I alluded to in my last,

[I have definitely missed an article. I will find it next Sunday. Meanwhile, interchange Hindus and Muslims, and Advani and Ali, and we have a repeat of history. At least, the Indian govt. wasn't as bad as the king. But who knows, after the next elections?]

were disseminated far and wide; the bazaars of Lucknow swarmed with active agents well primed with exaggerated and distorted versions of the affair at Fyzabad; and we are even told that a copy of the Koran, said to have been torn from the bosom of a martyr, clotted with his blood, spit upon and trampled under foot, was paraded for public view in the streets of the capital. And now, spite of the vigilance of the Durbar, Ameen Ali disappeared from Lucknow, the richer since his arrival both in money and men. Four days passed before his flight was made known to the King, who, professing the utmost surprise and indignation, ordered out troops and despatched them under the guidance of some of his principal generals and attendants to bring back the moulvie alive or dead. Ameen Ali, surrounded by his fanatical chiefs, received the summons of his Sovereign; but, far from obeying, ordered the two officers who were specially intrusted with the mission into a

confinement real or pretended. The leader of the troops, instead of attacking the Moulvie as a rebellious subject, treated with him upon terms of equality, and finally the following conditions were agreed to:- The troops were to return to Lucknow unmolested and unmolesting. For one month the Moulvie was to remain quiet. If within that month, dating from the 4th of September, the Durbar, in the name of the King, should order the demolition of the temple and the erection of a musjid on its site - an order which the general pledged himself to obtain - Ameen Ali would still remain quiet. But if the Durbar should fail in its duty to Allah and his Prophet, then the Moulvie was to be at liberty to carry his followers to Fyza-bad, and act as should seem to him advisable and advantageous to the faith.

[Either Supreme Court rule in our favour, or else...]

"If, as appears to be the case from the sources whence they are derived, these accounts are deserving of credit, we are warranted in entertaining the gravest apprehensions. The period of one month, limited by these extraordinary negotiations, has now expired, but some little time must yet elapse before we can learn whether the Durbar has redeemed the pledge of its general, or wheter its silence has set free for action the violence of the Moulvie and his followers. In either case the danger on an outbreak of the most perilous nature is imminent. The Hindoos would not be backward in meeting their enemy; they are brave, united and numerous, and the Mahomedans, in all probablility, would succumb. But the shock of a contest between the rival religions would be felt through every regiment in our service, and we cannot but wish to hear that an energetic interference in the affairs of this misgoverned country, even though it amount to annexation, has been undertaken by the Supreme Government.

"Some further particulars have reached us concerning the pamphlet which I alluded to at some length in my last, and have mentioned above. It was originally written (I believe in Persian) by a learned Moulvie, and translated into Hindoostanee (to use its own words) "in order to give the work a wider circulation among the faithful." It is printed at a native press at Cawnpore, and bears a Mahomedan date corresponding with June or July, 1852, though it is supposed to have been in print only a few months. When discovered at Lucknow, intelligence was promptly sent to the

magistrate of Cawnpore, by whom the press in question was searched and 300 copies of the pamphlet seized. This proceeding has materially impeded the circulation of the tract, but copies have been met with in Agra and in the Upper Provinces.

Leaving Oude behind us,.....”

The final article I have, is from the Times Dec. 31. 1855.

“We have received the following telegraphic despatch from Trieste:-

“TRIESTE, SATURDAY, DEC. 29.

“The steamer Bombay arrived here this morning.....On the 7th November there was a collision between the Hindoos and Mahomedans at Oude, in which 500 persons were slain. The Hindoos were victorious. The Mahomedan leader was killed.

Herat has been taken by the Persians....”

Thank you, those who stuck with me to the very end. Frankly, the whole episode makes me feel sick.

It seems to me that either the dispute was about the Babri Masjid site, in which case the temple was a Hanuman temple, and not a Ram temple, as the VHP would have us believe, or that the dispute was about another site, in which case one of the “evidences” of the VHP goes for a toss. In any case, there was no Hindu worship in the mosque.

If one takes seriously the National Public Radio report, then in 1949, the mosque was in Muslim hands, until idols of Ram appeared “mysteriously”, triggering off a Hindu attempt to take over the site.

Then it was the Muslims, and today the Hindus who are going into a frenzy over an imagined history, and a bunch of lies.

Really, it looks as though the Hindus and Muslims (in the above case, the Muslims, and today, the Hindus,) go out of their way to invent reasons to fight. The truth is to be found on neither side. The loss is to us all. And we never learn from history.

Courtesy: Arun Gupta USA

COMMUNAL HISTORY AND RAMA'S AYODHYA

by R.S. Sharma

It is difficult to define community and communalism. The community can be formed on the basis of ethnicity, profession, territorial habitaion, caste affiliation, and last but not the least on the basis of religious loyalties. When we think of communalism we think of religious communities. In India communalism is particularly seen in the light of the nature of relation between the Hindus and the Muslims, although in recent times the community organised on the basis of Sikh religion is being given an aggressive identity.

Basically religious beliefs, rituals and practices arise and develop in man's continuous struggle to overcome the obstacles presented by nature and equally so in Man's struggle against man on social issues. When people find it difficult to explain the difficulties presented by nature rationally they take to miraculous and superstitious explanations. These give rise to a plethora of gods and goddess as we have in *Rig Veda* where most divinities represented beneficent or malevolent forces of nature.

Again, when privileged groups or social classes find it difficult to maintain their power and privileges based on unequal share of the produce made available by peasants, artisans and others, they devise superstitious measures to collect taxes and tributes. Similarly when the mass of the people burdened with disabilities

fight for social justice they invoke the aid of the god who is credited with the creation of free and equal human beings. Thus religion is used and elaborated by both the privileged and the under privileged sections of society but more so by the former because the religious ideology of the privileged classes, as can be shown in the Indian situation, is turned into the dominant ideology which is ingrained in the minds of the people.

Religion played the same role in pre-capitalist societies in ancient and medieval times as various types of ideology play in capitalist and other societies in modern times. This is not to say that pre-capitalist states were theocratic. More often than not their policies were guided by the economic and political interests of the ruling class, and religion itself was used for this purpose. Thus the advent of such religions as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam helped to reform and reorganise society and economy on healthier lines. Social norms introduced by religions inspired people to form better social orders. But it has to be understood that every religion is the product of a certain type of social milieu. Thus the stress of Buddhism on the protection of all beings in general and of the cows in particular helped to promote agriculture at a time when iron tools came to be used in cultivation on a wide scale in the middle Gangetic plains from about 500 BC onwards. But Buddhism did not abolish the varna-based social distinctions that had emerged on account of the unequal distribution of the surplus product among various segments of society. The brahmanical religion took the wind out of the sails of Buddhism by focusing on the idea of the protection of the cow. Cleverly enough it also declared the life of the brahmins as sacrosanct as that of the cow, and this idea was embedded in the minds of the masses along with the idea of *punarjanma* or rebirth. Evidently the tenet of protecting the cow greatly promoted plough-based agriculture and animal husbandry in the tribal areas which were brought under brahmanical influence through conquest and land grants. But now with striking advance in agricultural technology cattle naturally take a back seat in priorities for protection. The sacred cow theory becomes a fetter on our economic growth. We have to feed either animals which are uneconomic and unproductive or human beings who are engaged in producing activities. This point has been emphasised by several leading economists. Thus we can see the interaction between the needs of the material life and the force of ideology. But this does

not detract from the positive role that Buddhism played in early history.

Similarly Christianity preached the gospel of equality between the slave and the master who were placed in the same category in the world of the god although it did nothing to abolish the real social differentiation that existed between the two in the Roman empire. Islam played a progressive role inasmuch as it welded the various Arab clans the tribe into a polity and substantially reduced the perpetual tribal feuds that plagued them. It also preached the tenet of equality between the rich and the poor and insisted that the poor should be supported by the rich by means of charities and taxes. But even Islam could not ignore social reality in the land of its birth and had to allow a maximum of four wives to its adherent. This was certainly better than the practice which permitted the clan chiefs to have 20 to 30 or more wives. Although Islam was opposed to idol worship it had to acknowledge the sanctity of the Kaba stone which was very well established in pre-Islamic Mecca. Religions therefore cannot be viewed in isolation from the social circumstances in which they originate.

From time to time when the older tenets of religion are found out of tune with the changing social and economic situations, movements are launched to reform religions and make them acceptable to their followers. The Arya Samaj, Prarthana Samaj and Brahmo Samaj are important examples in modern times. Of these the Arya Samaj movement seems to be the most important. It campaigned against the disabilities that were imposed on women and shudras who were debarred from Vedic studies, and especially on women who were made victims of child marriage and lifelong widowhood. It opposed idol worship and fought the evils that followed from it. The Arya Samajists did a lot of research and along with other reformists collected a large number of passages from ancient texts, especially from the Vedas, to find support for uplifting the position of women and lower orders in Hindu society. But now the zeal for reforming Hindu society shown by the earlier founders of the Samaj has been allowed to degenerate into anti-Muslim campaign and what it worse into an obsession that attributes uncritically all the wisdom and achievements of the world to the Vedas. Such propaganda cannot be swallowed by a historian who has to rely on facts and evidence. Unless this kind of vicious propaganda is countered with facts and figures, of which

there is no dearth in ancient texts, it will communalise the mind of literate people who in turn would infect the minds of the ordinary masses with communal virus. Such vicious religious propaganda coupled with other causes led to fanatical wars such as the Crusades and those between the Catholics and the Protestants in medieval times. At present such a propaganda poses a danger to the cause of national integration in India.

Under colonial domination, the nationalists of the Asia countries, which were civilised at a time when the colonialist countries were culturally backward, naturally took inspiration from the past. This happened in India, Arab countries, Turkey and elsewhere. Freedom fighters were not deterred by the glaring contrast between the feudal backwardness of their country and the advancing industrial capitalist society of their masters. In order to resist the rule of the colonialists they recalled the country's achievements in the past from which they drew confidence and inspiration. In India and elsewhere this task was performed by historians at some risk. In order to justify autocratic rule the British historians tried to prove that Indians were incapable of self-government and that they had been accustomed to despotic rule throughout their history. In reply the Indian historians tried to demonstrate the existence of several self-governing institutions at the local and even at the state level. The British historians in particular and western historians in general asserted that many elements of civilisation came to India from outside. In response to this Indian nationalist historians tried to prove that their institutions and elements of culture were purely indigenous. There is no doubt that a good deal of good research was done in response to the British denigration of India's past. The nationalist argument with India's past illumined many facets of its history, but it also threw up strong elements of revivalism.

Some leading historians of ancient India who tried to take a patriotic position included K.P. Jayaswal, H.C. Raychaudhuri and K.A. Nilakanta Sastri. Jayaswal was the first to provide solid evidence for the existence of republic in ancient India. Similarly Nilakanta Sastri was the first to underline the importance of self-governing institutions at the village and district levels under the Cholas and the Pallavas. Such researches certainly gave tongue to those who wanted to refute the tradition of despotic rule attributed to India by the British. But these writers sometimes over-

stepped the limits of scientific historical reconstruction. Jayaswal concluded his book on Hindu polity by the use of the phrase *janani janmabhūmishcha svargadapi gariyasi*, which means that the mother and the motherland are far more important than even the heaven. He gave a very inspired account of the ancient Indian political institutions. Nilakanta Sastri emphasised the cultural supremacy of the brahmanas, and sometimes considered the Hindus more tolerant than the Muslims, a cliché that has now become so popular with the communalists. Jayaswal, Nilakanta Sastri and others also stressed the alien character of the Shakas and others who came to India in post-Maurya times. K. Gopalachari praises the Satavahanas for having not allowed the Shakas to have obtained a permanent footing on the ground that they were foreigners. Thus this practice of calling foreign even those who settled permanently in India and became an integral part of its social, economic and cultural fabric is now used by some politicians, and the Muslims are repeatedly called foreigners by Hindu communalists.

A stronger element of Hindu revivalism appears in the writings of R.C. Majumdar, 1888-1980, who was a prolific writer and the General Editor of the multi-volume publication on the *History and Culture of the Indian People*, published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan from Bombay under the leadership of another revivalist, K.M. Munshi, and with the financial support of the Birlas. This series gave more volumes to what Majumdar considered to be periods of Hindu glory and domination and less volumes to those of what he considered to be periods of Muslims domination. He was a great protagonist of Greater India. He ignored the indigenous cultures of South-East Asia and highlighted its Hinduisation. Majumdar was a vocal exponent of the communalist approach to history. His historical outlook can be best expressed in his comments on the establishment of the Turkish Sultanate:

“So for the first time in Indian history, two distinct but important communities and cultures stood face to face, and India was permanently divided into two powerful units, each with marked individuality of its own, which did not prove amenable to a fusion or even any close permanent co-ordination” (HCIP, V, p. xxviii).

With this outlook Majumdar castigated those who referred to instances of goodwill and understanding between the Hindus and

the Muslims. He vehemently rejected the whole idea of the joint rule of the Hindu and Muslim rulers. To quote him:

"Eminent Hindu political leaders even went so far as to proclaim that the Hindus were not at all a subject race during the Muslim rule. These absurd notions, which would have been laughed at by Indian leaders at the beginning of the nineteenth century, passed current as history owing to the exigencies of the political complications at the end of that century" (Ibid., p. xxix).

Further, according to Majumdar, the end of Hindu ruling dynasties was followed by almost wholesale destruction of temples and monasteries by the Muslim invaders and rulers who very nearly extinguished the Hindu culture by destroying the source which fed and nourished it. Its further growth was arrested and an almost impenetrable gloom settled over it. He speaks of the "sudden halt" of the development of Hindu culture; the lamp of the past glory and culture kept burning only in Mithila in the north and Vijayanagara in the south (Ibid., xxxi).

Majumdar's view that under the Sultanate the Hindus viewed the invaders from Central Asia in purely religious or Islamic terms is without any foundation. The Indians perceived the Central Asians and their rule as the domination of an ethnic, social and cultural community. That is why the Gahadavala inscriptions speak of *tarushkandanda* or of a tax imposed upon the people to fight the Turks. In the regional languages we frequently come across the term *turuk* and do not hear of a people whose difference in religion is emphasized. The terms Muslim and Islamic hardly occur. This is true of both Indo-Aryan as well as Dravidian languages. The southerners also often perceive the armies sent by the Sultans as Turk. Majumdar speaks of the glowing spark of Hindu culture in Mithila, but its great poet Vidyapati almost invariably uses the term *turuk* in describing the Muslims of Mithila. Therefore the medieval Hindu perception of the Central Asian invaders is far more rational than that of the modern Majumdar which is out and out communal.

That 'Islam' almost extinguished the Hindu culture is another falsification of history. If we view the process of growth and synthesis in Indian culture in response to internal and external facts, it certainly made great strides in medieval times. The importance of social and religious reform movements is stressed by

Majumdar himself. We will not dilate on the growth of the Indo-Islamic art, architecture, literature, etc., with which students of history are so familiar. But even if we confine ourselves to the progress of brahmanical culture and Sanskrit learning, and Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages, unquestionably the medieval age was a great formative period in Indian history. It was during the period of sultans and Mughal kings that every important region of India including Bengal came to develop its cultural personality and thus contributed to the mosaic of Indian culture. In fact the medieval period was the most important period in the development of regional languages and literature. Majumdar thinks that Hindu culture continued in only two islands, Mithila in the north and Vijayanagara in the south. But the largest number of manuscripts in Sanskrit have been recovered from the 'Muslims' ruled state of Kashmir, whose pandits acquired equal proficiency in Persian and Sanskrit. If it is argued that all the Buddhist manuscripts in the Nalanda area were destroyed by the Muslims, then why are Jain manuscripts preserved so well in Gujarat in the centuries when the local Sultans ruled there. Most manuscripts, on the basis of which ancient Indian heritage has been reconstructed, were written and preserved under the rule of the Sultans and Mughals, particularly in Kashmir, western and southern India, and in Mithila and eastern India. What is called modern "Hindu renaissance" would have been impossible without medieval manuscripts.

Under the Turkish Sultans and Mughals emperors, apart from original works, numerous scholarly commentaries were written not only on the epics, *kavyas*, Dharmasutras and Smritis but also on the Vedic texts including the Shrautasutras and Grihyasutras, philosophy, logic, grammar, astronomy, mathematics, etc. In the process of commenting on old texts the commentators made substantial original contribution. It may be added that the Navyanyaya school of logic, for which India is justly famous, developed not only in Mithila but also in Bengal under the Sultans. The legal commentators took due notice of the changes which had occurred in society and tried to adjust the provisions of the Dharmashastras accordingly. Of course India did not make the same kind of social and economic progress in late medieval times as typifies Western Europe, but that is true of almost the whole of Asia of which only a part was ruled by the Islamic rulers. That the

Muslim rule in India should be singled out for condemnation can be explained only on communal grounds.

Some important Indian historians were caught in the communal trap laid by British historians. In keeping with the colonialist policy of exploiting the religious sentiments of the Hindus against the Muslims during the nineteenth century, British historians and archaeologists charged the Muslim rulers with a uniform, uninterrupted record of destruction of Hindu temples and persecution of the Hindus so that in contrast British rule might appear in a favourable light. The best example of British communal historiography appears in the Preface by H.M. Elliot, Secretary to the Government of India, to Volume I of his *Bibliographical Index to the Historians of Muhammedan India*, which was published from Calcuttain 1849. Here Elliot, who later became famous along with Dawson as the author of eight-volume *History of India as Told by Its Historians* covering the rule of the sultans and Mughal emperors, denounces the Muslim rulers in most severe terms. He bewails that even the Muslim kings created by the British are sunk in sloth and debauchery and emulate "the vices of a Calligula or a Commodus". According to him, Muslim rulers prohibited Hindu processions, worship, etc, mutilated idols, razed temples, forcibly converted people, and committed "murders, massacres, confiscations", etc. He cites instances for each one of these intolerant actions in the body of volume I. The picture presented by Elliot is almost one-sided and unabashedly motivated. This is because Elliot fervently hopes that once his volume is published, the British would no longer hear "bombastic Baboos, enjoying under our Government the highest degree of personal liberty,...rant about patriotism and the degradation of their present position". He hopes that "in a very short time" they would not "sigh" for the return of "the days of that dark period". Elliot is however convinced of Indians "not even attempting a national independence" because of deficiencies in their physical and moral organisation which can be made up neither by diet not by education.

Colonialist archaeologists also echo the sentiments of Elliot. Thus speaking of the monuments of Ayodhya in 1891. A. Fuhrer uncritically adopts some motivated local tradition that the three Ayodhya temples including the one at Janmasthan or the birth-place were destroyed by the Musalmans (The *Monumental Antiquities and Inscriptions in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*,

Archaeological survey of India, Allahabad, 1891, p. 297). He adds that "Most modern brahmanical and Jain temples occupy the sites of more ancient temples that were destroyed by the Musalmans" (Ibid., pp. 296-97). There is no basis for such sweeping statements, which were made when the memories of the 'Mutiny' were fresh and the echoes of the anti-British Wahabi movement had not died out. It seems that W.W. Hunter's homilies for helping the Muslims (*Indian Musalmans*, 1870) were confined to the administrators and had not as yet affected their academic counterparts.

Evidently the nineteenth century colonialist historians and archaeologist succeeded in injecting a heavy dose of communalism in Indian historians. It is because of this that leading historians from Bengal welcomed the establishment of British rule in eastern India as Blessing. Though the British colonial rule proved oppressive to both the Hindus and the Muslims alike such a great historians as Jadunath Sarkar looked upon it as an act of deliverance. It is most unfortunate that his ideas were accepted and taken to absurd lengths by historians like A.L. Srivastava who attributed the creation of Pakistan to the Arab invasion of Sindh in 712. It is very well known that the Arab invsion of Sindh was a non-starter in the history of India. Though the Arabs disseminated some elements of Indian culture in the West, yet their four-century rule in Sindh did not make any real impact on Indian polity, culture and society.

Since the mind of some of the leading educationists and historians of Bengal worked on communal lines they could not think of an integrated department of history in which all periods and aspects of history could be taught. It was obviously to boost the glories on ancient India that for the first time a separate department of Ancient Indian History and Culture was set up in the country in Calcutta University. Similarly a department of Islamic history was set up to match the study of Hindu history. It is significant that papers which were recommended for the study of Indian history in Calcutta University were devoted to Rajput history, Maratha history and Sikh history. The obvious idea was to highlight the activities of those communities which fought against the oppressive rule of the Mughals in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Accordingly monographs were written on each one of these peoples. On the other hand despite numerous examples of revolt against the British colonial rule in Bengal itself no

such courses were framed. It will therefore appear that the idea of regarding the Muslims as foreigners, even though they had permanently settled in the country and become a part of its composite culture, was fostered and legitimatisd by the organisation of historical studies on communal lines. Calcutta provided the model for historical and other studies in the universities that were set up in Bengal, Bihar and other adjacent areas. Once a department of Ancient Indian History and Cultural was set up in Calcutta, in course of time it was established in Banaras and other universities. There is no doubt that individual members of these departments have done valuable research work. But at the same time many of them turned out to be bastions of obscurantism and Hindu communalism and they tried to emphasise the antiquity and the uniqueness of all that happened in ancient India and tried to prove implicitly that Hinduism was intrinsically superior to Islam and other religions.

In the present situation revivalist ideas are being used and bolstered by a few communal-minded writers. It is asserted that all that has been good and great in the world in the past originated in India and spread from here to other parts of the world. But historians who have to base themselves on solid evidence cannot subscribe to such views. Whether it is the use of various types of metals and coins or whether it is the use of writing and similar elements of civilisation we have to examine the evidence carefully. It will be seen that all ultra revivalist views are put forward by such historians as are committed to Hindu communalist and Islamic fundamentalist ideas.

The communal problem in India is basically seen as the problem of relation between the Hindus and the Muslims. This problem cannot be solved by glossing over the acts of vandalism and oppression perpetrated by the rulers professing one religion over the rulers and ruled professing another religion. In history it has been a privilege of the ruling classes, whatever might be their religion, to plunder and oppress their subjects and their enemies and to distribute the booty, preferably among the members of the upper sections of the ruling class. If the Islamic chiefs and princes plundered the Hindu temples historians cannot generate good will by ignoring this fact. But the causes of such plunders have to be analysed and explained, as has been done in the case of the plunders of Mahmud of Ghazni by Mohammad Habib in his book

Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni. Even a lay man could see that although all Hindu temples may not have been as rich as those of Somanath and Tirupati, in general the temples were relatively far wealthier than the mosques. In the early eleventh century the Somanath temples had 500 devadasis, 300 barbers and numerous priests. It was endowed with as many as 10,000 villages. The very architecture of the mosque leaves no room for storage of wealth. It is an open structure meant for prayers. It is because of the accumulation of wealth in the temples that some Hindu rulers appointed special officers for destroying the idols made of precious metals and seizing wealth for the treasure. Such was the case with Harsha who ruled in Kashmir in the end of the eleventh century, and had appointed an officer whose function was concerned with that of uprooting the idols (*devotpatana*). The appointment of such officers and the measures recommended in the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya to raise money from the credulous people by superstitious devices will dispel the idea that members of the Hindu ruling class have been consistently tolerant towards their subjects. On the basis of Patanjali's *Mahabhashya* or commentary written around 150 B.C. on Panini's famous grammar *Ashtadhyayi* of about 400 BC, we can say that the Mauryas melted the metal image of the idols to fill their coffers. Therefore in their desperate need for money the Maurya and other rulers did not spare even the sanctity of religious idols.

Certainly there is much to emulate and admire in what Ashoka did, but he hit the pocket of brahmins. Pushyamitra Shunga, who put an end to the remnants of the Maurya power and set up a brahmana dynasty around the end of the second century BC, appears as a great persecutor of Buddhists in the *Divyavadana*, a text of about the second-third century AD. He marched out with a four fold army destroying stupas, burning monasteries and killing the monks, as far as Shakala or modern Sialkot. At Sialkot he announced that whoever would bring him the head of a Buddhist monk would get a reward of 100 gold coins for it. This may have been an exaggeration because Buddhist stupas were also built during the Shunga rule, but the antagonism between Pushyamitra Shunga and the monks cannot be denied. We also learn that Shashanka, a Shaivite ruler of Gauda in West Bengal, cut out the Bodhi *peepul* tree under which Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment. In the seventh century his contemporary Harsha is

considered to be a tolerant ruler, but he jailed and executed the brahmanas who were charged with the conspiracy of having burned the tower that had been raised in honour of the Buddha in the assembly at Kannauj. In early medieval times in south India we hear of open hostilities between the Jains and the Shaivites, and according to tradition as many as 8,000 Jains were impaled at stake; impalement is also represented in temple art.

Various pieces of sculpture from early medieval Bihar clearly suggest open, violent confrontation between the Buddhist and the followers of the brahmanical religion. Buddhist divinities including Aparajita are found trampling the Shaivite divinities. Theologically the conflict is reflected in the crusade launched by Shankara on a wide scale against Buddhism. It would be wrong to think that the Buddhists were wiped out from this country only by ideological propaganda against them. They seem to have been persecuted. This left them with only two options. Either they had to flee to other countries or had to accept Islam to get rid of the social disabilities under which they lived. It is significant that in India Islam as a religion got a foothold in only those areas which formed strongholds of Buddhism. This seems to have been true of Kashmir, the North-west Frontier region, Punjab and Sindh. Similarly Muslim population is found in Nalanda (Bihar Shariff) area, Bhagalpur (Champanagar) area and Bangladesh where Buddhists were to be found in good numbers. Why the Buddhists practically disappeared from India cannot be explained only on the basis of the internal transformation of their religion but has to be related to the attitude of the medieval Hindu ruling classes and religious leaders towards them. The Jains were also persecuted. Several stone images of Jain divinities in Lucknow museum are found in a disfigured state. This was evidently done by some Vaishnavites to give the images a Vaishnavite look. The Jains reconciled themselves to the dominant brahmanical way of life by substantially modifying their rituals and social norms. It is wrong to insist that the Hindus have been an integrated community. That the ranks of the Hindu ruling class lacked solidarity and were riven with contradictions is admitted by R.C. Majumdar, the great revivalist, anti-Muslim historian. He finds it "very painful" that when a Hindu state was invaded by Muslims, a neighbouring Hindu ruler seized the opportunity to invade it from the rear (*History and Culture of Indian People*, Vol. V, Preface, pp. xiv-xvi).

“So little was the Muslim danger thought of even in the region immediately to the south of the Vindhya that the powerful Yadava rulers of the Deccan attacked from the south the Chaulukyas of Gujarat at the very moment when they were engaged in a life and death struggle with the Muslim invaders from the north” (Ibid., p. xiv).

One of the glaring examples of sectarian intolerance among the Hindu religious leaders can be cited from the medieval history of Ayodhya. So long as Aurangzeb ruled, his strong hand kept things in Ayodhya under check. But after his death in 1707 we witness an open, violent confrontation between the organised bands of the Shaiva Samnyasis and those of the Vaishnava Vairagis. The bone of contention between the two was the possession of religious places and income from the pilgrims' fees and gifts. We may reproduce a quotation from a text of 1804-5 to describe the violent conflict that raged between the two sects:

“At that time when the occasion of Rama's birth came, people went to Kosalapur and assembled there — who can describe the enormous crowd? At that place there was an unlimited (number of) strong warriors in *Samnyasi garb*, carrying weapons, with matted hair and ashes smeared on every limb — an unlimited army of soldiers taking pleasure in battle. Fighting with the *vairagis* broke out. This fight was of no avail (to the *vairagi*), owing to lack of strategy... They made a mistake by going there towards them; the *vairagi garb* became a source of misery. All people dressed in *vairagi garb* fled — through fear of them (scil. [namely] *samnyasis*) Avadhpur was abandoned. Wherever they (scil. [namely] *samnyasis*) happened to find people in *vairagi garb*, there they struck great fear into them. Through fear of them everyone was frightened, and wherever they could they took shelter in a secret place and hid themselves. They changed their dress and hid their sectarian markings — no one showed his proper identity” (Quoted from *Shrimaharajacharita* of Raghunathaprasada, pp. 42f in Hans Bakker, *Ayodhya*, Gornington, 1986, p. 149).

The passage given above is sufficient to expose the myth of tolerance practised by medieval Hindu religious leaders.

We may note that centuries of indoctrination have not created an integrated Hindu community. Even now the so-called scheduled castes eat the carrion of animals including cows and

bury their dead in some cases. It is precisely this category of the depressed classes labelled Harijans by Mahatma Gandhi whose houses are razed to the ground and family members burnt to death in some villages of Bihar and elsewhere primarily for economic reasons. Very recently when a large number of scheduled caste people decided to embrace Christianity in the south it caused great hue and cry among the so-called custodians of Hinduism.

Similarly in spite of the violent propaganda of the fundamentalists the Muslims cannot be regarded as an integrated community. The bloody conflicts between the Shias and Sunnis are well-known in India and elsewhere, not to speak of the long drawn-out bloody confrontation between Iran and Iraq. In India, many higher and well-to-do Muslim families, like their Hindu counterparts, look down with utter contempt upon members belonging to the weaver-grocer and the other so-called lower order communities of the Muslims. The reports of the riot enquiry commissions show that precisely members of such lower communities suffer and are killed in large numbers in riots both among the Hindus and the Muslims.

R.C. Majumdar regards the Muslims as an integrated religious community locked in perpetual antagonism with the Hindus. The spectre of Mahmud of Ghazni and Timur haunts him historically. As he states:

“Never since the days of Sultan Mahmud, four hundred years before, had blood (as in Timur's time). Everything that unbridled lust and unchecked barbarism could conceive was perpetrated by his fanatic myrmidons, and the climax was reached in the cold-blood massacre of one hundred thousand Hindu prisoners outside the plains of Delhi,- an event unparalleled in the history of the world” (HCIP, VI, Preface, p. xxiv).

Such statements completely ignore the havoc that Mahmud of Ghazni, Muhammad of Ghor and Timur of Samarkand caused to the Muslim masses and rulers of Central Asia. Their main objective was to plunder other countries and enrich their own coffers and capital. When Mahmud Ghazni and Muhammad of Ghor invaded India, there was practically no Muslim population in the areas they invaded. But almost the whole of Central Asia had been converted to Islam by the tenth and eleventh centuries, and yet these co-religionists were not spared by the plunderers. The

depredations perpetrated by them on the Muslims of Central Asia were neither less in scale nor in intensity than what we find in the case of the Hindus in northern India. In history plunderers are generally impartial to their victims in respect of the booty captured by them. Similarly Timur inflicted a greater devastation in Central Asia on its Muslim population than what he did in India. By 1398-99 India had a considerable Muslim population, but even then the non-Muslims population outnumbered them. Thus although the invasions of Timur were primarily directed against the Muslim rulers, the ruled who fell victims to his attack naturally consisted of the Hindus.

Numerous instances can be multiplied to show that when it involved power and self members of both the Hindu and Muslims ruling classes proved to be equally ferocious. On the other hand there are also many instances of tolerance on the part of both the Hindu and Muslims rulers, not to speak of that existing between the ordinary masses of both the communities. Therefore it would be wrong to paint the Muslim rulers as cruel and the Hindu rulers as kind and tolerant. But unfortunately such images are being built by Hindu communalists, and Muslim fundamentalists try to catch up with them. An important instance of communal propaganda is found in the 30 murals very recently depicted on the walls of Babri Masjid in which an idol of Rama has been forcibly instituted. The statue of the district judge whose decision enabled the communalists to take possession of Babri Masjid was enthusiastically put up at the entrance to the mosque. Since then the communalists seem to be more concerned with lionising the judge than with worshipping Rama. Rama has been made a camouflage to cover their political prejudices of the worst kind. A mural represents soldiers of Babar destroying the fictitious temple of Rama and slaughtering the Hindus. This mural is introduced by a written label which states that the soldiers of Babar killed 75,000 Hindus in the course of their attack on the temple of Rama at Ayodhya and built Babri Masjid with their blood which served as mortar. Such an inflammable falsehood has been flashed to fan communal feelings. This propaganda is as false as the view that the temple of Rama was demolished by Babar and the Babari Masjid was built in its place by him.

R.C. Singh, a former Director of the Archaeology Department of Uttar Pradesh, explored as many as 17 sites in Ayodhya

and also excavated two sites known as Rinmochanghat and Gup-targhat. According to him at most places signs of habitation are not earlier than the second century BC; only at two places namely Maniparvat and Sugrivaparvat they could be attributed to Maurya times. B.B. Lal, a former Director General of Archaeology, Government of India, excavated several sites in Ayodhya for three seasons, and this excavation shows that Ayodhya was not settled on any scale until the seventh century BC. Even the seventh century BC seems to be early, for the date of the Northern Block Polished Ware cannot be pushed back to that time easily. It must be remembered that we have no carbon dates for the earliest period of settlement in Ayodhya. A more reliable date for early habitation is provided by the presence of some terracotta figures, one of them being a Jain figure, which belong to Maurya times or the end of the fourth and the beginning of the third century BC. However most sites excavated in the alluvial soil of the middle Gangetic zone do not seem to have been inhabited adequately until the seventh-sixth century BC. Those who believe in the historicity of Rama fix his date around 2000 BC. This is done on the basis that Rama, Dasharathi lived nearly 65 generations before the time of Bharata War. It is generally accepted that the Bharata War took place around 1000 BC. We therefore face a gap of more than 1000 years between the settlement of Ayodhya on any scale and the age of Rama in Ayodhya. It is because of this difficulty that some scholars try to locate Ayodhya in Afghanistan.

The earliest reference to Ayodhya in the *Atharva Veda* (X. 2.31-33), a text of about 1000-800 BC, shows it to be a mythical city. It is described as the city of gods, consisting of eight circles and nine entrances, surrounded by light on all sides. Ayodhya mentioned in the *Samyutta Nikaya* (Nalanda edn, Vol. III, p. 358; Vol. IV, p. 162 with fn. 1), a Buddhist Pali text of about 300 BC, is located on the Ganga river, which certainly has nothing to do with Ayodhya on the bank of the Saryu in Faizabad district. The early Pali texts do not support the view that Ganga is used in a general sense for all the rivers including the Saryu. They specify several rivers including the Mahi (Gandak) and Neranjara (Phalgu) whose banks were visited by the Buddha. They also mention the Sarabhu or Saryu but in a context which has nothing to do with Ayodhya. On the basis of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, M.C. Joshi, additional director general, Archaeological Survey of India, locates Ayodhya at

some distance from the Saryu. The Uttarakanda of Valmiki's *Ramayana* belongs to the early Christian centuries and places Ayodhya *adhy-ardha-yojanam* (110.1) away from the Saryu. This Sanskrit term also occurs in Balakanda (22.11) and means six kosas or twelve miles according to the commentators who take it as $1\frac{1}{2}$ (one & half) *yojana*. This again creates confusion because the present Ayodhya is situated on the Saryu. The river flows eastward and is known as the Ghaghara in its eastward course in Balia in Saran districts; it joins the Ganga in Saran district. The Saryu keeps on changing its course, because of which some scholars like to identify Khairadih in Balia district with Ayodhya. The evidence of the seventh century Chinese pilgrim Hsuan Tsang about the location of Ayodhya also creates difficulties. According to him Ayodhya lay at a distance of 600 *li* (nearly 192 km.) to the east-southeast of Kannauj and was situated about one and a half km. south of the Ganga. In placing Ayodhya almost on the Ganga the Chinese traveller probably confirms the earliest Buddhist tradition about its location.

According to Hsuan Tsang the number of the Buddhist monks in the country of Ayodhya was 3,000, and that of the heretics or non-Buddhists was small. Speaking of the capital of the kingdom of Ayodhya he speaks of an old monastery which had been a centre of Buddhist teachings for long (*Si-Yu-Ki*, Vol. I, London, 1906, pp. 224-25). This suggests the dominance of Buddhism at Ayodhya in the seventh century. Hsuan Tsang however states that there were about 100 monasteries and 10 Deva (brahmanical or other) temples in the country of Ayodhya. Earlier in the fifth century AD Fa-hsian speaks of Buddha's twig tooth-brush (*dantakashtha*) growing up to a height of seven cubits at Saket. Although the brahmanas destroyed the tree it again grew up on the same spot (James Legge, tr. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, Oxford, 1886, pp. 54-55). Ayodhya is also traditionally known as the birth place of several Jain *tirthankaras* or religious teachers, and is considered a place of pilgrimage by the Jains. The Jain tradition makes it the capital of the Kosala kingdom, but its exact location is not given. It is only from the Gupta period onwards that the present-day Ayodhya came to be associated with the legendary Ayodhya of Rama, when he came to be regarded as an incarnation of Vishnu.

So far no seals or coins specifically mentioning Ayodhya have been found in it. We have a variety of coins known as Ayodhya coins, belonging to the end of the second century BC and

to the first and second centuries AD, but they do not contain the name Ayodhya. For example the identity of Ujjaini, Tripuri, Eran, Kaushambi, Kapilavastu, Varanasi, Vaishali, Nalanda, etc., has been established on the basis of either seals or coins. An inscription of about the first century AD found in Ayodhya mentions a descendant of Pushyamitra Shunga, but coins and inscriptions are of no avail in fixing the identity of Rama Dasharathi's Ayodhya. It is really disappointing that despite adequate excavation and exploration we cannot confidently identify any pre-Gupta association of Rama with the present Ayodhya.

Although the story of Rama has been popularised in the Hindi speaking belt by the *Ramacharitamanas*, this Awadhi epic is based on the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana* of Valmiki. The original Rama epic is not a homogeneous composition. Originally it consisted of 6,000 verses in *shloka* metre which were later raised to 12,000 and finally to 24,000. A critical study of the text on the basis of contents shows that it has passed through four stages, and the last stratum is ascribed to the twelfth century AD; its earliest stratum might belong to 400 BC or so. Therefore several stages of cultural and social evolution are covered by the Rama story. However the epic is important because it sets certain norms for the orderly functioning of a class-divided, patriarchal and state-based society. It teaches that the son must obey the father, the younger brother the elder brother, and the wife the husband. It insists that the duties assigned to all the varnas must be performed by them, and, whenever necessary, deviation from the varna/jati functions should be ruthlessly punished. Finally it enjoins everybody including the king to carry out the dictates of dharma, which was prescribed to uphold the existence of the state, varnas and patriarchy. Vibhishana got converted to this kind of ideology called dharma at the cost of loyalty to his clan and family, which was the most important tie to keep members of the kin-based society together. Social and cultural norms similar to those prescribed by Valmiki also appear in Jain, Buddhist and other brahmanical epics and folk stories. This genre of literature is certainly important for understanding norms, stages and processes in the social and cultural history of India, but only in a few cases the historicity of the princes and the other great personalities mentioned in them can be established through corroborative evidence from archaeology, inscriptions, sculptural pieces and other sources. Unfortunately we have nothing so far of

this type which can prove the historicity of Rama Dasharathi in Ayodhya about 2,000 BC to 1800 BC, a period to which he is assigned by some scholars working on the Puranic traditions.

If we go by the history of Hindu belief, Ayodhya seems to have emerged as a place of religious pilgrimage in medieval times. Although chapter 85 of the *Vishnu Smriti* lists as many as fifty-two places of pilgrimage including towns, lakes, rivers, mountains, etc., it does not include Ayodhya in this list. It is significant that this Smriti, which is attributed to c. AD 300, contains the earliest list of *tirthas*. At present no temple of Rama is found in any part of Uttar Pradesh until the sixteenth century. We have a large number of *tirthas* or places of pilgrimage whose merits are extolled in the *tirtha* sections of the Puranas. But the *tirtha-mahatmya* section appears in the Puranas from the sixth century onwards. The *tirthas* really were set up on the ruins of ancient towns which were once centres of crafts, commerce and other urban activities. When urbanism declined the *tirthas* were instituted to preserve the ancient memories of the towns.

Bhatta Lakshmidhara, the Gahadavala minister, who wrote *Tirthavivechakanda* as a part of his book *Krityakalpataru* in the eleventh century and was evidently well acquainted with eastern Uttar Pradesh, surveys the well known brahmanical *tirthas* of his time, but significantly enough he neither mentions Ayodhya nor the birthplace of Rama; this absence of reference is particularly noted by Bakker (op. cit., pt. I, p. 45). It is therefore clear that Ayodhya has not been a *tirtha* as far more important than that of Ayodhya came to be regarded as one of the seven important places of pilgrimage. Tulsidas began writing the *Ramacharitmanas* at Avadhपुरी, but he does not mention it as a place of pilgrimage. In a verse (*chaupai*) he states that he began composing the manuscript at *Avadhपुरी*, which could have been easily changed into *Awadhtirtha* without doing any damage to the metrical arrangement. He clearly specifies the place and the time when he wrote his famous *Ramacharitmanas*:

nawami bhaumvar madhumas,
Avadhपुरी yah charit prakasa
jehi din Ramjanam sruti gavanhi
tirtha sakal tahin chali avanhi (Balakanda)

The verses quoted above would show that he launched his manuscript on Tuesday, the ninth day of the second half of Chaitra. He adds that whoever sings the story of the birth of Rama on that day obtains the merit accruing from his visit to all places of pilgrimage automatically, but he does not declare Avadhपुरी a place of pilgrimage. He stresses the importance of the day when he started the book and not that of the place where he wrote. In the *Ramacharitamānas* of Tulsidas Ayodhya neither appears as a place with a temple of Rama nor as a place of pilgrimage for the Hindus. On the other hand Prayag is called the king of all the places of pilgrimage, i.e. *tirath-raj*.

To quote Tulsidas further:

suni samujanhi jan mudita man

majjanhi ati anuraga

lahanhi chari phal achhat tanu

tirathraj Prayag (Ibid.)

According to Tulsidas people listen to religious stories and teachings in a happy mood and take bath with great devotion. They attain all the four goals in this life at Prayag, which heads all the places of pilgrimage.

As far as I know there is not a shred of historical evidence to support the view of those who assert that a temple of Rama was built in Ayodhya in the eleventh-twelfth centuries. Explorations and excavations do not attest any such statement. By the sixth century AD or so Rama, Sita and Lakshman appear in terracotta in Hamirpur district. We have also a panel comprising three divinities on the outer wall of the Dashavatara temple in Jhansi district. Stucco images of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana also appear at Aphasad in Nawada district in Bihar around the seventh century AD. The *Ramayana* panel in terracotta of about the same has been also found in Buxar.

Three temples exclusively dedicated to Rama are historically attested in the twelfth century AD in Madhya Pradesh (Bakker, *Ayodhya*, pt. 1, pp. 84-85). But in Uttar Pradesh we hear neither of a Rama temple nor of any Rama Janmabhumi temple until the end of the sixteenth century. The earliest Rama temple, Kanakabhavan or Kanakamandapa, belongs to the seventeenth century. The *Shri-*

maharajacharita, a text written in Avadhi dialect in AD 1804-05, states that in second half of eighteenth century Kanakabhavana and Ratnasimhasana flourished as centres of the Rasika sect (Ibid., 1, p. 143). This is perhaps the earliest reference to the existence of Kanakabhavana, and Kanakamandira is the earliest temple of Sita in Janakpur in Nepal terai. Both Kanakabhavana and Kanakamandira were evidently built under the Mughal rule in the seventeenth century, and are alike in design and architecture. The date seventeenth century assigned to these two temples seem to be very probable because it was only during this period that the cult of Rama became significant because of the earlier preachings of Ramananda in the fifteenth century and those of his disciples such as Popa, Kabir, Raidas, Malukadas, Dadu, etc, in later times. During the eighteenth century the Hindu and Muslim diwans of the Nawab of Awadh, who was a Shia, supported Hindu temples and sacred shrines in Ayodhya, but any Rama temple is not specifically mentioned.

Any writer, to whatever period he might belong, is not bound to notice or reflect in his writings all that happens in his time. But the context in which he writes his text is extremely important. Tulsidas, who was so devoted to Rama and who started writing his *magnum opus* at Ayodhya, was certainly expected to refer to Rama temple, if it existed there, or to Ayodhya being a tirtha if it was really so in his time on account of its association with Rama.

Some Jain and Shaiva temples may have existed in Ayodhya. The sect of Shaivism appeared much earlier in Ayodhya than that of Vaishnavism with which Rama came to be widely associated in medieval times. The device of cock associated with Karttikeya, the son of shiva, appears on the Ayodhya coins of the first and second centuries AD. A deep study of the *Ayodhya Mahatmya*, attributed to the period from the twelfth to the seventeenth century, shows that even after the emergence of Vishnu worship at Ayodhya the Shaivite worship continued to dominate the place till late medieval times. The *Mahatmya* mentions eleven Vaishnavite sanctuaries, but the Shaiva and Shakta sanctuaries together with the Tantric sacred shrines (*pithas*) are almost double that number (Hans Bakker, *Ayodhya*, op. cit., pt. III, pp. 26-27). Therefore it is wrong to suggest that the pillars used in the mosque belonged to a "Vishnu" temple (Ibid, pt. I, p. 44). They may as well have belonged to a Shaiva temple. The comprehensive and well-researched book of

Bakker on Ayodhya does not show that there was a Rama temple. He however relies on *Janmabhumi ka Raktranjit Itihas* or the Blood-stained History of the Birthplace, Ayodhya, 1969, written by Ram Raksha Tripathi, and is sometimes misled about the dispute relating to the Babri Mosque (*Ayodhya*, Gornignon, 1986, pt. II, pp. 146-49).

The pillars used in the construction of Babri Masjid may have belonged to some Shiva or Jain Temple. The use of the older material in the construction of mosque is noticeable elsewhere also, for example, in the structures near Kutub Minar. But those who have some idea of the archaeological sequence in structures in ancient India could cite many instances of the material from earlier buildings being used in the construction of the later ones; excavations show that numerous Kushan bricks were used in Gupta structures. In fact this is a widespread practice in different periods not only in India but also in other countries. However in the case of Babri Masjid there is nothing to show that a Rama temple was demolished and a mosque raised in its place. Muslim population in Ayodhya and Faizabad areas appeared around the fourteenth century, and there was every reason for building a mosque. Reference to the construction of such a mosque is not found in the *Babarnama*, i.e. *Memoirs of Babar*. It occurs in an appendix inserted by Mrs. Beveridge, who translated Babar's autobiography from Turkish into English in 1921. She refers to an inscription according to which a mosque was built by Mir Baqi at the command of Babar in AH 935 corresponding to the period 15 September 1528 to 5 September 1529. The identity of Mir Baqi is not known from any source, and the inscription does not refer to any temple whatsoever. Therefore the conjecture that a Rama temple was demolished is absolutely without any foundation.

On the basis of Mrs. Beveridge, who was concerned with that portion of *Babar's Memoirs* which dealt with India, a gap in the account between 2 April and 18 September 1528, mostly corresponding to AH 934, has been pointed out by A.R. Khan. He suggests that the temple, if it existed, may have been destroyed and the mosque built during this period of gap. But the inscription, which refers to the construction of the mosque, belongs to the period AH 935 corresponding to the period 15 September 1528 to 5 September 1529. Thus only a gap of three days 15 to 18 September 1528 is not covered in this inscription. It is incredible that the

mosque was built only during these three days. The crucial issue however is not the building of the mosque but the destruction of the supposed Rama temple. Here Mrs. Beveridge quotes from *Faizabad Gazetteer* written by Nevill in the first decade of the present century. Nevill states that an ancient temple was destroyed and the mosque built. Without any basis whatsoever, after "an ancient temple" Mrs. Beveridge adds in brackets the following: "(marking the birthplace of Rama)". Thus it is Mrs. Beveridge who calls the "ancient temple" a Rama temple, for which there is not the slightest evidence.

Babar mentions Awadh (Oudh) but not Ayodhya as such. On the other hand he describes Gwalior, and he speaks in rapturous terms of the architecture of both its secular and religious buildings. These include a mosque built by Iltutmish; otherwise all the other pieces of structure are Hindu. Babar speaks admiringly of idols and idol houses, i.e., temples of Gwalior including Chanderi. It is an irony that a lover of Hindu art and architecture should be credited with the destruction of a Rama temple, which, in any case, did not exist. It is therefore very clear that the Babri mosque was not built by demolishing a temple of Rama at Ayodhya. But even if a few religious structures of this type were raised elsewhere, it will be suicidal to adopt a policy of their deliberate destruction; this is not certainly warranted by the best traditions of Hinduism. Nearly 6000 big and small temples were registered in Ayodhya by the Department of Archaeology in Uttar Pradesh by 1980. Devotees of Rama are always free to increase this number, but this communalist should not be allowed to destroy the mosque and build their temple on a piece of disputed land. The best course as suggested by many, would be to treat Babri Masjid as national monument.

In the medieval period the cult of Krishna appeared earlier than that of Rama, and Mathura emerged as a far more important place of pilgrimage than Ayodhya. But its religious sanctity shot up only after its decline as an urban centre around the fourth century AD or so. Significantly in the Mathura between 200 BC and 300 AD there is no specific mention of Lord Krishna, who emerged later as the chief divinity in Mathura. the name Vasudeva is adopted by members of the Kushan dynasty, but they never adopt Krishna which name occurs in a Satavahana inscription of the end of the first century BC. Similarly we have numerous pieces of

sculpture from Mathura belonging to 200 BC and 300 AD and preserved in Mathura Museum and elsewhere, but no piece can be specifically identified as that representing Krishna. On the other hand numerous pieces represent Jain, Buddhist and various brahmanical divinities. Clearly the mythology of Krishna was developed much later in early medieval times when it found representation in art.

Recently because of underwater excavations in the coastal area of Gujarat the antiquity of Dwaraka has been pushed back to about the middle of the third millennium BC. But this does not automatically attest Krishna's association with Dwaraka around that date. We have neither any epigraphic nor sculptural evidence to support this view. Competent ancient historians in general place the date of the Mahabharata war around 1000 BC, and even if the historicity of Krishna is accepted he can be placed around that time. But motivated by religious fanaticism some scholars go on predating events without any rhyme or reason. Astronomical date fabricated in the early centuries of the Christian era are used to fix dates of mythological events. These are taken back to the fourth or fifth millennium BC and even much earlier when we do not have archaeological evidence for the use of metal or the practice of plough agriculture in our country. However the cult of Krishna appeared earlier than that of Rama, and Rama's cult really gained in importance in late medieval times.

Generally the historians who deal with modern history are least swayed by communal considerations. Even those who deal with medieval history do not seem to be very communal. But some of those who deal with ancient Indian history identify themselves almost completely with chauvinistic and communal elements and try to defend the indefensible in grounds of blind faith. Despite the striking contrast between the pastoral life of the *Rig Veda* and the urban life of the Harappans they insist that the Harappa culture was created by the Vedic people. They stress that the Harappan script is alphabetical and that it represents examples of proto-Sanskrit. Similarly they ignore the similarities between the Bronze Age urban civilisation of Harappa and those of Western Asia and Crete, and gloss over its efflorescence in Sindh and Punjab. They assert that this civilisation really originated and flourished in the Saraswati valley for which there is no evidence whatsoever. The Saraswati bed shows remnants of pre-Harappan elements which

may have contributed to the making of the Harappan culture in some ways, but the nuclear zone of the pre-Harappan culture as indicated by excavation at such places as Amri, Kot Doji, etc., really lay in Pakistan. The mature Harappan culture is a distinct phenomenon, and Harappa and Mohenjodaro in Pakistan still continue to be its best examples. Evidently all such assertions are made by some revivalist Indian archaeologists who find it difficult to accept Pakistan as the centre of the Harappan culture.

The communalists keep on arguing that the Aryans originated in India, created the Harappan civilisation and spread in Western Asia and Europe from this country. Probably they were provoked by Wheeler's caption of a publication which traced back the history of Pakistan to the fifth millennium BC. Communal chauvinists continue to propagate that the Muslims are foreigners. They even demand the writing of the history of India's freedom struggle from the time of Alexander's invasion. In their view the Hindus have been liberated only recently, and that the period covered by the rule of the sultans and the Mughal rulers was one of unmitigated continuous foreign rule. It is not without reason that communalist historians call the British conquerers the liberators of the Hindu from the "foreign rule" of the Muslims.

We should not rule out genuine differences in approach and opinion, but by and large revivalist exercise are undertaken to politicise the study of the past at the cost of the objective methods of historical research. They are meant to meet the demands of those whose vision of the future lies in the past. What is worse, history is invoked to justify all kinds of destructive demands including the one for the demolition of Babri Masjid and construction of a Rama temple in its place. In order to sell the past to the present generation it is painted in attractive but false colours. This does enormous damage to the understanding and preservation of Indian heritage of the country. The past is deliberately distorted to vitiate the relations between the various communities that inhabit the country. Only patient and sustained efforts of right thinking writers, researchers, and educators can foil the communalist attempt to use the past as a wedge to divide the people into waiting camps.

RAMJANMABHUMI- BABRI MASJID

A Historians' Report to the Nation

by R.S. Sharma, M. Athar Ali, D.N. Jha, Suraj Bhan

For the last two years a furious agitation has been organised in this country under the aegis of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its allies over what has come to be known as the Ram Janmabhumi-Babri Masjid dispute. Precious lives have been lost, communal riots have broken out, and for the first time since independence the secular nature of our state has come under serious threat, all seemingly over the issue of what is to be done to a 16th century structure at Ayodhya.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad demands that this structure, a mosque built in 1528-29 and known as the Babri Masjid, stands on the very site where Lord Rama was born ("Ram Janmabhumi" or "Ram Janmasthan"), and at which sacred spot there existed a Rama temple, which was destroyed in order to build the mosque. This historical wrong done to the Hindu community nearly 450 years ago is now sought to be right, the mosque pulled down or shifted, and a new, magnificent Rama temple built on the same spot. The legalities of the dispute - (Lucknow bench) - are to be brushed aside, in view of the higher verdict of History, which the VHP has already declared to be in its favour.

The Government of India, under circumstances that are well

known, began negotiations with the VHP and the Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC), with a view to examining the historical and legal merits of the case of both parties. Thus the dispute over the facts of History was now to be decided by the litigants, with the Government of India as an umpire, and not by any independent forum of historians. This seemed to us, as professional historians, a very unhappy procedure. We therefore approached the Government of India to include impartial historians in the process of forming judgement on historical facts and to let us have access to such evidence, archaeological and textual, as has been presented to it or is in possession of government organisations, such as the Archaeological Survey of India. We regret to say that the Government of India's response to this was largely one of silence. The BMAC declared that it was ready to abide by the findings of a set of independent historians, but this position was not acceptable to the VHP.

However, in spite of these obstacles, we thought that national interest required an unbiased and impartial enquiry, so that people should be clear about what the historical facts are. We scrutinised most carefully the evidence submitted to Government by the VHP and BMAC, and collected historical material on our own. Two of us went to Ayodhya to examine and survey the site and the structure of the Babri Masjid. We also examined archaeological material from Professor A.K. Narain's excavations at Ayodhya, now preserved at the Banaras Hindu University. To our regret, through no lack of trying on our part, material from Professor B.B. Lal's excavations at Ayodhya was not made available for inspection by us; and we had to depend on published reports only.

Having undertaken this effort, we place in all humility the results of our enquiry before the nation. We will at least have the satisfaction that, within the limits of our capacity, we have done our duty.

The VHP's case rests on the following four major claims:

- (1) The Hindus have always, and certainly over a long period before the construction of the Babri Masjid, believed in their being a very sacred spot at Ayodhya, where Lord Rama was born.
- (2) This spot was the very site where the Babri Masjid now

stands.

- (3) A temple dedicated to Rama stood at this holy site long before the Babri Masjid was built.
- (4) The temple was pulled down to construct the Babri Masjid at this spot.

We now proceed to examine these claims largely in the order as they are listed above.

II

We have, first, to see what substance there is in claims (1) and (2), namely, that Hindus have for a very long time believed in the sanctity of Ram Janmasthan at Ayodhya, and in its existence at the very site of the Babri Masjid.

People will be surprised to find that the VHP has been unable to cite any ancient Sanskrit text in support of its claim that there has been an ancient Hindu belief in Ram Janmasthan at Ayodhya. Surely, if there were such a strong belief, there would have been numerous Vaishnavite texts exhorting worshippers to visit the spot. The absence of any such reference makes it very dubious that the belief in Ram Janmasthan is of such respectable antiquity as is being made out. It is even doubtful if it is earlier than the late 18th century, as we shall see.

The only Sanskrit text the VHP experts have produced in support of claims (1) and (2) is the *Skanda Purana*. They refer to the *Ayodhya-mahatmya*, that is, the merits of visiting Ayodhya, given in the *Skanda Purana*. We have used the printed version of the *Skanda Purana* (kshemaraja edn, Bombay, 1910) and two other versions found in manuscript in the Vrindavan Research Institute, Vrindaban, and the Bodleian Library, Oxford. These texts are of recent origin and the insertion of interpolations in the *Ayodhya-mahatmya* section of the printed *Skanda Purana* seems to have continued at least till the 18th century. The internal contents of the *Skanda Purana* including the mention of Vidyapati, who passed away in the first half of the 16th century, show that the core of this Purana itself was not compiled earlier than the 16th century. The *Ayodhya-mahatmya* given in the printed version has not been compiled by one hand. For example, the course of the description of the tirthas

in general is interrupted and all of a sudden the glorification of Ayodhya starts. In the case of Ayodhya itself the virtues of visiting and taking bath in the Sarayu river are not given at one place, but at two places; in between the contexts have nothing to do with the Sarayu. We also find that in the description of the tirthas, Vasistha replaces Agastya as the narrator, and then again the narration is taken over by Agastya. This shows obvious interpolation. The description of Janmasthan occurs in the last chapter of the *Ayodhya-mahatmya* (verses 18-25), and is clearly a later addition. It is easier to make insertion at the end of a text.

In spite of these various inconsistencies even if we accept the location of the birthplace of Rama as given in the *Ayodhya-mahatmya*, it does not tally with the site of the Babri Masjid. Two terms are used for the birthplace of Rama, Janmasthan and Janmabhumi. Even if we take the two to be identical, the *Ayodhya-mahatmya* information about the location of the birthplace does not take us to the Babri Masjid site. Both the Vrindaban and Bodleian versions of the Mahatmya mention the compass directions and distances of Rama's birthplace from a few sites. According to verses 21.24 the birthplace is located 500 *dhanus* (910 metres) westward of Laumash and 1009 *dhanus* (1835 metres) eastward of Vighneshvara. According to local Hindu belief Laumash or the place of Lomash is identical with the present Rinamochana Ghat. On this basis the Rama Janmabhoomi should be located somewhere west, in the vicinity of the Brahmakunda close to the bed of the Sarayu. Further according to the Mahatmya Rinamochana Ghat, or the place of Lomash, lies 700 *dhanus* (1274 metres) northeast of Brahmakunda. Both the direction and the distance have been found to be approximately correct by us. It is further stated that the Janmasthan lies north-east of Vighnesh. According to local tradition the place of Vighnesh is marked by a pillar, which lies south-west of Rinamochana Ghat. This again excludes the Babri Masjid site and places the birthplace somewhere between Rinamochana and Brahmakunda on the bank of the Sarayu. Thus, according to Hindu belief as given in the *Ayodhya-mahatmya* of the *Skanda Purana*, the birthplace of Rama cannot be located on the site where the Babri Masjid stands. It is argued by the experts of the VHP that the location of the Rama Janmabhoomi is given on the basis of solar directions and cannot be determined through the use of the compass. But even if we take solar directions into

account the Janmabhumi of the *Skanda Purana* cannot be located on the site of the Babri Masjid.

The various versions of the *Ayodhya-mahatmya* seem to have been prepared towards the end of the 18th century or the beginning of the 19th; even as late as that the birthplace was not considered to be important. It is significant that the Janmasthan is not mentioned even once in any itinerary of pilgrimage given in the Mahatmya.

The descriptions of the tirthas in Ayodhya as given in the *Ayodhya-mahatmya* show that the Svargadvara tirtha was far more important in the eyes of the compilers of the pilgrimage section than the Janmabhumi. Svargadvara is believed to be the place where Rama left for heaven and is considered sacred because of that reason. The *Skanda Purana* speaks of two Svargadvara tirthas in Ayodhya. Whatever might be its real location there is no doubt that in Hindu belief it was far more meritorious to visit this place than other local places of pilgrimage. The earliest mention of this tirtha appears in a Gahadavala inscription of the 11th century, which speaks of the land grant made by a king at the confluence of Sarayu and Ghaghara. This grant speaks of the worship of Vasudeva at the confluence site but not of any temple (D.C.Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, Volume II, Pp. 276-77, lines 20-23). It appears that the sanctity attached to the place of Rama's death was of greater importance in earlier times. It is significant that the *Ayodhya-Mahatmya* of the printed version of the *Skanda Purana* devotes one hundred verses to the description of the Svargadvara which is made identical with Gopratara tirtha (b. 112-211) and gives only eight verses to the description of the Janmasthana (10.18-25).

No place in Ayodhya is associated with Rama's birth either in the 11th century or even six centuries after. When a place is associated with his birth possibly in the late 18th century its location given in the various *Mahatmyas* does not tally with the present Babri Masjid. It, therefore, seems quite erroneous to hold that according to old Hindu belief the Rama Janmabhumi temple was situated at the same site as is now occupied by the Babri Masjid.

III

while there is no ancient text testifying to the antiquity of the birth-site of Rama in Ayodhya as a recognised spot for veneration and pilgrimage, the VHP says that there existed a Rama temple on the site of the Babari Masjid; and for this it has brought forward two arguments:

- (a) The Babri Masjid contains 14 black stone pillars, with non-Islamic motifs; and these must have formed part of the structure of the destroyed temple.
- (b) Professor B. B. Lal's excavations in the neighbourhood of the Babari Masjid suggest that a pillared structure, probably a part of the original temple, extended up to his excavations.

As to the black stone pillars, we have to establish whether they originally come from the disputed site and belong to the same structure. It is significant that two such pillars have been found in a graveyard at a distance of about $\frac{3}{4}$ Km from the Masjid. We have consulted a number of art historians including Devangan Desai, M. A. Dhaky, Krishna Deva, N. P. Joshi, and R. C. Sharma. The general consensus is that some motifs suggest a date around 9th and 10th centuries while others a date around 10th and 11th centuries. It is therefore evident that the pillars cannot belong to a single structure. The motifs found on the pillars seem to have been similar to the pillar motifs on eastern India. Similar pillars are described in R. D. Banerji, *Eastern Indian School of Medieval Sculpture*, Reprint, New Delhi, 1981, Plates LXXXIX (b) & (c), XC (d). The pillars have been geologically examined, and there is no doubt that they are made of black basalt stone which is found in Raj Mahal and Mirzapur. We have many instances of the transportation of building material from one place to another in pre-industrial India. The Ashokan sandstone pillars were quarried and made cylindrical in Chunar from where they were sent to different parts of the country. Under Firuzshah Tughlaq Ashokan pillars from Meerut and Topra were brought to Delhi. An inscription in the Chola Brihadisvara temple of Thanjavur shows that some pillars, brought from a Nolamba temple in Karnataka, were used

in it. In the mid-12th century the image of a *dvarapala* or door-keeper was brought by the Chola ruler Rajadhiraja to Rajarajesvaram temple at Daraseuram near Kumbhkonam from Kalyani, the capital of the Western Chalukyas whose power was destroyed at that time. We know of several mosques which were decorated or made with building material brought from considerable distances. Thus, the door frame of Gujri Mohalla mosque (early 17th century) in Patna City is made of the Pala pillars of black basalt stone though these are not found anywhere in the vicinity of Patna City. It is therefore possible that the pillars used in the Baburi Masjid were brought from outside to decorate it.

The experts of the VHP asserts that the carvings on the pillars show Vaishnava associations. But this is far from true. Any good Vaishnavite or even a knowledgeable historian cannot think of Vaishnavite affiliation without the representation of *sankha* (conch shell), the *chakra* (wheel), *gada* (mace) and *padma* (lotus). These are the inseparable emblems of Vishnu. The presence of *Vanamala* (garland) does not specifically establish Vaishnavite associations because the garland is used by several other deities.

The general height of these pillars is a little more than 5• feet and they are embedded at the arched entrance in the massive walls of the mosque and stand at the floor-level on the foundation walls constructed for a big building. Clearly these are decorated pieces and not load-bearing pillars. In order to take load they have to be at least 7 ft. in height and their lower portions have to be placed in the plinth. Further, these pillars are not *in situ*, i.e., not in their original positions; thus they have been brought from outside. It is therefore absolutely wrong to assert that these pillars are the remains of a local temple of which they formed an integral part in the beginning, and the mosque was erected over them. It may be further noted that in just one arch four similar pillars are found; in each of the three other arches dissimilar pillars are found. All this confirms the fact that they have been brought from outside.

As for the second argument, this is based on the recent announcement by Professor B. B. Lal that certain brick bases found by him in the close vicinity of the Babri Masjid many years ago were meant for sustaining pillars and so suggest the existence of a temple-like structure in the south of the Baburi Masjid. Though he excavated the ground over eleven years ago and thereafter pub-

lished several papers on Ayodhya diggings, he first mentioned this discovery only towards the end of 1990 (Manthan, October 1990). This delay, left unexplained, is certainly strange. We wanted to clarify our ideas about the inferences drawn from these pillar bases by examining the site notebook and register of antiquities connected with the Ayodhya excavations. We also wanted to have a look at the drawings, plans, photographs, excavated material, etc., connected with the Ayodhya excavation of Professor Lal. For this purpose we wrote five letters to the Government of India and we also requested the Home Minister to make the necessary material available to us for examination. But our repeated requests did not yield even an acknowledgement of our letters. The failure to make available relevant material raises not only questions of ethics in using archaeological material, but also makes it doubtful whether Professor Lal's new interpretation is really borne out by the actual record and material of his excavations.

The VHP rejoinder notes that Professor B. B. Lal does not mention the pillar bases in his reports submitted to the Archaeological Survey in 1976-77 and 1979-80 but adds that he "does mention the floors made of lime and kankers". But it deliberately leaves out a significant part of that report. The relevant sentence runs thus: "Several later medieval brick-and-kanker lime floors have been met with, but the entire late period was devoid of any special interest". (*Indian Archaeology, 1976-77 -- A Review*, P. 53). In the context of its use by ASI, the 'later medieval' period indicated 17th-18th centuries? If remains of a structure of 17th-18th centuries are found outside the Masjid area, how do they prove the presence of a temple that was supposedly built in the 11th century and destroyed in the early 16th century?

Moreover, the mere presence of pillar bases does not make out a case for the existence of a temple. No stone pillars, architraves or roof material of the supposed temple were found in the debris of the trenches where the brick pillar bases stood. The VHP experts argue that this brick pillar base-"temple" was demolished in 1528-29 and was replaced by the Masjid. This seems a baseless inference. Islamic glazed ware pottery has never been used in Hindu temples. But pieces of this pottery occur in the trenches above the floors associated with the brick-pillar base structure and immediately below the general floor of the Baburi Masjid. This shows that the brick pillar-structure had already fallen down and

gone out of use around the thirteenth century and the site was inhabited by Muslims who also lived in other parts of Ayodhya as well, where glazed ware has been discovered in the trenches as a result of the excavation conducted by Professor A. K. Narain (material shown to us by courtesy of professor Purushottam Singh, Head of Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology, B. H. U.)

This demolishes another argument of the VHP experts who assert that the supposed Rama temple was deliberately destroyed by babur's officials to build a mosque though there was allegedly no need for it because of the absence of the Muslim population in Ayodhya. Finds of Islamic glazed ware in the excavations conducted by both A.K.Narain and B.B.Lal make it clear that the Muslims lived in Ayodhya from the 13th century onwards and may have needed a mosque for offering prayers.

It is argued by the VHP experts that the brick pillar-bases in the trenches south of the Babri Masjid, the black basalt stone-pillars used in the mosque in the four arches of the mosque and also found in the graveyard together with the doorjamb are integral parts of the one and the same structure. But variations in the style and the diameter of these pillars and, more important, the total lack of their stratigraphic association, completely rule out this possibility. These pillar bases, pillars and the doorjamb are stratigraphically unassociated and are found at different places and in completely unrelated contexts.

Since the excavator cannot postulate the existence of a temple on this basis, Professor Lal has suggested digging underneath the mosque. But so far there are no indications whatsoever that this exercise would expose any temple structure. The trenches in which pillar bases have been found have not yielded any object with religious association. Just in front of the Babri Masjid the VHP enthusiasts have dug a trench, 7' x 7' x 8'. This was done for the purpose of the shilanyas ceremony in 1989. If no antiquity with any religious association has been discovered so far either in the trenches dug by Professor B. B. Lal or in the more recent trench dug by the VHP people themselves what is the basis on which it is proposed to dig underneath the mosque in the hope of discovering a temple?

Finally, there is nothing to show that the pillar bases existing

at a distance of about 60 ft. to the south of the Babri Masjid structure are in alignment with the pillars used in the Baburi Masjid. In fact no importance can be attached to the structure postulated on the strength of the pillar bases. It could be a small verandah, which may have been used either as an animal shed, or just for living purposes. Such structures are found in that area even now.

IV

The VHP has been unable to present any early textual evidence that Rama birth-site in Ayodhya was either spotted as such or recognised as a place of pilgrimage in ancient or early medieval India. Its archaeological evidence for the existence of a temple at the site of the Babri Masjid is, to say the least, weak and dubious; in fact archaeology suggests proximity of a Muslim settlement to the mosque from the 13th century onwards.

What, then, of the recorded evidence? What does this tell us about the VHP's claims of temple destruction at the hands of Babur's men?

Within the category of recorded historical evidence, the most primary source for the construction of the Baburi Masjid consists of the inscriptions in Persian that were put on the mosque immediately upon its construction in A.D. 1528-29. These inscriptions were partially published (with some inconsequential mistakes) in A. S. Beveridge's translation of Babur's memoirs as an appendix (*Baburnama*, London, 1921, Vol. II, Appendix U, Pp. IXXVII-LXXIX), comprising six couplets only. But in actual fact, the original inscriptions consisted of as many as fourteen couplets, together with an invocation and the engraver's signature. The entire text has been retrieved and published in the *Epigraphic Indica, Arabic & Persian Supplement*, 1965, Pp. 58-62, an authoritative publication of the Archaeological Survey of India.

In view of the crucial importance of the record for the present enquiry, the full translation, is reproduced below, with a few linguistic corrections.

(A)

- (1) By the order of King babur whose justice is an edifice, meeting the palace of the sky (i.e., as high as the sky),
- (2) this descending place of the angels was built by the fortunate noble Mir Baqi.
- (3) It will remain an everlasting bounty, and (hence) the date of its erection became manifest in my words: *It will remain an everlasting bounty* (chronogram yielding A. H. 935/ A.D. 1528-29).

(B)

- (1) (a) In accordance with the wishes of the ruler of the world, Babur,
(b) a lofty building like the palace of the spheres,
- (2) (a) (that is to say) this lasting house (of God), was founded
(b) by the fortunate noble Mir (and) Khan (Baqi).
- (3) (a) May ever remain such a founder of its edifice,
(b) (and) such a king of the world and age!

(C)

(Invocation:) In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.
And in Him is my trust.

- (1) In the name of One who is Wise, Great (and) Creator of all the universe (and) is spaceless.
- (2) After His praise, blessings be upon the chosen one (i.e., the Prophet), who is the head of Prophet and best in the world.
- (3) The *qalandar*-like (i.e., generous) Babur has become celebrated (lit. a story) in the world, since (in his time) the world has achieved prosperity.
- (4) (He is) such (an emperor) as has embraced (i.e., conquered) all the seven climes of the world in the manner of the sky.

- 5) In his court, there (is) a magnificent noble, named Mir Baqi, the second Asaf,
- (6) councillor of his government and administrator of his kingdom, who is the founder of this mosque and fort-wall.
- (7) O God, may he live for ever in this world, with fortune and life and crown and throne!
- (8) The time of the building is this auspicious date, of which the indication is nine hundred and thirtyfive (A.H. 935 = 1528-29 A.D.)

(Engraver's signature:) Completed was this statement of Unity of God and praise of God, of Prophet and of King, and of the noble. May Allah illumine his proof! Written by the weak writer and humble creature, Fathullah Muhammad Ghori.

The contemporaneity of the inscriptions is shown by their text and date. Their accuracy is established by the fact that Mir Baqi finds mention in Babur's memoirs as his governor of Awadh or Ayodhya at exactly this time (A.H. 935): see A. S. Beveridge's trans., II, Pp. 684-85, also P. 679. Even for the use of the word *qalandar* for Babur, we have the authority of his daughter Gulbadan Begam that the sobriquet was popularly given to him (*Humayun Nama*, London, 1902, P. 12).

These fairly long inscriptions show that the construction of the Baburi Masjid was completed in 1528-29. But nowhere is any hint given in them that the edifice was built after, destroying a temple or upon the site of a temple. If one accepts for the purposes of argument that there was a temple at the site, and the builder of the mosque (Mir Baqi) destroyed it to build a mosque, one has to answer why at all should any reference to this fact should be omitted in the foundation inscriptions. Surely, had Mir Baqi destroyed the temple, he would have deemed it a meritorious deed; and what would be more natural than that he should get this act recorded along with that of the building of the mosque to add to his religious reputation. That he did not get any such act recorded surely means that he had in fact not destroyed any temple, and so found no reason to record something that had not happened.

V

Within fifty years or so of the construction of the Baburi Masjid, Tulsidas composed in 1575-76 his celebrated *Ramcharitmanas*, the most fervent exposition of the Ramayana story in Hindi. Is it possible to believe that Tulsidas would not have given vent to heartrending grief had the very birth site of his Lord been ravaged, its temple razed to the ground and a mosque erected at that place? Surely he could not but have known of the event, had the desecration and temple-destruction taken place in 1528-29, early in his life but long before the composition of his work. Knowing of it would he not have complained in his verses that fate (if nothing else) was now preventing Rama's devotees from worshipping the very sacred seat of the Lord's birth? His silence can only mean that he knew of no such scandal; and, given his attachment to Rama and Ayodhya, this must then mean that no such event had in fact taken place.

Tulsidas, on the contrary, suggests that it was not Ayodhya but Prayag that was to him the principal place of pilgrimage (*tirath raj*); and so no tradition of the veneration of any spot as that of Rama's birth at Ayodhya had yet taken shape.

In subsequent descriptions of Ayodhya of both the 16th and 17th centuries no indication occurs that the Baburi Masjid, or, for that matter, any other mosque, was built at the birth-site of Rama. Abul Fazal in his *A'in-i-Akbari*, completed in A. D. 1598, includes Ayodhya among the important places of pilgrimage of India. He says that the sacred ground extends "forty *kos* to the east and twenty from north to south" and thus is not confined to the city itself. It mentions the Ramnavami festival here (III, tr. Jarrett, rev. Sarkar, Calcutta, 1948, P. 335). The same tradition about the very large area of the holy city is given in his account of Ayodhya in the chapter on the province of Awadh: "In ancient times its populous site covered an extent of 148 *kos* in length and 36 in breadth, and it is esteemed one of the holiest places of antiquity". Abul Fazal goes on to say that Ayodhya "was the residence of Ramachandra, who in the *Treta* age combined in his own person both the spiritual supremacy and the kingly office" (II, tr. Jarrett, rev. Sarkar, Calcutta, 1949, P. 182). Clearly, the tradition till then did not confine Rama's place of birth to the existing town of Ayodhya, let

alone the site occupied by the Baburi Masjid. Had such tradition existed, Abul Fazal would surely have mentioned it, because he does mention the tradition that two Jewish prophets lie buried at Ayodhya: "Near the city stand two considerable tombs of six and seven yards respectively. The vulgar believe them to be the resting places of Seth and Prophet Job, and extraordinary tales are related of them" (ibid). It cannot escape notice that there is not the remotest reference to Rama's birth-site, let alone to any mosque being built on it.¹

The same is found to be the case with William Finch's fairly extensive description of Ayodhya, which he visited during his stay in India during A.D. 1608-11. He says:

"Here are also the ruins of Ranichand (s)¹ castle and houses, which the Indians acknowl(e) for the great God, saying he tooke flesh upon him to see the tamasha of the world. In these ruines remayne certaine Bramenes, who record the names of all such Indians as wash themselves in the river running thereby; which custome, they say, hath continued foure lackes of yeeres (which is three hundred ninetie four thousand and five hundred yeeres before the worlds creation). Some two miles on the further side of the river is a cave of his with a narrow entrance, but so spacious and full of turnings within that a man may well loose himselfe there if he take not better heed; where it is thought his ashes were buried. Hither resort many from all parts of Irtidia, which carry from thence in remembrance certain graines of rice as blacka as gun-powder, which they say have been (p)reserved ever since. Out of the ruines of the castle is much gold tryed". (Early Travels in India, 1583-1619, ed. W. Foster, reprint, New Delhi, 1968, P. 176).

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1. The translation has been checked with the Persian text, *A'in-i Akbari*, Nawalkishore ed., Lucknow, 1892, Vol. II, PP. 78, 140, and has been corrected at one place on this basis, reading "from north to south" instead of "to the north".
 2. A typographical error obviously for 'Ramchand's'.

We have thus a reference to where Rama's ashes were buried, which, as we have seen from the *Skanda Purana*, was deemed of principal importance as *Svarga duara*; but there is no reference to where Rama was born. We are told of "the ruins of the castle" (Ramkot) extensive enough for a search for gold to be undertaken, but not of any exact site of special veneration within that 'castle' — let alone of a temple-site desecrated by a mosque.

In 1695-96, Sujan Rai Bhandari completed his work *Khulasatu-t Tawarikh*. This contained in the first part a geographical account of India, in which the author devoted special attention to the holy places. While describing Mathura, he did not omit to mention that the temple of Keshav Rai here had been destroyed by Aurangzeb who had a mosque built in its place (ed. Zafar Hasan, Delhi, 1918, P. 40; tr. J. Sarkar, *India of Aurangzeb*, Calcutta, 1901, P. 25). But his account of Ayodhya contains no reference to any destroyed temple here.

"In the Hindu books it is called Ajodhya, the birthplace of Ramchand. His building a bridge over the ocean, his going to Lanka (Ceylon) with a countless host of monkeys and bears, his slaying Ravan (the king of that country), and his recovery of his wife (who was preserved chaste and pure during her captivity under Ravan) are well-known. The history of *Ramayan*, is an account of his strange and wonderful deeds. As this city was the residence of king Ramchand, it is held to be one of the holiest places. One *kos* from it, the river Ghaghar (Gogra) having united with the river Saraju, passes by the foot of the fort (of Ayodhya). In the outskirts of the city they sift dust and get gold. In the town are the tombs of Shish (Seth), the son of Lord Adam (the peace of God be on him!) and Ayub (Job), the pro[phet -- both places of pligrimage to the Muhammadans". (text, P. 42; Sarkar's tr. P. 31).¹

In A.D. 1759-60, Rai Chaturman completed his work *Chahar Gulshan*, which contained a geographical account of India. It has

1. Sarkar's translation has been followed here, but where Sarkar renders *bungah* as birth-place, it should be 'residence'.

not been printed, and Sarkar's translation in his *India of Aurangzeb*, mainly reproduces its statistics. The unpublished text has this to say of Ayodhya's association with Rama:-

"Ayodhya is deemed one of the select places of worship. It was the birthplace (zadgah) of Raja Ramchandar, son of Jasrat, who was one of the ten *avatars*, that is, one of the ten visible incarnations of God; and he was married to Sita. Ram Chandar engaged himself in wielding worldly sovereignty with exercising spiritual authority". (Account of Suba Awadh: See MS. Abdus Salam Coll., Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh, No. 292/62).

Thus until two hundred and twenty years after the construction of the Baburi Masjid, there was no suggestion anywhere, in the long contemporary inscriptions of the mosque or any other description of Ayodhya that there was a precise site of Rama's birth, where the holy structure had been destroyed and the mosque built -- whether we take the writings of Hindus or of Muslims or the record left by the single European observer.

VI

The suggestion that the Babri Masjid had any proximity to a site associated with Rama's birth was first made by the Jesuit Priest Joseph Tieffenthaler, whose work in French was published by Johann Barnoulli from Berlin, 1788, as *Description historique et géographique de l'Inde*. Tieffenthaler says:

"Emperor Aurangzebe got demolished the fortress called Ramcot, and erected on the same place a Mahometan temple with three cupolas. Others believe that it was constructed by Babar. We see 14 columns of black stone 5 spans high that occupy places within the fortress. Twelve of these columns now bear the interior arcades of the mosque; two (of the 12) make up the entrance of the cloister. Two others form part of the tomb of a certain Moor. It is related that these columns or rather the debris of these columns, were brought from

Lanka (called Ceylon by the Europeans) by Hanuman, king of the monkeys”.

“We see on the left a square platform 5 inches above ground, 5 inches long and 4 inches wide, constructed of mud and covered with lime. The Hindus call it *bedi*, that is to say, the birthplace. The reason is that here there was a house in which *Beschan* (*Bishan* = *Vishnu*) took the form of *Ram*, and his three brothers are also said to have been born. Subsequently, *Aurengzebe*, or according to others, *Babar*, Razed this place down, in order not to give the Gentiles (Hindus) occasion to practise their superstition. However, they have continued to follow their superstitious practices in both places, believing it to be the birth-place of *Ram*; they go round it three times and prostrate on the ground. The two places are surrounded by a low wall. One can enter the front chamber through a low door in the middle.”

The account shows that a tradition of treating the site of the mosque and its surroundings as sacred was now in its initial phase of creation, marked by the construction of a small rectangular mud platform of no more than 5" X 5" X 4", and its identification as *Rama's* crib. No tradition even remotely existed as yet of there having been a temple here; the entire place was thought to be a part of *Rama's* “fortress” or “place”.

Twenty years passed and the legend grew, so that now it came to be thought by some that a temple had previously existed here. But *Francis Burchnan* who visited *Ayodhya* about 1810 and recorded the traditions as these had by now developed found the temple-destruction theory to be “very ill-founded”. He deserves extensive quotation:

“The people of *Ayodhya* imagine, that after the death of *Vrihadbala*, their city was deserted, and continued so until the time of *Vikrama of Ujjain*, who came in search of the holy city, erected a fort called *Ramgar*, cut down the forests by which the ruins were covered and erected 360 temples on the places sanctified by the extraordinary actions of *Rama*... (T)he destruction (of these temples) is very generally attributed by the Hindus to the furious zeal of *Aurangzebe*, to whom also

is imuted the overthrow of the temples in Benaras and Mathura. What may have been the case in the two latter, I shall not now take upon myself to say, but with respect to Ayodhya the traditional. (T)he mosque at Ayodhya, which is by far the most entire, and which has every appearance of being the mostmoderris ascertained by an inscription on its walls (of which a copy is given) to have been built by Babar, five generations before Aurangzebe. This renders the whole story of (temples erection by) Vikrama exceedingly doubtful."

As regards the black stone pillars ("only 6 feet high"), Buchanan inferred that "they have been taken from a Hindu building", but thought it probable that they "were taken from the ruins of the palaces", not any temple. (Buchanan's surveys edited and printed by Montgomery Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India*, London, 1838, Vol. II, pp. 333-336).¹

Religious myths have a tendency to grow despite the clearest evidence to the contrary. Now, where Hindu beliefs about the site of the mosque were clearly vague and contradictory, it was the turn of a section of Muslims to claim with pride that at Ayodhya mosques had, indeed, been built after the destruction of temples on the sites of Hindu holy places. It was this growth of bravado which exacerbated relations between the two communities, and which resulted in a serious clash at Ayodhya under the Awadh Nawabs in 1855. Under the shadow of bitterness of that clash, a fiery tract was composed by Mirze Jan in A.H. 1272/ A.D. 1855-56 under the title *Hadiqa-i-Shahuda*. This book contains a passage allegedly quoted from a Persian work *Sahifa-i Chihal Nasaih-i Bahadur Shahi*, said to be written by "a daughter of Bahadur Shah Alamgir (sic!)".

(1) The VHP, while confounding the original observer, Francis Buchanan, with his editor, Montgomery Martin, and so bringing down the date of the original account by 20 years, prudently omits the earlier portion of Buchanan's description in its submission of evidence (Annexure 13 in its evidence).

The author claims that he read the tract by the princess on 15 Sha'ban 1231, i.e. 11 July 1816, in the library of Mirza Haider Sukhoh son of Mirza Sulaiman Shukoh, and that in the 25th of the 40 Advices, the following was found:-

“The temples of the polytheistic Hindus situated in Mathura Banaras, Awadh (Ayodhya), etc., which the wretched infidels believe to be the birth place of Kanhya (Krishna), or the *rasoi* (kitchen) of Sita or the residence of Hanuman, in which, they say, Ram established him after the conquest of Lanka, have been destroyed, and for the strengthening of Islam mosques have been established on all these sites: let them not leave these mosques without Friday prayers and congregation.” (printed book, Habibganj Collection, Urdu, 32/115, Maulana Azad Library, p. 114).

Since much has been made of this quotation supposedly from the pen of a Mughal princess, it is important to note that the author himself confesses that he had read the book forty years before he was writing, and claims that he had then copied the passage. This on the face of it is very implausible. There are further incongruities. The princess remains unnamed, and her father Bahadur shah is given the title 'Alamgir, which not he but his father Aurangzeb (d. 1707) had borne. No work by a daughter of Bahadur Shah or bearing the title *Sahifa-i Chihal Nasa'ih-i Bahadur Shahi* is known to exist in any collection anywhere in the world. One fails to locate it in C.A. Storey's *Persian Literature - a bibliographical survey*, or D.N. Marshall's comprehensive *Mughals in India - a Bibliographical Survey*, Vol. I: Manuscripts. It is very likely, therefore, that the work or the passage was a figment of Mirza Jan's imagination.

While in his so-called quotation from the Counsels of the Mughal princess Mirza Jan only speaks of a temple at the site of Sita-ki-rasoi being destroyed, he goes on himself to say that the Babri Masjid was built at Rama's birth-place by destroying the temple of Ram Janmasthan, close to Sita-ki-Rasoi, so that the mosque was then known as Sita-ki-rasoi. Thus the legend had grown: to Rama's birth-site had been added Sita's kitchen; and Mirza Jan was exulting in the supposed destruction of a temple

here, of which generations of earlier Hindus and Muslims were unaware!

Subsequent to Mirza Jan's tract — in fact, subsequent to the clash over the Babri Masjid in 1855 — the myth that the Masjid was built on the site of a destroyed temple became the common possession of the partisans of the two communities. How the legend could grow, out of a sense of bravado and revenge on both sides, is illustrated by the series of Urdu tracts, which VHP triumphantly lists. Lack of space prevents an analysis of this material, but it is enough to say that no evidence, not already discussed by us, is presented in this literature. It is only illustrative of the growth of the mentality of modern communalism; its authority for what stood at the site before the Babri Masjid was built is nil.

VII

The conclusion that we have reached after a careful consideration of the entire available evidence may be summed up as follows:-

- (1) No evidence exists in the texts that before the 16th century (and indeed before the 18th century), any veneration attached to any spot in Ayodhya for being the birth-site of Rama.
- (2) There are no grounds for supposing that a Rama temple, or any temple, existed at the site where Babri Masjid was built in 1528-29. This conclusion rests on an examination of the archaeological evidence as well as the contemporary inscriptions on the mosque.
- (3) The legend that the Babri Masjid occupied the site of Rama's birth did not arise until late 18th century; that a temple was destroyed to build the mosque was not asserted until the beginning of the 19th century, when the observer, before whom the assertion was made, disbelieved it.
- (4) The full-blown legend of the destruction of a temple at the site of Rama's birth and Sita-ki-rasoi, is as late as the 1850. Since then what we get is merely the progressive reconstruction of 'imagined history' based on faith.

It is for the people of this country to judge whether on the basis of such obvious evidence as the VHP has presented in support of its case, it is justifiable to mortgage the destiny and good repute of the country.

As historians it is also our duty to point out that in an civilised country of the world is a building of the 16th century permitted to be destroyed or tampered with.

In 1891 when A. Fuhrer drew up his descriptive list of *Monumental Antiquities and Inscriptions in the North-West Provinces and Oudh*, 1891, he put the Babari Masjid among the monuments of Class II b (pp. 296-97). On page i, he explained the implications of this classification; it meant that though the monument was "in possession of private bodies and individuals", it was "possible or desirable to save (it) from further decay by such minor measures as the eradication of vegetation, the exclusion of water from the walls and the like". Being such a monument, the Babari Masjid became a protected monument under the *Ancient Monuments Act*, 1904 (re-legislated, 1958). Besides being built nearly 450 years ago, it is a significant example of Sharqi architecture. It is a part of our common, national heritage. Under law, Government must save and preserve it as a fully protected monument.

If, then, we have a care for historical facts, if we want to uphold the law, if we have love for our own cultural heritage, we must protect Babri Masjid. A country is surely judged by how it treats its past.

'NO ONE WILL STOP THIS RATH YATRA'

*The BJP President L.K.Advani speaks to Swapan
Dasgupta in Udaipur*

What do you feel are the reasons for the success of your rath yatra?

Firstly, our reverence for Ram. And secondly, those who are politically conscious feel elated that for the first time in 40 years there is a party which doesn't shy away from expressing the views of the majority community. After all, this community, namely the Hindus, really gives direction to national life.

The BJP has hitherto shied away from moving to the forefront of the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation. What were the compulsions that led you to go on a *rath yatra*?

I have constantly said that the BJP is not leading the movement. It is being conducted by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the *sanyasis* and *sadhus* associated with the whole movement. The BJP has done some conscious thinking on this issue since 1985, particularly after the undoing of the Shah Bano judgement. This was a watershed event. The formation of the Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC) in 1986 was a logical consequence of the government's capitulation of the Shah Bano issue. The committee was set up in the belief that, having succeeded undoing a

supreme court judgment, there ought to be no difficulty in having a district court judgment undone. However, the mood of the Hindus began building up after 1985. They became conscious of the fact that all the other political parties had not refused to understand the Hindu psyche but were determined to disregard it because they felt, and not very wrongly, that there is not such thing as Hindu vote bank. This is why virtually every political party has not hesitated from speaking contemptuously about Hindus.

Was your *rath yatra*, in its timing, meant as an alternative cementing force to the divisiveness of Mandal?

I have earlier said that I hope that this government does not have any confrontation with the people on this issue of Ram Janmabhoomi and that it allows this temple to be built. I also added, that in case they are bent upon a confrontation, that may occasion the biggest mass movement this country has ever seen. Now you will recall that statement was made in June, at a time when the Mandal commission was nowhere in the picture. This statement was made at that particular point of time because the VHP in its Hardwar meeting had noted that the four months' time given to the V.P. Singh government had lapsed. As the Prime Minister had done nothing in the direction of resolving the matter they decided to fix a fresh *muhurat* and October 30 was the day selected.

While our party was not very actively involved in all this, we had no hesitation (in joining the movement). This was underscored by my personal participation in the *shilanyas puja* last year. Today I can admit that my participation was provoked by repeated statements from Janata Dal leaders (during the elections) that unless the BJP changes its stand on Ayodhya they would not have any seat adjustments with it.

I felt that instead of replying to these repeated threats with a counter statement a formal dramatic gesture would be more appropriate. I had decided that something must be done to ensure that the BJP participates in this movement in a big way without leading it. During the drafting of our resolution (on the Temple issue) last year, we had drawn an analogy between Ayodhya and Somnath. Therefore, the first thing that came to my mind was a *padyatra* from Somnath to Ayodhya. Later, thinking about it I realised that such a long *padyatra* would not be feasible. Also, I

would not be travelling through three states — Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. I consulted a few colleagues and the idea of the *rath yatra* evolved.

Now that the *rath yatra* has taken off, there is a demand that it be banned on the grounds that it is inflaming communal passions. You have said it will provide a healing touch. Is there some failure in communicating this view to those who demand a ban?

No, I do not attribute it to any such failure to understand the message of the *rath yatra*. I am sure that everyone knows that it has provided a healing touch, it has not caused any tensions or inflamed passions. These demands are being made by people who felt that they could ride roughshod over the sentiments of the Hindus. But now the sentiments of the Hindus have been manifested and articulated in such a powerful fashion without arousing any communal passion that their case has become indefensible. It is the indefensibility of their own case which makes them react with such vehemence.

I am pained by the casual comments being made here and there about *rath yatra* leaving behind trails of blood and communal passions. Actually, these have nothing to do with ground reality, I can admit that I was very apprehensive when it started. As everyone knows, Gujarat and particularly certain places such as Baroda, Ahmedabad, Surat and Bharuch have become very susceptible to riots over the slightest provocation.

Therefore I was particularly keen to ensure that nothing happened. You may have noticed that the first reaction to the *rath yatra* there was the blood *tilak*, vessels of blood and the collection of *shastras*. All this is symbolic, they don't mean anything. Even then they saw that I didn't approve of it. I don't even approve of the slogans that are being raised, *Babri masjid todo, jo hum say takrayega sidha upar jayega* and I think this disapproval had a very salutary effect on them.

There are many who feel that in the 11 months this government has been in power it has created greater devastation in Hindu society than what the Congress has done in the last 40

years. The Mandal reservations are a case in point. So how do you explain your continuing amicable co-existence with this government?

Now this question has been posed to me several times. I would reply to it by saying that the behaviour of Indian political parties in relation to this particular issue leaves little to choose from. And as I have already said in reply to an earlier question that the turning point in recent political history regarding Hindu-Muslim relations has been the Shah Bano case and for this the Rajiv government was responsible. The present Prime Minister also contributed, he was part of that government but Mr. Arif Mohammad Khan can be seen as the other pole.

But that being the turning point I do not see any reason why I should be comparing these governments. They determine all their approaches to issues, which has even led to the partition of the country and they keep formulating their approach to Kashmir, to Babri Masjid, to even the question of public holidays, on what I describe as minorityism, which I describe as pseudo-secularism. This approach is common to all the parties, including the communist party, which has been responsible in the post-partition era for giving a fresh lease of life to the Muslim League which was virtually dead and buried after partition.

The Muslim League was resurrected only because of the patronage of the party in Kerala, when they were made partners in the communist coalition government. It was only after 1985 that the communists decided to take a stand on the Shah Bano case, on the *Shariat*, and other issues in opposition to the Muslim League. There too, it is political, an electoral expediency rather than any principles that has made the communists take their present stand even now they say nothing against the BMC. It is purely and simply a veneer of non-communalism and this non-communalism is communalism in reverse, everything that they say supports the BMC and the Muslim League lobby which has been responsible for the undoing of the Shah Bano judgment.

I have no doubt that if the Shah Bano controversy had erupted in 1988 and not in 1985 the communist party would not have dared to take the stand it took in 1985. And therefore I regarded it as significant that during the 1989 election campaign they did not pay so much as mention the Shah Bano issue.

You are about to enter Bihar and U.P. where both the governments have publicly announced that they are opposed to you and that they will try to prevent the progress of the *rath yatra*. What is your attitude and what do you think will be the likely consequences if it is executed?

I remember this point being repeatedly raised in the November 9, 1989 (*shilanyas*) case and ultimately there was no clash. I am not saying that something similar is bound to happen this time but at the same time I would not say that I have lost hope that a confrontation would be averted. Therefore, I am not taking cognisance of what the Bihar and U.P. chief ministers are saying. I am told that your paper too carried an article that the Mufti too said something to that effect but I don't need to react to that. I proceed on the assumption that no one will try to stop this *rath yatra*. I will be reaching Ayodhya on (October) the 29th.

Courtesy: Sunday Times of India

'MARK MY WORDS, THE HINDUS WILL WIN'

In this heated tirade, Ashok Singhal, secretary general of the Vishwa Hindu Partshad, explains why his organisation still believes in violent quarreling over a 3200-square foot piece of land in Ayodhya, offers his views of the Muslim community, and predicts that VPSingh is going to be booted out of power

by Rashme Sehgal

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) is ostensibly an organisation devoted to religious work. And this is what their cadre claim they have been doing all these years. In the capital they have functioned under the front of Seva Bharati, with an office located opposite the Jhandewale temple.

The truth is that the VHP has become a force unto itself, presently riding a wave of unprecedented fundamentalism. Ever since they took up cause of demolishing the Babri Masjid and replacing it with a Ram temple six years ago, they have moved centrestage an issue which strikes an emotional chord in the hearts of the Hindu majority. So effective has their campaign been that they have been able to unleash a religious war of frightening dimensions.

One of the major players in their gameplan is Ashok Singhal, the secretary general of the party. He joined it in 1982, bringing

with him a formidable reputation as a dedicated and resourceful RSS worker, a party he joined in the early '50s. Singhal's contention, like that of his party members, is based on the belief of Hindu superiority, as also in their inalienable right to construct the Ram temple.

"We do not know what is disputed or undisputed," he asserts matter-of-factly. "All we know is we want the place where the idols are kept and no force on earth can stop us."

To the crucial question of how exactly the VHP plans to build a temple without demolishing the masjid, Singhal gives a long-winded reply: "The place where the Muslims claim the Babri masjid stands used to belong to Wajid Ali Shah, till he transferred it to the East India Company, after which it belonged to the Crown. In fact it came to be called the Crown Land, owned by neither Hindus nor Muslims. Then how can the Shias or the Sunni Waqf Board lay claim to it today?"

The VHP argument is very clear. They are "righting a great wrong", and the only remnant of the mosque as put up by Mir Bagi, the army general of Babar, is a piece of stone with the inscription *farishton ke uttarne ka sthan* (place for the descent of angels). This stone should be entrusted to Mir Bagi's descendants living at Shahwanwa village, six kilometers from Faizabad.

"The Hindus have decided to put up a fight for the temple and that is why we are going to Ayodhya in large numbers for the *kar seva*. The government and police may stop us. There may be firing, many of us may not be able to reach Ayodhya, but we are not going to bow down anymore. If they try and stop us, we will give a call from Ayodhya to spread the agitation to every district in this country. Mark my words, the government will have to bow down before the overwhelming tide of Hindu sentiment," says Singhal. In a less militant tone, he continues, "Our purpose will be achieved once we get the *santum sanctorum*. It is such a small piece of land, measuring just 3,200 square feet. Why should anyone want to quarrel over it?" he asks.

Singhal blames political parties for politicising the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babari Masjid issue for their own ends. Rajiv Gandhi started the trend and V.P. Singh has followed suit. The VHP analysis is simple: it is all being done to capture the Muslim vote. "Otherwise, what is the difficulty in our getting the Ram Janmab-

hoomi?" he asks. "We all know this is Ram's birthplace." And almost as though he were invoking Ram's fury, he adds "Rajiv Gandhi did not allow the temple construction. He was booted out of power. The same will be the fate of V.P. Singh".

In Singhal's scheme of things, there does not seem to be any problem in having the Babri Masjid shifted to another spot. The VHP has consulted several technologists and engineering specialists who have informed party members that the mosque is not as delicate or as dilapidated as some people have made it out to be. Not that the VHP's machinations will stop here. The BJP president L.K. Advani has expressed the view that if the Muslims give up claims to the Babri Masjid, his party will not press for the removal of other mosques.

The VHP's gameplan is quite different. Ayodhya is only the first step before the spotlight turns to Krishnabhoomi and Kashi Vishwanath. "Our stand from the start has been: give us these three and forget about the other thousands of temples destroyed by Muslim invaders. If the government does not agree, we will agitate and force it to comply." says Singhal.

Do Singhal and his colleagues seriously believe they can reverse a historical process? After all, the history of Islam is replete with examples of mosques being constructed in place of worship. "Who is talking about the processes of history being reversed?" he asks heatedly. "If that were the case, we would have broken down all the mosques and converted all the Muslims, or thrown them out of the country as has happened to Hindus in Pakistan. The government has allowed one-and-a-half crore Bangladeshis to settle down in our country. They have created a national menace. What is happening in Kashmir? Thousands of Hindus are being thrown out of the state and the government is keeping quiet. Muslims are being appeased to the extent that I accuse the government of moving towards a process of Islamisation. It is this policy of appeasement that has caused a backlash in the Hindu mind. Every Hindu feels a strong sense of injustice and the government is responsible for creating this feeling, not us."

For the VHP, this explains why Advani's *rath yatra* drew such massive crowds: it helped to assuage the feeling of "insult" Hindus have faced for the last 60 years. Singhal's tirade does not end here. The VHP has come to believe that their war in essence is

a battle between "true nationalism and communalism". "What is being dubbed communal is national", says Singhal, "and secularism has become a password for the appeasement of Muslims. Why else have they not been absorbed into the national mainstream?"

It is because of this "historical injustice" that, according to Singhal, the Muslims have gained the "upper hand". Following this logic, the VHP holds the Muslims responsible for starting riots and picking quarrels with the police, even as it turns a blind eye to the violence inflicted on Muslims. In their frame of argument, it is the Muslims who invariably attack religious processions. It is they who attack the PAC and that is why they are decimated in such large numbers during riots, and it is this "quarrelsome mentality" that has kept them below the poverty line.

The Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy has definitely proved to be a financial windfall for what once was a struggling organisation. Their call for Re. 1.25 donation towards the *shilanyas* and temple construction has already raked in a massive 8.5 crore rupees. "No organisation in the world has been able to collect such a large sum of money based on such small donations," Singhal explains expansively, dismissing rumours that the actual collections were much larger. "All our funds are audited. *Paise paise ka hisaab hai.*"

However, the VHP has apparently not really been all rage and fury. It was launched as a party to work towards eradicating the multi-fold evils prevalent in Hindu society. "Practices like untouchability, dowry and dowry deaths had to be removed. Our society had become stagnant and tradition-bound. The backward classes were being neglected and they had become a fertile ground for Christian missionaries, who started playing on their feelings and converting them in large numbers," Singhal maintains.

How could the VHP complete against Muslim and Christian groups, especially when the latter were receiving aid to the tune of several crores of rupees, asks Singhal. Here again, they were discriminated against, he says, since the government forbade them access to temple offerings which amount to hundreds of crores of rupees. If it had been made available to them. They would have ploughed it back and certainly raised the standard of the poverty eradication programmes.

As a parting shot, Singhal comes to the end of his thesis: "It

is only when the Hindus become strong that the Muslims will cease to attack us. It is when they come forward and assert themselves that they will carry the minorities along with them."

The question people are asking now is whether the nation's political future can be left in the hands of medieval mahants. Singhal may have an engineering degree from Benaras Hindu University, but his view of life is no different from other Hindu zealots whose sensibility and understanding of religion is distorted by a vengeful view of history.

Courtesy: The Independent

'AREY BHAI, MASJID HAI HI KAHAAN?'

by Arun Shourie

Aap use masjid kahte hi kyon ho? ("But why do you refer to it as a mosque at all?") "*Arey bhai, masjid hai hi kahaan?*" ("Where is the mosque, my friends?"). "*Woh to Raam lalla ka mandir hi hai.*" ("That is just the temple of our dear Ram"). That is not L.K. Advani talking to V.P. Singh. It is V.P. Singh talking to several RSS leaders.

The elections had not yet been announced, V.P. Singh had travelled to Bombay to meet the RSS leaders. Persons I know intimately were present throughout the meeting. V.P. Singh said then that as the structure was valued by the Muslims and the site was sacred to the Hindus, he was for Rajmohan Gandhi's proposal — i.e. for shifting the mosque brick by brick to another site and constructing the temple at the site. This in essence is what the VHP and the BJP came to espouse — with the improvement that the Hindus shall raise the fund to bear the entire cost of shifting the structure.

Later too, I know from one of the senior-most leaders of the BJP, one who measures every word he says, Kidar Nath Sahni, V.P. Singh used the exact expressions to the BJP leaders.

Later still and I know this directly from my friend Jaswant Singh, the BJP MP and today the chairman of the Estimates Committee of parliament, he used the very expressions to Jaswant Singh. To him V.P. Singh added that as the structure was a mandir

in any case, why “demolish” it?

There had been play on the word “demolition” too at the meeting with the RSS leaders.

“*Demolition ke zaroorat hi khaan hai, bhai*”, V.P. Singh had asked. (“Where is the need for demolition?”). “*Ek dhakka doge to woh gir jayegi*” (“One shove and it will crumble”). “*Aur agar aap sab ek ek eent ghar le jayoge, wahan kuch rahega hi nahin*” (“If each of you were to carry just one brick home, there will be nothing left there!”).

Nor was there any change in the ensuing months. I know — again from persons who were directly involved — that V.P. Singh did not just endorse the three-point formula which was worked out. He actively participated in devising it.

Under the formula the entire property — i.e., the structure and the land — was to be acquired by the government. The structure was termed Part ‘A’ and the lands around it Part ‘B’ and ‘C’, for reasons we shall just see.

As for Part ‘A’, the Supreme Court was to be asked to determine the character of the structure. Till that determination was handed down, the VHP etc, though continuing their movement, would not touch the structure. The lands around the structure were divided into two parts — and only because the method of acquiring them had to be different. The lands around the structure which were owned privately had to be acquired under the Land Acquisition Act. In normal circumstances to acquire these notices of up to two years would have to be given. The notices were dispensable in emergencies, but even then it was necessary to give notices of three weeks or so. This latter is what was to be done in the case of this land.

The rest of the land was Nazul land. This the government could and therefore would acquire immediately.

The lands had some structures on them a temple, a dharmshala, an office etc. It was decided that for the time being the government would keep these.

The lands per se were to be made over to the VHP etc, and they were to commence construction from the spot where the shilanyas had been done last November.

It was then noticed that actually the entire land could be ac-

quired by the government under a special ordinance. There was, therefore, no reason to hand over the Nazul land one day and the privately owned land three weeks later.

It was all to be done in one go.

All this was worked out between V.P. Singh and others between Monday, October 15, and Thursday, October 18.

George Fernandes met Bhaurau Deoras and Atal Behari Vajpayee on the night of Thursday, October 18 and confirmed the arrangement.

V.P. Singh confirmed it on Friday, around 11 a.m.

At 3 p.m. that day two ministers, Madhu Dandavate and Subodh Kant Sahay, met Moropant Pingle, the RSS strongman overseeing the VHP, and reconfirmed the arrangement. Pingle expressed the VHP's reservation: It would accept the formula, but it would not give up its right to continue its movement for shifting the mosque, he said; however, he agreed, it would not disturb the structure for the time being in any way.

Then came a stormy meeting of Muslim leaders with V.P. Singh. And so around 5 p.m. V.P. Singh let it be known that he had changed his mind. What was the "disputed structure" became "disputed land". "And all land the titles to which were in disputed before the Allahabad High Court were now to taken to be covered by the expression "disputedland".

As nothing was to be done to disturb what was "disputed", this change meant that nothing could be commenced any where, not even at the spot where the shilanyas had been done.

"But once the government acquires the land," it was explained to him, "all disputes about its titles would end. There is thus no reason for going back on what has been agreed about commencing construction."

"Then I won't acquire the land," said V.P. Singh.

THE ORDINANCE

That night however came the ordinance. It did not make the

distinction which had been agreed to originally between the structure and the land. The government did not spell out what exactly was to be referred to the Supreme Court. And there was nothing about transferring anything to the VHP.

Even so, the ordinance had at least acquired the land.

The VHP was furious. It felt it had been taken for a ride, not just by government but by the mediators. But the impression was given on behalf of government the next morning, on Saturday that is, that the ordinance had been just the first step, that the rest would follow within the next two or three days. Moderate leaders, L.K. Advani and Vajpayee, therefore declared that while the ordinance was a small step, it was a small step forward.

The initial reactions of the Muslim leaders too were of cautious relief: they had been in on what was being negotiated; they did not reject what was announced; they said the details would be studied.

Even on Saturday therefore the original arrangement was alive.

But by Sunday recriminations had started among the Muslim leaders; you have agreed to a step which will become the precedent for taking over.

Properties anywhere and everywhere, charged some about the others. The hardliners prevailed. And so the Muslim leaders warned V.P. Singh: If you allow any construction even in the plot in which the shilanyas had been done, the Muslims will spurn you the same ways they spurned Rajiv last year.

And it became clear too that Mulayam Singh, who had already outdone V.P. Singh in chatting up the Muslims, might seize upon the ordinance as an opportunity. It wasn't just that he could be halting the *rath yatra* undo on the ground whatever might have been agreed to in Delhi. It was that a word from him that V.P. Singh had caved in to "Hindu fundamentalists" would erase the image which V.P. Singh had been so assiduously cultivating all this while.

The CPM stepped in too, in minatory hues.

These things and nothing else were the spur to the "secularism" which burst upon everyone so suddenly on Monday, and of which we have heard so much in the last five days.

Secularism has not been upheld. It has been given a body blow. The one and only inference which will be drawn from the fact that a prime minister of India went back on what he had himself helped put together, and therefore even withdrew the ordinance which had been issued in the name of the President, and that he did all this because of pressure from secularists like Imam Bukhari, the only moral that will be drawn from this is that Hindus too should raise Bukharis among them.

Not just secularism the authority of the state has been dealt a body blow. And in the long run no one will be harmed as much by such weakening of the state as minorities.

THE TRAGEDY

I am so much on what all this reveals about V.P. Singh: no one has to labour much on that these days, he is doing all the revealing himself day and night.

I am on the tragedy of it for our society, and for the Muslims in particular.

Through the last few decades the rational course for all citizens has been to work together to strengthen the institutions in the proper functioning of which alone the security and prosperity of all lies. But section after section has been led to believe by the thekedars in it that its security and prosperity lies in fortifying itself as a group separate from the others. And at each turn the lay members of it have been led to believe that this leader or that — Mrs. Gandhi one day Bahuguna the next — was the one and only available guarantor of their security and prosperity.

The real reason behind this has been simply that the leader has won over the thekedars by the customary devices, that the interests not of the poor Muslim masses were secure in the hands of that leader but that the interests of those thekedars had been taken care of by him. That has been the real reason. But poor Muslims have been made to fall for the contrived superficials; the achkan with a Lakhnavi or Hyderabad cut, the cap of this cut rather than that, the person's demeanour at Iftaar parties, the smattering of Urdu in the person's speeches. That have led to fall to surface promises — "The Minorities Commission shall be given constitutional status", "There shall be special financial institutions

for the minorities”.

It is not only that so many of these promises have been hollow — what the poor Muslim weaver, his trade being swamped as that of any other weaver by the rush of technology of the poor Muslim boy toiling away over a carpet like any other poor boy going to get from the conferment of constitutional status on the Minorities Commission? It is that many of these sops will worsen the lot of the Muslims: you set up separate financial institutions for them and see the attitudes of managers in ordinary banks towards Muslim clients.

But because a leader has held out such baubles, the Muslim masses have been enticed by their thekedars to repose faith in him.

Of course, the leaders and the thekedars are not the only ones who have contributed to this. The pseudo-secularists have done even more. They have not cared to study the details of any controversy that has arisen — be it Shah Bano or Rushdie's book or the affair on hand. The handy slogan, the smear have been all for them. But these they have let loose ferociously.

Every rational solution has thus been drowned.

And the very thing they said they were out to prevent — Hindu reaction — has been inflamed.

V.P. Singh taunts the BJP leaders today, asserting that they embarked on the *rath yatra* for electoral purposes. Assume they did.

But what is portentous is not the *rath* they launched. What is portentous is the tumultuous response it evoked.

Today no one stokes that reaction more than the sudden secularists, V.P. Singh and Mulayam Singh.

And the poor Muslims are led to believe — by the thekedars among them, by the pseudo-secularists, and of course by the two of them — that these two are their protectors.

Courtesy: Afternoon Despatch Courier

'STOP THE BLOODTHIRSTY CHARIOT OF FIRE'

by Rashme Sehgal

A little-known fact about the Shahi Imam, Syed Abdullah Bukhari, is his love for semantics. He has a certain image of himself and that is the way he wants the rest of the world to perceive him. Despite all the political controversies raging around him and his neck-deep involvement in politics he would like to be seen only as a religious leader.

Sitting in the ornate drawing room of his air-conditioned office located in the sprawling Jama Masjid area, he places a *Paan* in his betelstained mouth, points to a chair, and says a trifle dramatically, "Suppose I decide to call this chair a sofa, or a table or a house, will it change and become any of these things? People calling me a politician is equivalent to calling this chair a house or a sofa or a ceiling fan".

Apparently delighted at this explanation, he breaks into a beatific smile, firmly places his dark glasses back on his eyes and elaborates, "If I were a politician, I would be occupying an important *kursi*. But my point is, what is the mettle of today's politicians? They believe in currying favour with the masses and wooing them with sweet words as a means of catapulting themselves to positions of power. I am not one of them.

Whatever his claims may be, the Shahi Imam has managed to

hoist himself to the position of undisputed leader of the Muslims. His ability to blow hot and cold over an issue so that he always remains on the winning side has kept him on the political centre-stage for the last two decades. Ever since the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi issue has swept into the national consciousness, the Imam has been exhorting his followers to be prepared for a holy *jihad*.

Now, with matters reaching collision point, the Shahi Imam has been issuing warnings that BJP president L.K. Advani's "blood-thirsty chariot of fire" must be stopped from entering the capital. On October 6, a meeting of Muslim leaders under his chairmanship asked the central government and prime minister to take concrete steps to diffuse the situation. "We are waiting for their response," says the Imam. "After all, there are many ways of igniting a volatile situation. You don't have to take a bundle of straw and throw a lighted matchstick on it. That is one example. The *rathiyatra* is another."

Then, on a different note, he continues, "If the government does not do the needful, we will take concrete steps to defend ourselves. Muslims possess great strength and because they keep their strength under control does not mean they are weak." Although the Imam says that he and other Muslim leaders are willing to abide by the court's verdict on the Ayodhya dispute, in the same breath he admits that if the court demands a demolition of the mosque, its verdict will not be acceptable to the average Muslim. "Where is the proof of Ram's birthplace?" he asks. "Many leading Hindu scholars and archaeologists have stated no proof exists. Just because the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bharatiya Janata Party say so, does not make it Ram's birthplace."

But how are Muslim leaders willing to abide by the high court decision on ayodhya when they rejected the supreme court verdict in the Shah Bano case? The Imam has his own ingenious explanation for this. "In the Shah Bano case," he explains, "the judges interpreted the *Quran* in the wrong light. We believe that only very learned and knowledgeable persons can comment on our holy book. Judges do not fall into this category. Though I would like to clarify that we rejected only a small part of the court verdict where the supreme court presented wrong details over the issue of our personal law. The Ayodhya dispute does not pertain

to any religious book. Here, the dispute is over a point where the very fabric of the country is being torn asunder."

A solution the Imam has recently suggested is that the dispute be referred for a final settlement to a committee comprising Mitrasen Yadav, MP from Faizabad and nine members of the Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly, also from Faizabad. The decision of this committee, he feels, should be acceptable to all Muslims and the matter would then be resolved in less than a week.

The entire Ayodhya controversy seems to have embittered him. He comments, "V.P. Singh is a good, sincere, person but his dependence on the BJP has proved incalculably harmful for his government. That is why I am convinced it is better for the government to fall rather than continue to depend on the BJP. It is only after a mid-term poll that the BJP will realise its actual strength. I am convinced they will not get more than 10 to 12 seats. During the last elections they managed to secure 80 seats. Primarily because their adjustments with the Janata Dal proved to their advantage."

A mid-term poll could also see the return of Rajiv Gandhi, couldn't it? "That would be unfortunate for the country," he replies, "but conditions are such that anybody could come to power. In politics, anything is possible — it is like the rainbow — the colours keep changing."

Elaborating on this, he states, "Tomorrow Rajiv Gandhi can come, the next day a donkey, or a monkey or a *langur* can come. Time alone will tell. We have to be concerned with our needs and we can only hope that V.P. Singh returns as prime minister. But I must add that I would prefer the Congress any day to the BJP and VHP."

Often, Muslims in the rest of the country feel the Imam has got far more publicity than is his due and there are some who condemn him altogether as straying off the religious path. Unfortunately, recent developments show that religion has become so entangled with politics that it is difficult to sift them apart. It is therefore not shocking to learn that the Shahi Imam was a greater admirer of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and even met him in 1982. He supported the Anandpur Sahib resolution and strongly condemned Operation Bluestar.

Syed Abdullah Bukhari is the twelfth Imam of the Jama

Masjid, built 350 years ago by Shah Jehan. He was appointed Imam in 1973 by his father, the later Sayed Hamid Bukhari. The city at that time was agog with rumours that Syed Abdullah had pressurised his father to retire and the old man was forced to give into his sons's harangue. For some time he tried to play the genuine religious leader and steered clear of politics but in 1974, after the riots in the walled city, he publicly criticised the Congress government. This marked his first step into the political arena.

In 1975, the Delhi Waqf Board convened a meeting to replace him as Shahi Imam. Bukhari gatecrashed into the meeting and demanded to know how they could remove him when they were not entitled to comment on religious matters. A free-for-all followed, he was injured, arrested under MISA, and locked up.

People living around Jama Masjid were informed he had been killed. Large-scale rioting and looting followed. When he was released from jail a few months later, he found he had acquired superstar status. The Shahi Imam has never looked back since.

His public statements soon became more vocal, more vitriolic. He bitterly criticised Sanjay Gandhi's mopping up of the Turkman Gate and the Jama Masjid area and termed the period the "bulldozer raj". He supported the Janata Party in the 1977 general elections but was disillusioned when they ignored him later. Indira Gandhi used this opportunity to mend fences with him and called on him along with Sanjay Gandhi. The Imam refuses to discuss her, merely saying with a deprecatory laugh, "She came here once and then I met her again at a function at some embassy. I never met her again."

What he is really not willing to talk about is his anger at being-ignored by the Congress (I) after they returned to power in 1980. It was then that he decided to build his own political base rather than allow politicians to exploit him. Luck also worked in his favour. When Syed Shahabuddin had his muchpublicised differences with V.P. Singh, the Jan Morcha had to look for a credible Muslim alternative and V.P. Singh became PM, he signed an agreement with the Imam which the old patriarch claims "is lying safely in my locker" apart from sanctioning Rs. 50 lakhs for restoration work at the Jama Masjid.

Questions are asked occasionally about the Imam's finances. Amongst his sources, it is alleged, are Iran and Libya. the activities

of his four sons are also questioned. But he dismisses all rumours with a wave of his hand.

Whatever the Imam's assurances, his word is law in the old city. Few dare openly question his diktates and those who do are reportedly invariably beaten up and worse. The *kabadi bazaar* that surrounds the Masjid helps provide the manpower for his squad. That they obey his every whim is a reflection of his power.

Courtesy: The independent

ADVANI'S MISSION IS WRONG, SAYS G.S. TOHRA

by Jyoti Punwani

Both Hindus and Sikhs are puzzled by the dismissal of the granthi of the Delhi gurdwara who presented L.K. Advani with a siropa. Can you explain the action?

A Siropa is given ritually on many occasions and also as mark of respect. Advani was himself presented with one when he was elected as MP last year. But his current mission was directed against one particular community, aimed at destroying their place of worship. It was a 'vijayayatra' in a 'vijay rath'; we considered the mission wrong. I can understand a shankaracharya taking out a yatra to build a temple. But here is a politician challenging the government to stop his vijay rath and comparing it to the horse used for the Ashwamedh yagna!

But Akalis have always held that religion and politics cannot be separated.

Not when your politics is aimed against another's religion, when you want to destroy the religious place of another to build your own. Then what is the difference between Aurangzeb and Babar and you?

What do you think of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's adoption of 'kar sewa'?

Kar sewa means guru ki sewa. But behind their kar sewa is

only politics. A temple is built by men of god, not by politicians. Kar sew has to be started by saints; after that, ordinary people can go and participate in it. You can't just go and start it yourself.

You approve of Advani's arrest?

Had he not been arrested, this country, which is supposed to be a secular state, would have been exposed. V.P. Singh did a good thing by placing the country above the government.

You would like him to continue as prime minister?

We have no MPs, so what difference does our preference make?

But Badal has issued a statement naming Chandrashekhar as his party's choice.

That's if we have to support someone besides V.P. Singh.

Why Chandrashekhar?

Because he is in the true sense of the term, a secular person. Plus, he's a socialist, and his political life has been clean.

Won't you be supporting the Congress-I by supporting Chandrashekhar?

The Congress-I are the ones who made him suffer the most. Apart from the Akalis, he was the only man who remained in jail all the 19 months of the emergency, in solitary confinement.

You think he will be able to solve the Punjab problem?

Even V.P. Singh wanted to solve the Punjab problem, but he had rahu and ketu sitting on his shoulders — the BJP and the CPI-M. Left to him, we would have had elections in Punjab. If Chandrashekhar has the same rahu and ketu behind him, he too will fail.

So there's no hope for Punjab?

It is a Sikh minority problem, not a Punjab problem. He who agrees with this will be able to solve it. A minority which has contributed more to the country than taken from it...if the feelings of such a minority cannot be assuaged by a country of 87 crore people...

Chandrashekhar believes that the Sikhs should not remain angry. V.P. believed this too. Yet he could do nothing. So whoever becomes prime minister, it won't make much difference to Punjab.

What will then? Which Party?

Parties won't change. V.P. went on convening all-party conferences on Punjab. But the parties must first understand the problem. We have the same inter-state and state-centre disputes as others all over the country, whether it's a question of a state capital, river waters, language... Yet, the solutions that apply to others are not available to us. Why? The only answer that occurs to people is that it is because Punjab is a Sikh state, not a Punjabi state. Had it been a state of Punjabi-speaking people, it would have extended up to Himachal Pradesh. Deliberately, Punjab was carved out as a Sikh state.

You need to look at Punjab's problems with broadmindedness. That is happening everywhere else in the world, but not here. The Anandpur Sahib resolution has been adopted in the USSR! There's nothing like a solution to Punjab; it's a question of getting one's rights. When we demand autonomy, we don't mean that only Akalis will enjoy it. A Darbara Singh may run this autonomous state, or a Baldev Parkash.

You think elections could have been held in the current situation? It is said that terrorists control Punjab.

You mean that as long as the AK-47 is heard in Punjab, President's rule should continue — 15,20 years? Let the militants win; after all, you keep saying they should join the mainstream. Anything is better than this rule of bureaucrats where the people's voice is not heard, where corruption goes on unchecked. There's no development or employment. Don't go by the announcements on TV. It took four months for 45 jailed army men to be released after the PM himself announced their reinstatement at the Ludhiana rally; of these 31 had finished their jail term anyway. The PM may announce anything, the bureaucrats sabotage it. And the militants use this. The tragedy of Punjab is that the Bureaucrats keep gifting weapons to the militants.

It is said that you too are scared of the militants?

Why shouldn't we be? They've killed so many of us. The reality is that when they ask us: after all your loyalty to the country, what has the country given you, we have no reply. So we prefer to keep quiet.

How do you explain S.S. Mann's failure?

Like everyone else, Mann too wanted justice. Had the centre

extended his hand, he would have succeeded. The bureaucrats saw to it that he didn't. They don't want any strong local leadership to emerge; they know how to use the entire state machinery to keep us divided. This has been happening since 43 years; since Nehru and Patel's days.

As a political party, what are you doing to keep political activity going under president's rule?

That is the tragedy — who wants political activity? After president's rule was extended again, Mann started his Punjab bachao programme. But it's not a question of Punjab bachao. Those Punjabis who are represented by the BJP, CPI-M Congress-I — they want president's rule. It is they who influence politics in Punjab. But the three Akali factions, who represent the villagers of Punjab they have no say in the state's politics. So it becomes a question of Sikh bachao.

Why do the Hindus want president's rule? Out of fear?

Fear? That's what the Sikhs feel. The Hindus regard president's rule as Delhi's rule and Delhi's rule as Hindu rule.

Courtesy: The Independent

MYTH AND SYMBOL

Dr. Sudhir Kakar speaks to Pamela Philipose

Would you say that the transformation of the Ram Janman-boomi-Babri Masjid structure into a religious symbol is a significant development?

From the appearance, this transformation is an extremely significant one because, in a sense, the symbol of the temple/mosque extends beyond the political to the sacred. It has the power to evoke instant emotional responses, much more, in fact, than any political symbol.

Do you think religious community require such symbols to give them a sense of identity?

This is inevitable. You see, nobody can live in an empirical reality all the time. People need to be connected to some other kind of reality too — we may call it transcendence or any other label. Empirical reality is represented by our material conditions of life. Transcendental reality is represented by both myths and symbols.

How are myths and symbols related?

Very closely. Both myth and symbol are expressions of transcendence. But the symbol is a kind of instant representation — a snapshot, as it were, of an image or a sound. It extracts an immediate emotional response. A myth is more a narrative of the symbol. It articulates what the symbol is all about. Myths may well

have a kernel of historical truth, but they build on it, so that finally they do not even need to depend on that truth for legitimacy. So when the BJP states that the temple issue does not depend on the historical truth of the structure, they are, in a way, right. They are not talking of the empirical reality, but the mythical reality.

Of course, this leads to problems. If another community has a different mythical reality, and also sees the structure as a symbol of its identity, it can become a very potent source of social conflict.

In this context, are myths and symbols constructive or destructive phenomena?

I feel that whenever there is a great collision of viewpoints on a symbol, it always has a divisive effect. This is bound to happen when one community doesn't share the same view of the symbol, feels threatened by it, or feels it threatens a symbol of its own faith. So here we come to the ambiguous nature of certain symbols, which may even be constructive at a personal level and destructive at a social level.

Do you think that such socially divisive symbols can be replaced by others that are not potentially as threatening?

You are referring here to symbols that don't belong to any one community and can be shared by all communities. Invariably, symbols bring together as well as exclude. Ram Janmabhoomi excludes Muslims. You can have a symbol that Indians relate to but Pakistanis don't. Or another which Asians can relate to but Europeans can't, and so on.

The power of myths and symbols gets much stronger in a period of crisis. When a community's identity is threatened, either by a real or imagined danger, the symbols which hold that community together get much greater significance. At a pan-national level, the tricolour gets great symbolic power when there is a war, when the country is perceived to be threatened by outside forces. What is important to note here, is that it doesn't matter if the threat is not an actual one. It can be created by a politician, or a certain lobby with vested interests.

Going by history, who are the politicians who have been able to make use of symbols? In today's context, the BJP and the VHP have made use of the symbol of the *mandir* very effectively?

Gandhi was a master at making political use of symbols — the *chakra*, the lifting of salt from Dandi. Nehru also, to some extent, was successful in this. For instance, when he referred to the Sindri Fertiliser factory as the modern temple of India, he was trying to give a certain symbolic meaning to factories. They are not just what they represents. They are India's unity, they are India's future, and so on. Actually, I don't think any politician can survive as a politician if he/she doesn't know how to make use of symbols. It becomes a test of his/her political acumen to get people to share in that symbol.

So, by that same token, cynical politicians can make use of symbols to pit one community against another.

When one community, often through someone who represents it in the public sphere, begins to assert its religious community character, then others start becoming very aware of their own and they, in turn, become more religious to protect their identity. In the Nehruvian era, some attempt was made by the middle-and upper middle-classes to shift away from religious identities, into a greater individualism. Somewhere in the '60s, this process was reversed. There was a shift towards the community once again. After all, communalism, as we understand it today, is derived from the word 'community' — albeit the worst aspects of the word. As a result, communities became much more ingrown and started defining themselves in terms of opposition to other communities. I personally regret this.

Does this process manifest itself in social prejudices, wherein people refer to those from other communities as "dirty" or "fanatic" or "stingy"?

Social prejudices are the easiest defence one community has against its own bad feelings. It is essentially a child's response. Mature individuals are supposed to contain all the bad feelings within themselves. A child, on the other hand, deals with his bad feelings by declaring, "I am not bad — it's you or the other persons who is bad." So communities, very much like children, begin to look at other communities as holly bad as a way of keeping the goodness within themselves. Remember, in mythical communities, you always have *rakshas* as a counterpoint to the *deva*.

But if this is not a mature way of looking at things, how do you account for this immaturity?

In periods of perceived threats to identity especially, we go back to perceiving things like children. We start thinking in those ways, we start speaking in those ways. We either suffer from delusions of grandeur — that we are the centre of the world — or we suffer from feelings of persecution. Sometimes, grandiosity can exist simultaneously with paranoia. It becomes a case of “them” versus “us”.

Does this happen at a mass level or an individual level? How does individual response translate into mass response and vice versa?

Every individual exists at several levels. At the psychic level, at the physical level and at the social level. Anything happening at one level is going to affect the other two. The body will experience pain, the psyche will experience anxiety, and at a social level, that individual will experience panic. So, if there is panic at the community level, it can affect the individual at the other two levels as well. Similarly, if an individual is affected, the society in which he or she exists, also gets affected.

But how is it that reason or a rational perception of a situation, say a riot situation, doesn't hold sway?

I would say that this is so because feelings like panic, anxiety and fear are all early developments, rather than something like rationality. So even the most rational, the most highly educated person, can come under the sway of social panic.

How does something like riots, for instance, affect the mass psyche of the community that has been attacked?

I haven't done much work on this. But I would say that people who've been victims of riots respond in different ways. Some go through a complete breakdown, then there are those who identify with their aggressors, faulting their own people for getting them into the situation.

Others have the sense of being oppressed or under siege, powerfully reinforced. Then there are the very strong ones who suppress their rage and await the historical moment when they can give vent to it.

How do you perceive the aftermath of the Ramjanmabhooni-Babri Masjid tangle?

I am pessimistic. Not about whether a solution can be found

in the short run, but whether a lasting solution for this problem can be arrived at. Forging a national identity is a long process. There has to be some kind of common basis for communities to come together—for two communities to merge into a higher community. How does one bring this about? There are no easy solutions and perhaps 40 years as an independent nation is too short a time for such a process.

Courtesy: Sunday Observer

WHAT IS NATIONAL HONOUR?

Views of Prominent Indians

Minoo Masani

Former MP and member of the Constituent Assembly

I am unable to comment intelligently on Advani's claim because for me the entire issue (Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid) is in the world of the irrational, which is beyond my understanding. It is the duty of all citizens under the rule of law to accept the judgement of the courts of law. I want my country to live in the present and not in the past.

In my view, the elements that go into the making of national honour are the view that is presented of the average citizen's personal integrity, honesty and sense of consideration for others. By that criterion the national honour of the Swiss is very high and the Indians very low.

This has not always been so. There was a time when the Indian was looked upon with respect and his culture was admired throughout the world. Alas, by our conduct in our own generation, we have failed to live up to those standards. India's politicians are almost all believed to be rascals. It is not altogether fair to cast a stone at them because after all, every country gets the government it deserves. Gandhiji's advice to "turn the searchlight inwards" is very pertinent. If we search our own hearts most of us

upper-class Indians will realise that the politicians only represents us.

Perhaps all this is a phenomenon of post-Independence India. Gandhiji certainly set a very different example from what was to follow. D.F. Karaka wrote a book titled *Out of dust He Made Us Men*. Orfice he was assassinated, however, the picture changed. So powerful is the force of example, that in prime minister Nehru's time, fellow members of parliament, who had been to prison with me sacrificing their own careers, were to get licences from ministers under the so-called socialist regime. Gandhi brought out the best in people, but this has not been true of any prime minister of India, except for Lal Bahadur Shastri.

What India needs is a reformation and a renaissance similar to the ones that brought Europe from the dark ages to its present eminence. That alone is a path to reviving India's honour.

Asghar Ali Engineer

Bohra reformist leader and scholar in Islamic studies

National honour means taking great pride in being an Indian, working towards the larger good and protecting the country's interests within and outside its borders. National honour means to place the country above all — above temptation for political power, fame or money and above class or caste interests.

Chauvinistic national pride, which is what Advani is propagating, has no place in my concept of national honour. How can one party's or one leader's sectarian interests constitute national honour? Why doesn't Advani take out a rath yatra to press for land reforms so that the landless labour may benefit? Or to press for a fair deal for women?

There is so much serious discrimination in India — in every field of activity — that it is rather difficult rally to talk in terms of national honour. How does one define national honour when there is no universal justice in the country? When every community discriminates against its women? Let us give our women equal opportunities; our landless labour land; our children no labour. Let us shun religious symbols and fundamentalist movements and

work towards upholding the ideals of our Constitution. That would be a nation honour.

Rafiq Zakaria

Member, Janata Dal and the sub-committee on communal harmony

National honour is something that naturally evokes a lot of response from everyone, but what is it? Is proclamation of the fact that one is a Hindu a proof of national honour? That is what Advaniji is trying to emphasise.

But then the question arises: even if one is to confine national honour to being a Hindu. WHO is a Hindu? Here you get into the vortex of the caste system which is something nobody who knows anything of Hinduism can disown. Even Gandhiji accepted it as an essential part of Hinduism. So you get from being a Hindu to being a casteist, and if the oppressed castes are sought to be uplifted in order to bring about equality and social justice, there is a revolt from the other castes and so national honour gets complicated. If we broaden the base and include the other religions, it gets further complicated. There is, therefore, the risk that such an adherence may land us into deeper waters.

India is really not a country, it is almost a continent. Its strength has always lain in the multiplicity of its social and cultural affinities. It has always rejected rigidity in approach, that is why it has always remained a fertile land of broad humanism.

To my mind, our concept of national honour has to be based on broad humanism that embraces all that has been essentially a part of our continuing historical process. It is that something which Ashoka and Akbar represented, which Gandhi and Nehru represented and which to me constitutes the essence of our national honour. Does Advani or his rath yatra represents this? That is the question.

Chayanika Shah

Member, Forum Against the Oppression of Woman.

To start with, it's very difficult for me to talk about a 'nation's honour' because I don't know how one defines a nation or how one defines honour. Advani's definition of the 'nation's honour' seems ridiculous to me, and I really fail to understand how the honour of people could be so stupid as to be based upon where a temple should, or shouldn't, be built. I don't think this reflects what the people of this country want or need.

To me the honour of a country is what the people want. Today we have boys burning themselves to protest against the Mandal Commission's recommendations. Women, on the other hand, have been burning for ages as another form of protest against what society has been doing to them. Yet not a hair on anyone's head has turned. When people at the core are being hurt in this way it seems absurd to be talking about 'honour'. There's something basically wrong here.

I want to talk about the honour of human beings; of every human being. My honour does not rely on what a few politicians have decided upon. And unless there is a fair sense of justice to each individual, I do not think we can talk about honour.

K.F. Rustomji

Former chief of the Border Security Force

It would enhance our national honour if the temple were built with the consent of people who worship there. It would be a national dishonour if hundreds of people are killed in the battle for this right. The consequential repercussions throughout India may imperil the safety of Muslims living in the interior. If we cannot achieve glory, at least let us prevent dishonour by acquiring the site and preventing bloodshed.

My concept of national honour is something acceptable to all, consistent with our culture, our Constitution and our hopes. And as a symbol of national honour, I can only think of the Constitution. So let us look to making the ideals enshrined in it a reality.

Dr. Gieve Patel

Painter and poet

The openness of a much people Bombay Street, its ease and casualness on any common day, the various levels of communication that prevail here, the sense of safety enjoyed even by women and children — this is Bombay street culture at its best. (I do not now speak of the worst, which too we are unfortunately familiar with.) True nationalism should carry such a flavour of benevolent inclusiveness. It cannot be the harsh imposition of one group's religious or social belief over others — symbolised by loudspeakers blaring from mosques, and by the noise and thoughtlessness of modern-day Diwali and Navratri celebrations.

Fr Rudy Heredia

Director, Social Science Centre, St. Xavier's college.

When you substitute group interests for national honour, then you defeat the basic concept of honour. Pushing caste or community or class interests betrays the interests of the larger populace. Another thing that betrays national honour is when we do not allow all groups to participate in the whole process of national development.

How can one particular community or political party or ideology decide what it considers to be national honour is actually so. How can Advani decide what national honour is? When we choose a symbol of national honour, we must choose one that everyone identifies with. Otherwise the chosen symbol becomes a tribal symbol. The Ram Mandir cannot be a national symbol. A movement to build a temple or a mosque or a church can only be a religious fundamentalist move.

And all fundamentalist movement are a reaction to change. They are a resistance to the development of new icons, new ideologies. Interestingly, there are revivalist movements everywhere — in the West there is a Christian revival, in the Middle-East an Islamic revival and in India, a Hindu wave.

To come back to the concept of national honour, I might add

that, in my opinion, it includes, among other things, a positive discrimination towards the weaker sections. I believed that the benefit of doubt should always go to the weak, the powerless. More generally, national honour should be a secular ideal enshrined in the Constitution. An ideal all political parties and individuals should uphold.

Sheela Barse

Activist and journalist

The BJP stance suggests that Hinduism begins and ends with Ram, which is a fallacious position. How does that position relate to the Advait school or Shaivite streams? Advani's concept of national honour is a Rama temple lobbyist's idea. It is a device to reassure and aggrandise himself.

The most negative side of the coin of national honour is the reality that more than 116 million Indian children have to destroy their childhood to find food for their own survival, and often the survival of their siblings; that millions of citizens live amidst dirt and garbage; that lakhs of people are driven into such a degrading living environment and many more driven to beggary by every national budget.

V.S. Venkatvardhan

Director, Nehru Planetarium

The very concept of nationalism has been bothering me since my childhood. Nationalism is essentially parochialism of a certain sort. When you expand your mind limits somewhat you become a nationalist. When you shrink them still further you become parochial.

That's why I am even opposed to the word internationalist. What has led to the problems in Punjab and Kashmir? Essentially groupism. If we sacrifice our pride and nationalism the world will be a far better place to live in. I think humanism is a far better option. We should take pride in being human. Our motto should

be not to hurt anyone and believe me, this is not so difficult to put into practice.

Susan Mathai

Vice President, Western Region, YWCA, India

Can the concept of national honour be as limited as Advani defines it? How can a religion leave out the human cause? His definition doesn't take into account the experiences of the poor, the illiterate, of woman and children. Instead, he offers a narrow, sectarian view and whips up emotion for 'Ram's cause'.

What does that mean to people who are deprived of basic amenities like drinking water? Women who are brutalised? There is so much money and energy being spent on the rath yatra and it is such a sad waste. Could we not channelise youthful energy into something more positive? The rath yatra is only casting things in a religious colour and making the minorities feel insecure.

- It is merely a gimmick, a way of diverting attention from the real causes. It is also giving rise to a sort of new culture where everything is dealt with superficially. Everyone goes on a yatra nowadays but how does it help the common man?

Dr. Pratap Chandra Chunder

Former union education minister

I don't agree with L.K. Advani at all. I always held him in high personal regard but this does not mean that I have to go along with his views on national honour. Ram is there for every Hindu but that does not mean that at a particular place a temple would have to be constructed by pulling down an existing mosque which is a house of god. The whole world belongs to god and to me every place is suitable for the construction of a temple of god but not at the cost of another temple.

The question of national honour depends on the concept of national and rationality. The nation comprises all the units that comprise the entire people. So the supposed honour of the people

does not necessarily mean the honour of the nation.

Ashis Nandy

Social Scientist, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi

L.K. Advani may feel that the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya truly represents Indian nationalism. I for one would like to draw a distinction between nationalism, a concept borrowed from the West, and patriotism.

The Ram Janmabhoomi may or may not be a symbol of nationalism, but it certainly does not represent patriotism. Both Tagore and Gandhi were opposed to this Western concept of nationalism and stressed the need for evolving authentic, home-grown patriotic values.

Indian nationalism rooted in our own soil is different from the nineteenth century concept of nation states which had evolved in Europe, and was totally homogenising and majoritarian.

The BJP is totally sold on this *Western* concept, which is not only majoritarian but also heavily centralised. The BJP has fully internalised the idea of a nation-state. In such a system, the majority always imputes motives to the minority. The minority is accused of subverting the nation state and this negative feeling in turn is used to further strengthen the state. The BJP essentially believes in such an ideal.

The BJP essentially is an illegitimate child of British colonialism and its Ramjanmabhoomi campaign is an excellent example of that. The party does not represent true Hindu tradition in anyway.

A more apt symbol of Indian patriotism would be the co-existence of the temple and the mosque at the same site in Ayodhya. Indian civilisation has never historicised matters of faith.

Courtesy: The Independent

SECTIONS IV

EDITORIALS

MERCHANTS OF FAITH

The Statesman

Mr. Syed Shahbuddin made a pertinent observation when he rejected Mr. L.K. Advani's rather surprising promise not to support the agitation for temples to be built at the site of the mosques in Mathura and Varanasi if Muslims allow the Rama temple to be constructed in Ayodhya. According to Mr. Shahabuddin, the offer underlined a typical example of the bargaining tactic of "first raising the price and then offering a reduction". Whether or not the BJP's known affinity with the trading community influenced Mr. Advani's thought process, the proposal has brought little credit either to him as a responsible leader or to his party. For most people will see in this strange bargain confirmation of the sneaking suspicion that cynical political calculations, rather than any deeply-felt religious conviction, lay behind the Ramjanmabhoomi agitation. Surely, if his part was convinced about the rightness of its cause, Mr. Advani would not have favoured such haggling. If he has nevertheless done so, it may be because he suspects that the movement is fizzling out in the wake of Mr. V.P. Singh's latest populist measures and Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav's determined stand, and wants to recover some lost ground through a trading process. A second possible explanation could be that he hopes that by arranging a settlement with the Muslim community he will ensure that the BJP, rather than the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, remains in control of the movement.

In this respect, Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia must be admired for being more forthright in her candid admission that “once we are through with the Ramjanambhoomi issue, then we shall pick up the Krishnajanambhoomi issue” and that means enough work to last at least my lifetime”. she, too, may be driven by a political motive, but like the VHP, of which she is a leading light, the Rajmata makes no bones about the path she is pursuing, or the dangers it might hold for communal harmony. But such directness of approach, exemplified yet again by her open support for “voluntary sati”, is easier to understand and tackle than the tendency of some of the more political elements in the BJP to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. Differences within a political party are not unknown, and perhaps not even undesirable, but when they relate to an issue that formed its main electoral plank not so long ago, doubts arise about the leadership’s real intentions. In a way, the BJP has always tended to live in two worlds, as the latest differences over the use of English also shows, drawing sustenance from a highly conservative section of Hindu society and yet gamely trying to adjust to the demands of a modern, secular polity. Rajmata Vijayaraje Scindia obviously represents the more orthodox section, but those who seek adjustments have to make wholehearted efforts based on genuine belief and not opt for a deal that seems to smack of the bazaar. What they do not seem to realize is that such offers can bring an ancient and tolerant faith into disrepute, as when the Shankaracharya of Dwarka threatened to build new temples not only in Ayodhya, Mathura and Varanasi, but after demolishing 300 mosques elsewhere. His fervour, too, was obviously roused more by a desire to enter into a competitive confrontation with the VHP than from any desire to bring true glory to the Hindu religion. It is Hinduism’s tragedy — but, perhaps, also its saving — that the faith is so much greater than its self-appointed defenders.

Courtesy: The Statesman

CALL OF THE NATION

The Times of India

The arrest of Mr. L.K. Advani bears vivid testimony to the secular character of the Indian state. The BJP leader's *Rath Yatra* and his single-minded determination to demolish the Babri mosque to erect a Ram temple in its place threatened to sap the very foundations on which this nation has been built. Mr. V.P. Singh's ambivalence throughout the crisis provoked by Mr. Advani had raised serious doubts about the National Front's ability or willingness to shoulder its constitutional responsibilities and uphold the law. In the end the Prime Minister chose to chart a principled course despite the serious risks involved. It can be argued in retrospect that he was compelled to do so. Any compromise with the *Hindutva* forces unacceptable to secular opinion would have spelled disaster for the country. This was indeed the leitmotif of Mr. V.P. Singh's speech on Doordarshan telecast on Monday night. Clearly he was convinced that there was nothing left for him to do other than to put credit of the National Front and indeed to that of all secular parties that despite their intractable conflicts of interest they were able to isolate the BJP. The nation may have to pay a heavy price for this isolation. The threat of an abrupt escalation of communal strife cannot be discounted. For this very reason the forces of law and order at the Centre and in the states will be expected to perform their duty. The Indian state must act, and must be seen to be acting, to nip in the bud every attempt to whip

up communal tensions. Any laxity on this score could erode the significance of Mr. Advani's arrest and send confused signals to the Indian people and indeed to the world at large.

Unfortunately, however, the National Front government is now bereft of the legitimacy it requires to enforce the writ of the state. The withdrawal of the BJP's support leaves Mr. V.P. Singh without a requisite majority in Parliament. As is his wont the Prime Minister has refused to acknowledge this plain reality. He appears to be in no hurry at all to secure a vote of confidence in his government. Yet, the more he drags his feet in the matter the more he risks creating an altogether unprecedented constitutional crisis which is bound to jeopardize the government's efforts to deal with the fall-out of Mr. Advani's arrest. To dispel the impression that he is engaged in unseemly horse-trading in order to continue in office Mr. Singh must lose no time to convene Parliament at the earliest. If he fails to win a vote of confidence, President Venkatraman will be free to exercise his prerogatives. As the main opposition party the Congress has already announced that it will lend its constructive support from the outside to any government which is not headed by Mr. V.P. Singh and which does not enjoy the support of the BJP. The National Front is thus expected to elect another leader to replace Mr. Singh. Only if it fails to do so can Parliament be dissolved and a fresh poll ordered. In the meanwhile, however, the constitutional process cannot be allowed to be undermined by the machinations of a beleaguered Prime Minister. A mid-term poll conducted in an atmosphere surcharged with atavistic passions provoked by the Mandal and Ayodhya controversies could unleash violence on a truly alarming scale. It is therefore in the nation's overriding interest to allow such passions to subside before it goes to the polls again.

Mr. V.P. Singh cannot for a moment forget that at the present time his is a lame-duck government and that he himself is a caretaker Prime Minister. Instead of seeking constitutional loopholes to be able to continue in office it is incumbent on him to swiftly end the instability at the Centre. A weak Centre, whose very legitimacy is now in doubt, is in no position at all to face the awesome problems now plaguing the country. Therefore, any step he takes to cut short the political uncertainty in the capital is certain to redound to his credit. He should know that even his most severe critics have not failed to applaud his belated but firm stand on the

Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi controversy. He must not fritter away these plaudits by projecting the image of a Prime Minister who resorts to base stratagems to cling to power. Indeed if he abdicates office at this stage without even waiting to secure a vote of confidence in his government there is every reason to believe that he will enhance his reputation. Meanwhile, a word is also in order regarding the BJP's responsibility in this hour of crisis. The arrest of Mr. L.K. Advani will have served a purpose if it persuades his party's leadership that militant Hinduism is the very antithesis of Indian nationhood. As the Prime Minister correctly pointed out in his televised address, a demonstration of Hindu militancy can and does lend legitimacy to fundamentalist and secessionist forces. The time has clearly come for secular and patriotic elements cutting across party lines to make common cause. A beginning in this direction can be made in the present Parliament if possible; if not, the wisdom of the electorate should be trusted to bring such a realignment in the next Parliament.

Courtesy: The Times of India

NATION'S ZERO-HOUR

The Times of India

Development in Ayodhya beginning today (October 30) will decisively determine the future of India as a united, secular and democratic republic. If the U.P. chief minister, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav's courageous, if somewhat gauche and abrasive, efforts to thwart the performance of the *Kar Sewa* on the disputed Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi site succeed, and if this success does not provoke a communal conflagration, the country's precipitate slide into chaos and anarchy will have been halted in the nick of time. If, however, the price of the chief minister's success in terms of lives lost is exorbitant or if the efforts to stall the *Kar Sewa* fail altogether, Mohammed Ali Jinnah's two-nation theory, formally propounded half a century ago, will stand finally vindicated. The risks attendant on a sharp polarisation of Indian society along communal lines are best left to the imagination. Suffice it to say that these will lead not to the creation of a Hindu Rashtra conjured up by the BJP and its apologists but to a bitterly fragmented India. Mayhem and violence will grip every city, town and hamlet where there is even a small presence of the minority community. Indeed, ever since Mr. L.K. Advani undertook his politically-motivated *Rath Yatra* the minority community has lived in a kind of trauma it has not collectively experienced since the days of partition. If the Indian state does not uphold the law and if it fails to protect the Babri Masjid, the faith of this community in its future

well-being in India will be shattered quite beyond redemption. The nation simply cannot afford to harbour within its fold more than a 100 million frightened, disillusioned and angry citizens. Any concession to the *Hindutva* forces the state makes at this point will also provoke other minorities to redouble their efforts to sap the unity and integrity of the nation.

So the issue at stake in Ayodhya today is as clear as daylight. The main responsibility for allowing the issue to become inflammatory must be squarely laid at the doorstep of Mr. Vishwanath Pratap Singh. When he chose to form his government with the outside support of the BJP eleven months ago he should have realised that the arrangement was fatally flawed from its very inception. There was virtually no major issue on which the National Front government and the BJP saw eye to eye: Kashmir, Punjab, the economy and of course Ayodhya. The negotiations conducted by the government to find an amicable solution to the dispute also left little hope — as Mr. V.P. Singh now admits — that the BJP would soften its stand. Yet the Prime Minister behaved as if the BJP was acting responsibly. It was only when the *Rath Yatra* showed no signs of slowing down that the BJP was denounced in no uncertain terms. Far from establishing Mr. V.P. Singh's secular credentials this turn-about was widely seen as a plot to safeguard his position as Prime Minister. The result is there for all to see: the country is seriously threatened with a civil war of a magnitude that boggles the mind. The threat comes at a time when the social fabric is being ripped apart by the Prime Minister's dangerously naive attempts to inject "equity" in the system through the partial implementation of the Mandal Commission report.

The nation desperately needs a respite. It can come about only if there is a swift end to the political uncertainty in the capital. From all accounts the temperature will begin to cool the minute Mr. V.P. Singh chooses to step down. A few months out of office before he tests his popularity in an election is a small price to pay to bring the country back from the brink. If the BJP has a new interlocutor in Delhi it may yet decide to call off the *Kar Sewa* and agree to test the appeal of its *Hindutva* drive in an election too. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi clearly cannot be such an interlocutor. His forceful reiteration of his party's commitment to secularism has no doubt earned for him overwhelming public enthusiasm. But he would quickly fritter away these gains if he is seen to be eager to play the

role of a caretaker Prime Minister. The Congress should now redouble its efforts to ensure that the National Front jettisons Mr. V.P. Singh and back a replacement even if he is acceptable to the BJP. Mr. Gandhi can then go back to the people seeking a clear mandate on the theme that in this hour of crisis stability and *sadbhavana* taken together can alone check the calamity that has enveloped the country within less than a year of Mr. V.P. Singh's rule. In the interregnum the National Front, too, will have an opportunity to get its act together. There are enough elements in it who realise that India cannot be effectively government unless all forces opposed to Mr. V.P. Singh's casteist policies and the BJP's communal onslaught make common cause. A caring, progressive India can be built only if such elements summon the courage to make a clean break with the recent past. The time to do so is now. A week later the perpetrators of destabilisation of Indian society will have fulfilled Jinnah's dream in a way that would have alarmed the founder of Pakistan himself.

Courtesy: The Times of India

SAVING THE MOSQUE

The Statesman

Although the damage that frenzied BJP and VHP activist caused to the Babri mosque on Tuesday was, mercifully, not much, it nevertheless represented an unfortunate failure on the part of both the Centre and the Uttar Pradesh Government. Quite obviously, both underestimated the determination and the organizational ability of the militant proponents of Hindutva to offer such a grave challenge to security arrangements at the disputed shrine. A similar failure was also evident from the fact that important office-bearers of the VHP like Mr. Ashok Singhal and Mr. S.C. Dikshit were able to evade arrest and turn up at the gate of the mosque to create even more trouble. It is possible that if the intelligence agencies had been somewhat more active, and the road-blocks better managed, such a huge crowd would not have been able to mount its attack. It might also have been necessary to give the impression right from the start of a much greater degree of cooperation between New Delhi and Lucknow on the law and order front so as to deter the mob and not make it appear that everything depended on the beleaguered Chief Minister.

But, despite these failures, the Mulayam Singh Yadav administration can still be said to have stuck to its task with commendable zeal. That the loss of lives was kept relatively low, notwithstanding the unofficial estimate, is also something to be

thankful for. But for the brief period when the security forces were overwhelmed and nearly a thousand demonstrators managed to enter the mosque, the police and the para-military forces acted with no little credit. The Chief Minister's achievement is all the more remarkable, considering the unsavoury reputation which some of these units — the Provincial Armed Constabulary for instance — have acquired over the years. The fact that nothing major went wrong is indicative of the firm hand with which Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav has dealt with the situation and for which Muslim leaders have congratulated both him and the Prime Minister. But even if the shrine has been cleared of intruders, and the BJP and the VHP prevented from starting their work of demolition, the danger is not yet over. It is not only Tuesday's temporary breach in the security cordon that may encourage these organizations to launch a fresh offensive, they may also hope to weaken the Centres' commendable resolve by stepping up their efforts to replace Mr. V.P. Singh with a new leader who may prove more amenable to pressure.

Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's intriguing reference to a national government after the BJP had seemingly accepted the inevitability of a mid-term poll may be a pointer to such a devious game plan. Since there can now be no turning back for the BJP, it may even pass off the little damage that has been caused as the beginning of the so-called *kar seva* and continue to whip up communal tension. The violence that has already engulfed large parts of the country as a result is, of course, of little concern to the party that has set its heart on using such degrading passions to mobilize political support. It might have been possible to offer a more determined opposition to its nefarious plans if all the political parties that profess secularism were able to sink their differences and act in unison at what is undoubtedly the most critical time in the country's post-1947 history, but they are still engaged more in settling personal scores than in putting up a common front. The mosque may have been saved for the time being, but as the blatant attack on it showed, India is entering a period when all the values it cherishes are in peril. On the survival of this one mosque may depend the survival of India as we know it.

Courtesy: *The Statesman*

CRISIS OF FAITH

Economic & Political Weekly

Nobody can have remained untouched by the waves of frenzied activity sourced, in time and space for now, in the VHP-led rathayatra which the Bharatiya Janata Party has chosen to ride so gleefully and triumphantly. It has not only upset the tenor of public life all over the country but distorted social exchange resulting in a communal polarisation which, even if it blurs in time, will have added a touch of fragility to the social fabric. But strangely the response of the country's political leadership to all this has ranged from rhetoric and ineffectual criticism from those who are out of power to a bewildering ineptness in anticipating situations and an unwillingness to act and act decisively when confronted with crisis from those who are in power. That such a pattern of political activity, struggle for power at the cost of social concerns, hardly needs to be stated.

What we see today is perhaps grounded in the very premise on which the National Front came to power. It was voted into office in an election which was to all events and purposes issueless, for, while the focus was on probity in public life few of the parties concerned could have claimed to have been untouched by corruption. Thus the NF government's imperative for survival in power lay in performing intricate balancing manoeuvres and the act of governing and administering the country became a secondary task.

Given that the BJP's support did not come unconditionally — it had made a deliberate point about V.P. Singh's refusal to address an election meeting because the BJP flag was alongside the others, which in effect meant that the party had by no means decided to play down its theme song of Hindu rashtra — that it would at some point choose to reassert its ideological focus was on the cards. But even if this was not foreseen, or perhaps foreseen and dismissed as being of little consequence, by the National Front allies, it is surprising that even when it began to be vocalised in the growing coherence of the Janmabhoomi movement, the government chose to sidestep it.

It was only after the macabre roadshow was well on its way that V.P. Singh attempted direct communication with the BJP president. Even if it be allowed that the prime minister was pre-occupied by the Mandal primed violence, there can be no explanation but one for his nonchalance — that the government was so busy seeking to justify its decision on Mandal and in balancing contrary pulls in an effort to survive that it underestimated the significance of the blatantly communal and potentially volatile cocktail that was being launched by the VHP-BJP combine.

Incredibly enough even as late as October 19, when the BJP remained inflexibility on the Ayodhya issue and the rathayatra rolled on leaving a trail of communal strife — no doubt often at a distance in time and place from rathayatra but unquestionably its outcome — National Front leaders were still talking of negotiating for a solution. Clearly the bargaining parleys had begun too late. For by this time the BJP could not have got off the tiger it was riding and hope to survive. Moreover, the government's response, desultory as it was, and Mulayam Singh Yadav's belligerence offered the party the right mix for adorning the resurrected bogey of danger to Hindutva. In any case if one were to take seriously the BJP's constant assertion that it was but a participant in a movement planned and being executed by the VHP where was the question of negotiating with the BJP? As things turned out, the ordinance taking over the disputed land and the three point proposal while mildly welcomed by the BJP were rejected outright by the VHP. What has followed was inevitable.

Interestingly the V.P. Singh government has not only been ineffectual in coming to grips with social concerns, but it has not even been able to secure space and time to establish itself and ensure its survival. If political compulsions are indeed the primary determinants of the content and the timing of decisions in a multiparty system, the central government has committed a series of blunders. Time and again its calculations appear to have gone away. Advani's arrest could not have come at a better time for BJP; his arrest was the right impetus for the last phase.

Not the least distressing has been the fine tuning of the BJP theme ensemble of Hindu crusaders battling for a place of worship, in fact for the right to worship, which began with the paraphernalia of the Advani juggernaut to reach its height in the crude symbolism of storming the masjid to plant a saffron flag. That the propagand has considerable influence cannot be in doubt. For one thing the failure of the security bandobast at the disputed shrine had more to do with the breakdown of the spirit — these security forces, it has been reported, were openly sympathetic to the cause even if they were uncomfortable with its militant garb.

More than a 100 have died in the last couple of days in addition to the many lives lost in communal riots all over the country since the rathayatra rolled out of Somnath and violence continues unabated. In a sense what will happen before the weekend when the Janata Dal meets or on November 7 when the parliament reconvenes to entertain V.P. Singh's appeal for a vote of confidence, is almost irrelevant. No party or group has acted with either wisdom or clarity of purpose or when that its interests lie primarily with the people. In this context the left must come in for its share of criticism. If as EMS Namboodiripad and others repeatedly asserted as early as May this year that the time was right for a realignment of progressive secular forces excluding the communal elements, there seem to have been no indications of decisive tactical action on its part to facilitate the emergence of such a formation. In fact the left has failed miserably to make use of the political space it gained at the top, at the high cost of having to hobnob with communal forces, when it decided to support the NF government.

Now with the elected representatives all set to play musical chairs, the answers to Ayodhya can only be found in Ayodhya, or rather among the masses who have long been victims in these power games. For ultimately decrees and orders can only be effective when implemented by a people-oriented, people supported government. Such is not the case today.

Courtesy: Economic & Political weekly

THIS IS NOT RELIGION

The Independent

Rarely has a news photograph said as much and caused as much anguish. The picture splashed on the front pages of yesterday's newspapers may have pleased the RSS and its millions of supporters, but to many, it is a symbol of shame. The conquest of a place of worship by the followers of another faith, however short-lived, is not something to be proud of. Nor is it any achievement for a community which comprises over 80 per cent of a nation's population to take over a shrine belonging to a community which numbers just over 12 per cent. What such an action establishes is not merely the might of the majority; it is also a declaration of contempt for the minority; the most effective way of 'showing them their place'.

That this happened under a government perceived by both concerned communities as the most pro-minority government after Nehru, should help destroy all illusions that India is a secular state. The failure of the security forces — and it wasn't just the notoriously communal Uttar Pradesh police that was positioned in Ayodhya — in stopping the kar sevaks and other devotees from entering the Babri Masjid and hoisting saffron flags on its domes, points to a failure of the intelligence agencies. How could the authorities not have anticipated the onslaught of thousands of kar sevaks? The house-to-house searches meant to flush out kar sevaks as October 30 approached, were either not extensive enough or not efficient enough. But more than the intelligence failure, the

more dangerous conclusion of the large security network's failure to protect a building which occupied about three square km. Is that the forces weren't motivated enough.

Our security forces have demonstrated time and again that they are capable of the utmost brutality when faced with an uncontrollable crowd. From all accounts, the highest authority in Uttar Pradesh was determined to save the disputed shrine at all cost. So it is not as though heads would have rolled if the forces had fired on the kar sevaks. There is also no report yet that the forces refused orders to fire. So the relatively few casualties — official sources, confirmed by the BBC, put the toll at six — suggest that the security forces acted with more restraint than is their wont. What was it then that made them handle the hysterical crowd with kid gloves? The only conclusion is that the security forces acted as Hindus, not as an arm of a secular state.

Not that a massacre would have helped. Not even a shrine is worth preserving at the cost of human lives. Besides, had the casualties been large, it is more than likely that there would have been a severe backlash. And there would not have been much either Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav or Mr. V.P. Singh could have done to prevent it. Already, the strongman of Uttar Pradesh has expressed regret for the death of eight persons in Ayodhya. But although he admitted minor damage to mosque, neither an explanation nor an apology for this was made.

This can only add to the resentment and insecurity created by the event in Ayodhya among Muslims and perhaps, also the other minorities. It is a measure of the common Muslims' faith in this government that they continue to express support for it even after what happened on Tuesday. To retain this trust, the least the government can do is explain its inability to live up to its tall claims — the Uttar Pradesh chief minister had challenged anyone to lay a finger on the shrine. An explanation may be too embarrassing but an apology would not. An agnostic like Mr. Khushwant Singh has often suggested that had Indira Gandhi apologised for Operation Bluestar, the majority of Sikhs would have forgiven her. Those who supported the army action on the Sikhs' holiest shrine point out that the Golden Temple had armed militants hiding in it. But the only militants anywhere near the Babri Masjid were Hindus.

The casualties in Ayodhya may have been negligible, but the dispute over the shrine has already claimed too many lives in the last three years. Even now, six states are witnessing riots connected to this issue, with the army out in a number of cities. If Mr. L.K. Advani's rath yatra caused riots, his arrest and the forcible halt to the yatra didn't help stop the violence. The one thing Tuesday's events prove is the cliché that confrontation, instead of compromise, helps no one. Ordinary Muslims and Hindus would not have minded a temple co-existing with the mosque in the same complex. That those claiming to be their leaders didn't allow this is not surprising — they wouldn't have much left to build their careers on had the dispute been resolved. But what deserves the strongest condemnation is the prime minister's withdrawal of the compromise he had worked out after consulting both sides. All this makes it imperative for ordinary citizens to pressurise the government and their so-called leaders to work towards a compromise.

It would be enlightening to know how Mr. L.K. Advani views Tuesday's events. Did he want his followers to set upon the mosque? There are still people who will not believe that of him, despite his deliberate — and successful — campaign to whip up religious and communal feelings. However, the interview he gave yesterday to *India Today* indicates no soul-searching on his part. It would be revealing to know whether the majority of Hindus identify with the aggressive and violent brand of Hindism demonstrated in Ayodhya, which was provoked by Mr. Advani's yatra.

It would also be revealing to read Imam Bukhari's mind now. Having pressurised the prime minister into withdrawing the compromise on Ayodhya, he must now come up with some plausible defence of Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav's policy of confrontation. But there is no point blaming M/s Bukhari and Advani alone. There is no one person responsible for today's communal situation. There is Mr. V.P. Singh, our current prime minister. His own secularism may be beyond doubt. But he gave the BJP a long rope, and at the same time fawned over discredited opportunists like Imam Bukhari. Then there is our former prime minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi. The strategy followed by Mr. Singh has proved to be not much different from that followed by Mr. Gandhi just before last years' general elections, which pandered to both communities' worst excesses to such an extent that it succeeded in causing riots

and also alienating both communities. It says something for Mr. Singh's secular credentials that he continues to retain the trust of the Muslims and the Sikhs. But October 30 must have proved even to him that protection of the minorities does not lie in appointing them to crucial posts and declaring their religious occasions as national holidays. Nor does it lie in denying the Bharatiya Janata Party access to Doordarshan-besides being self-defeating, the RSS's own communications network is too strong to depend on Doordarshan alone. Mr. V.P. Singh has only a few days left as prime minister. He could redeem his record, and earn the gratitude of sane people of all communities, if he comes up even now with an imaginative solution, and then has the will to implement it.

Courtesy: The Independent

A GLIMMER OF HOPE

Indian Express

Hopes, of course, can turn out to be dupes. But the fact that representatives of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the All India Babri Masjid Action Committee (IBMAC) sat round the same table on Saturday and discussed, even if inconclusively, a possible solution for the Ayodhya dispute constitutes a break in the dismal pattern of a proxy war at one remove. That they came out with no agreed specific solution in what was necessarily a cautious, preliminary mutual probing is hardly surprising, especially when any appearance of excessive reasonableness might be tactically inadvisable given the recent history of the dispute and many cross purposes at work. But the fact that they issued a joint statement asking for a peaceful resolution of the problem and appealed to the people to maintain peace and agreed to meet again on Tuesday to carry forward the discussion is a hopeful sign. Taken in conjunction with the fact that intense behind-the-scenes exchanges on possible ways of breaking the current deadlock which have thrown up some possible compromises, there is some reason to believe that a honourable solution meeting the minimal aspirations of the two communities even while allaying their fears will be found acceptable by both.

We would commend a composite three-faceted solution. First and immediately, let the proposed kar sewa in Ayodhya on

December 6 be allowed to take place without too fussy a determination of its legality. In return, the VHP should give the assurance in advance that it will ensure that the structure in dispute will not be touched. Secondly, if it becomes expedient for the police to arrest the volunteers at the site, they will, like the true satyagrahis, offer no resistance. This should be easy enough to give since the VHP sees the whole exercise as a satyagraha. The essential point is for both sides to empty the confrontational, content that characterised the tragic encounters of October 30 and November 2. If the assumption is correct that the weekend meeting of the VHP and the AIBMAC is a break with a sterile past and there is now a genuine desire for a meeting of minds, then this is an essential first step to defuse an immediate obstacle to the longer term solution that is being canvassed.

Once this immediate pressure of a deadline is out of the way, an enduring solution of the main dispute can be worked out in relative calm. The most promising course seems to be the one suggested by Mr. Rajiv Gandhi in his letter to the Prime Minister. If a commission, set up to determine whether as a matter of historical fact there was an earlier temple at the site where the masjid stands, comes to the conclusion that there was such a temple, there should be no objection to the place be turned over for the construction of a new temple. If there is no evidence to this effect, then the whole *raison d'être* of the VHP to have the mosque shifted and a temple built in its site fails and there would be no reasonable ground for its basic demand. As for Muslim opinion, many leaders — notably Mr. Shahbuddin — have expressed the view that they would be agreeable to the removal of the present structure, if this fact is established.

The third face of this solution is the acceptance by Hindu opinion that all other mandir-masjid disputes must abate as a *quid pro quo* for this compromise. It is a nightmarish prospect that even after the resolution of the Ayodhya dispute the country should be embroiled in quarrels over 3000-odd other such places of worship. And countless other claims would crop up of places of worship of other faiths displaced by shrines of Hindus or of other religions. Such a regurgitation of vandalism of long ago will be inexcusable frivolity in a country faced with intractable contemporary economic and social problems. It is no doubt for this reason that Mr. L.K. Advani has himself been suggesting that the Ayodhya

dispute be treated as *sui generis* and that once satisfaction on it is obtained, all other similar disputes could be given the quietus.

A composite package like this is eminently worth the serious attention of all those interested in putting an end to a dispute that has generated a bitter conflict among our people and distracted us from urgent tasks of social and economic regeneration. Is it too much to hope that Tuesday's meeting will set in motion the healing process by providing its imprimatur to this eminently sensible solution?

Courtesy: Indian Express

SECTION V
OTHER MATERIAL

LETTERS FROM READERS

Indian Express

Demolish Taj Mahal & Red Fort too...?

Sir, — The BJP and the VHP leaders have said that the demolition of the Babri Masjid is necessary to 'correct a wrong of history' and that the tomb at Ayodhya is a 'national shame' because it reminds the Hindus of the Moghuls. The statements might sound patriotic but they betray any knowledge of Indian history.

Do these leaders know that the magnificent Red Fort (Lal Qila), the pride of Delhi from where the National Flag is unfurled every Independence Day was built by Emperor Shah Jehan and was his personal royal residence?

Do these leaders know that the small town of Agra, the pride and trump card of Indian tourism today and which earns a good lot of the much-needed foreign exchange for the country, owes it to the Taj Mahal, the most beautiful and the most expensive Moghul monument ever?

Or do these leaders know that the Qutub Minar, Delhi's most famous landmark, was commenced in 1199 to mark the Muslim defeat of the last Hindu king?

If Babri Masjid is today considered a national shame, should

we also demolish the Red Fort, the Taj Mahal and the Qutub Minar? Yes?

Historical monuments, no matter who built them, stand testimony to the religious tolerance and broadmindedness of the people of India over the centuries. Let us not allow a fly-by-night leader like Mr. Advani to twist history to meet his political ends. We all know very well that there is no historical evidence to support the claim that Babur constructed the Masjid at Ayodhya after demolishing a temple or even that the present disputed site in the Ayodhya city is the birth-place of Rama. There are a dozen more temples in the city of Ayodhya who openly claim that according to popular belief the site where their temple is built is the place where Rama was born.

Muslims in this country will never feel the same after the assault on their sentiments on the 30th of September, 1990. One shudders to think what price generations to come will have to pay for this folly of the Advanis.

Mohd. Jamaluddin,

603, Crescent Towers,
Masab Tank,
Hyderabad-500 028.

Sir, — Mr. Abu Nadeem and you deserve to be highly complimented publishing an enlightend letter, "A mosque where Ram lives". The letter has spotlight the facts that:

— in the spirit of Islam, no spot or place has any inherent sanctity;

— previously mosques have been demolished and rebuilt in Delhi and Bhopal. A number of mosques have been demolished, re-located and re-built in all places in Saudi Arabia, a country of birth of Islam.

These facts indeed will go a long way in clarifying public doubts regarding some of the issues of Ayodhya controversies.

It is, however observed that author should have elaborated some statements for proper understanding of the issues involved

e.g., the article has referred to the statement of Mr. Ramchandra Gandhi that the mosque at Ayodhya is also considered by Muslims of India to be sacrosanct, even worth giving their lives for. However, the basis or grounds on which such immense, faith of Muslims is built up, is not elaborated. Spelling out such grounds is necessary because"

—The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has maintained that no namaz has been performed in the mosque since 1934. Further, the structure called as Babri Masjid is not a masjid at all. Some of the distinguishing features which are normally in the masjids are conspicuously absent in the disputed structure at Ayodhya.

— It was held by some Muslims that, if the temple(s) or place(s) of worship is/are destroyed and mosque is built up at or near site of destroyed temple(s), such mosques is "napak" unworthy place for namaz according to Islamic principles.

In the interest that Indian should have dispassionate objective views' on 'Ayodhya controversies', I fervently appeal to you, to Mr. Nadeem and other nationalist scholars to publish articles enlightening various issues referred to in the letter.

R.M. Palkar

31, Dwarka Blocks, Shatri Hall,
J.D. Marg, Grant Road,
Bombay-400 007.

Born too late

Sir,— I greatly admire Shiv Sena supremo Balesaheb Thackeray except he was born before Muslims invaded India, there would have been no problem of majority and minority. Similarly, if he has been born before the arrival of Aryans, there would have been no Ram janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute as Lord Rama is known to be from Aryan parenthood. Even the battle of Kurukshetra would not have been fought if Mr. Thackeray had arrived on the

Indian soil earlier. There would have been only Asura race left on the Indian sub-continent.

K.M. Ali

117, Pakmodia Street,
Bombay-400 003

Cognisable offence

Sir, — For the last one year our country has been passing through an undeclared state of cultural revolution because of the awakening in the minds of the people. It is really a very good sign for the future generations. But no amount of revolution or evolution will bring about drastic socio-economic-cultural changes unless and until casteism and untouchability are redefined as cognisable offences and practices of which are nipped in the bud so as to favour rapid reforms in the Hindu communities which are sick and unhealthy. Both vertical and horizontal movements of the people in the Hindu communities, including intercaste marriages, will minimise internal conflicts.

Hariprasad Bhusal

Bldg. No. S2/12,
II Floor,
L.I.C. Colony,
Borivli (W), Bombay-400 108.

A Hindu Rashtra is not the answer

The two-part article by Mr. K.R. Malkani (Dec. 24 and 25) has a few valid points to make regarding the theory and practice of traditional Indian secularism. However, I find its tone and conclusions unpalatable. Mr. Malkani correctly points out that, four

decades after the adoption of our Constitution, the Directive Principle regarding a uniform civil code (Article 44), remains a dead letter and Indian politicians, instead of striving towards it, have been moving in the opposite direction. The extreme accommodation of the conservative Muslim leadership has resulted in the continuation of Polygamy among Muslims and fortification of the notoriously unjust divorce law. Secularism which perpetuates a community's backwardness, sacrifices social advancement. Genuine secularism can only be achieved by an immediate destruction of the legal basis of sexual oppression and a uniform civil code in the near future.

Mr. Malkani refers to the mass conversion of Hindus to Islam in Meenakshipuram and asks why such a thing should be permitted in India, when a similar conversion of Muslims to Hinduism is inconceivable in Pakistan. This, Mr. Malkani, is because the respect for freedom of faith which is central to Indian culture is missing in Pakistani culture and will no doubt be erased from India if the goals of the RSS-VHP are realised. The answer to an Iran or a Pakistan is not a Hindu Rashtra (for that is the same evil in another guise) but a global out cry against theocracies — Islamic or otherwise.

Mr. Malkani denounces the "Coca Cola culture," or so-called secularists who condemn Manu's code without having read it and the "rootless" Hindus. No doubt there is a slavish imitation of the West and lack of appreciation of our own heritage. But this evil cannot be excused by whipping up a mindless Ram frenzy, but through patient and careful appraisal of our past accomplishments — a task to which many of the secularists Mr. Malkani denigrates have contributed. And the picture of our Hindu past which emerges is one which, although marred by major social vices, radiates a spirit of catholicism, tolerance and love and duty towards all animate nature, a spirit alien to Mr. Malkani and his ilk. Both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* clearly distinguish between virility and cruelty, courage and aggression and it is sacreligious that the name of Rama who was the very soul of compassion and mercy should be invoked by rioters perpetrating atrocities on women and children.

I think we must admit that Indian Muslims lag behind in the matter of evolving an Indian consciousness. The vicious cycle of

their own backwardness, the conservatism of their leaders and the electoral considerations of our politicians perpetuate their communalistic insularity. But the recent politics of Mr. Malkani's comrades, the massacre of Muslims in Bhagalpur, Ahmedabad, Kanpur and Hyderabad, and the emergence of a predatory Hindu identity will only increase the Indian Muslims' sense of alienation. What is terrible is not only the blood that is being shed but the inevitable sickening of the spirit — the emergence of the paranoid Mussalman and the Hindu with iron in their souls.

Mr. Malkani and his friends seem to have nothing to offer in terms of social and economic policy. Their cure-all for our national ills is Hindutva which is linked in their minds to "Hinditva." Mr. Malkani is very caustic about the 'secularists' who stall Hindi on grounds of "Tamil objection". His is a Hindu-Hindi formula for Indian unity and integrity. Apart from the Tamil objection there are Assamese, Bengali, Punjabi objections too. Hinduism can no more unite India than Christianity can unite Europe. The resentment over Hindi (the proposed language of Hindu India) is only one aspect of the effort of the various linguistic-cultural groups to assert their identities. Only a genuinely federal structure allowing equal status to all languages and cultures will succeed in keeping India united. The Hindu rashtravadis should take lessons from the fate of Pakistan which due to the stupidity of its leaders lost its eastern wing and remains united with great difficulty and repression.

Shantanu Chakraverti

Calcutta

The article by Mr. K.R. Malkani was insufferable as were Mr. Advani's speeches some time back. I am so enraged that I appeal to all your leaders to express their views on the matter. Like the vast majority of Indians, I do not believe that Hindus are getting a raw deal today because the nation's first Prime Minister was Jawaharlal Nehru and not somebody like Sardar Patel who would not have been such a fearless critic of the RSS and company.

If it is true that hundreds of millions of Indians think the way the BJP does, then why does the party have only 88 seats in Parlia-

ment? It should have been in power. And secularism, as far as I am concerned, means that I sacrifice in order to make my fellow citizen from the minority community feel at home, and not the other way round. This is the kind of secularism, that Ram had preached by befriending an *asura*.

It is wrong to say that cow slaughter has affected the development of the country. It is odd that Hindus get so agitated over cow slaughter but they kill other animals like any other community. And, if we are going to be upset over the killing of one kind of animal, let us listen to the environmentalists and seek a stop to the killing of all animals for the good of our earth.

Lastly, let us not forget that there are many Muslims among the politicians, intellectual, artists and professionals in the history of modern India who have envisioned an independent, self-sufficient nation and have contributed richly towards this goal.

Sangeeta Naik

Bhubneswar

Mr. K.R. Malkani asserts that he and others of the same school of thought would like the Muslims of India to follow the example of their co-religionists in Indonesia by taking Ram, Krishna and the other Hindu deities as their own. Stretching his logic one could say that Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh should also embrace the Prophet Mohammad as their own because they happen to live in Muslim-majority countries. Mr. Malkani's argument is absurd, to say the least.

Further, he ignores the fact that in Indonesia the Muslims are in a majority and therefore feel no threat to their identity by identifying, to some extent, with Ram or Krishna. But the Muslims in India, being an insecure minority, would naturally feel even more threatened if they were forced to embrace Ram. Further, the fascist Hindu culture that is now emerging would only alienate our Muslims from Ram instead of the other way round.

As for his assertion that the RSS has no connection with fascism, one can only quote Golwalkar, the former RSS chief. In *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, he declares: "To keep up the purity

of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by purging the country of the Semitic race — the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well nigh impossible it is for races and cultures having differences going to the roots, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.”

This, unbelievably, was written in 1939 when the Nazi power was at its peak. Can any sensible person, after this statement, deny the fascist links of the RSS? Mr. Malkani may defend his stand in any devious way he can, but the fact remains that the secular people of our great country know the truth to be to the contrary.

Michael Devadawson

New Delhi

One feels saddened, disappointed and deeply hurt by the views expressed by Mr. K.R. Malkani. Why are people like him obsessed with pitting Hindus against Muslims on every possible issue? Mr. Malkani should explain why he feels India must become a Hindu state just because Pakistan and Bangladesh became Islamic states.

Why do people like Mr. Malkani regard the military defeat of petty rajas and chieftains by invaders several hundred years ago as the conquest of Hindum by Islam? And, holding this opinion, incite others to take revenge? Should all Muslims be hounded out of India because of the bitterness emanating from the Partition? The fact regarding the Partition are now available and people should read books like H.M. Seervai's *Partition of India: Legend vs Reality*.

Why are people like Mr. Malkani seemingly so upset over the fact that there are so many Islamic states in the world? Why do they forget that these countries are so different in culture, heritage, language, ethos and attitude? Had religion been the overriding factor, these countries would have fused into one. Instead, they even fight one another. Besides, a Muslim from India is considered “different” by the people in these countries, including Pakistan and Bangladesh. His being Indian is accorded more importance

than his being a Muslim.

We are Indians first and last. Religion is incidental. Would a child born of Muslim parents but brought up in a Hindu family (or vice versa) behave or think differently from a member of the other community on growing up? Should we hate and kill each other just because of names?

Fazal Mahmud

Ranchi

I was surprised at some of the statements made by Mr. K.R. Malkani in his article, all the more so as he is an important ideologue of the BJP and a former editor of the *Organiser*. Mr. Malkani cites the instance of the Shahidganj gurdwara being forcibly converted into a mosque after Partition. Either he feels that what Pakistan did was right and that India should follow suit or that, even though the act was violation of ethical and democratic norms, he would not hesitate to do the same with the Babari Masjid. Does one crime justify another?

Then, Mr. Malkani mentions some slogans mouthed by Muslims. They are definitely objectionable and I thoroughly condemn and despise those who shout such slogans. But, having read Mr. Malkani's article, I doubt whether he would condemn those who shout such slogans as "Musalman ke do hi sthan, Ya Pakistan ya Kabristan."

Zia Aftab

Calcutta

I have followed with interest the war of words between Mr. Kewal Varma and Mr. K.R. Malkani. It has occurred to me that a debate encompassing secularism, nationalism, communalism and so on would be welcomed by readers. I feel that a nationalist view will prevail ultimately, and if it is the BJP's brand, so be it. Secularism, that is, respect for all faiths, does not necessarily mean being pro minorities and anti-Hindu. Mr. Varma is not anti-Hindu

but he believes in Nehruvian secularism which is outdated. Most of Nehru's policies are outdated and if we continue to follow his version of secularism, then India will soon disintegrate.

Also, reservations must be on the basis of economic criteria. I know many tribal families in which as many as five members are gazetted officers and yet these people enjoy the benefits of reservation. There should be a rule according to which a family can have only one member who has benefited from reservation. Otherwise, the tribals will remain backward even though their financial position may be sound.

Khaidem Mukta

Sugnu, Manipur

Reading the exchange between, Mr. Kewal, Varma and Mr. K.R. Malkani, one would think that the issue is beyond solution. However, one way out would be for both sides to come to grips with the problem and define - for the government, the public and the individual — what, respectively, being a Hindu and a Muslim is. This should be done by scholars from both communities who should base their research on text as well as reality. It should also be accepted by one and all that religion and secularism are distinctly separate spheres.

A.K. Bajpei

Bilaspur (MP)

Mr. K.R. Malkani's article, "Are Hindu getting a raw deal" (Dec. 24), is more a product of collectivist fascism than Hindu fundamentalism. And fascism — whether in the name of religion, caste, race or class-based determinist dogma — is always founded on the same premise: the dispensability of the individual.

It is high time we realised that Hindu and Muslim individual are being equally sacrificed to the so-called 'cause' of the BJP-RSS-BJP combine. Both Hindus and Muslims are being blinded to the

real problems confronting the country: poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and other such causes of social backwardness.

Contrary to what Mr. L.K. Advani would have us believe, it is not blind faith in religion but the advancement of science, industry and commerce that results in social progress. And such progress is only possible if we reject mystic faith and collectivist dogma. Mr. Malkani, however, glorifies the obnoxious fascism of theocratic states.

Arunava Das

Calcutta

Questions on Ayodhya

Sir, — The Government's handling of the Ayodhya issue needs to be critically assessed. Is this Government secular, pseudo-secular or in fact, anti-sacular? All over the world, religion has provided a binding force, a sense of belonging, a code of conduct and a value system.

It is historical fact that we have in our country Sikhs, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Parsees, Jews and others. They are our brothers, and they continue to make major sacrifices even by laying their very lives for the security and integrity of our nation. Secularism is thus an automatic requirement of our nation. Principles of secularism have found a place in the Constitution.

It is made out that the Ayodhya issue is a confrontation between the Hindus and the Muslims. Is it really so? I think there is overwhelming evidence that Hindus and Muslims do not have any persistent dragging issue between each other.

In fact, the issue revolves around some simple questions which alone need be considered. These questions are:

1. What do archaeologists have to say about Ram Janmabhoomi Babri Masjid place? For how long did the temple exist there before the Babar episode?

2. If an archaeological study is conducted, how much time can it take to release its findings to the people of this country?
3. In what way is the court expected to resolve this issue? Is Rama's school leaving certificate available to be presented to the Court to establish his birthdate or birth place? If the Court proposes to examine legal papers related to the ownership of the land on which the temple now stands, is the Court looking for papers, prepared and signed by the British, or by Babar, or by Vikramaditya, or by Dasaratha? If these questions are stupid, why does not the Court leave the issue to the archaeologists?
4. If some Hindus (and indeed even some Muslims) ask for the construction of the temple does it mean that they propose to build a nation on the basis of religion? Or are they asking for the construction of a mere temple for the deity they have considered for thousands of years to be the incarnation of Vishnu?
5. If some educationalists, social workers, politicians, etc. take sides, does it mean that they are involved in mixing profession and politics, politics and religion, etc or are they merely performing their duty towards the secular constitution of India and seeking religious freedom for the Hindus?
6. Is the disputed place a place of worship for the Muslims? Does this place meet the definition of a mosque according to Islam?
7. Why are the Hindus charged with raking up past issues? What attention would the Government have given to this religious right of the Hindus if the issue had not acquired such dimensions? Would the issue not have been left hanging for many more decades? Would that not have resulted in failure of secularism, failure of constitution, and failure of human rights?
8. Will the Government consider ordering flag-marches by huge army battalions in Srinagar and Jammu and also in the troubled cities of Punjab to show its strength to muzzle

the terrorism, just the way it did to curb the movements of Mahant, Sadhus and Sanyaas? Is this misplaced show-of-strength secular?

I think that V.P. Singh and L.K. Advani should address the nation and give crisp and short answers to each of these questions. They must not skip any one of these questions. It can be done immediately, and in just half an hour the nation can decide who is secular and who is not. Both Hindus and Muslims will definitely accept the reconstruction of the Ram Temple, or the retention of the mosque, as would be dictated by the answers to these questions. Both the communities are patriotic and have forgotten the pre-Independence and the pre-British authorities. They both want peace and prosperity.

The members of other religions need not look at the Hindu resolve with suspicion, since the Hindus deserve their trust.

Other religions have always enjoyed total freedom in India despite its Hindu majority. However, the Hindus have a definite duty to protect their own religious sentiment so that secularism and our Constitution can be safeguarded. Secularism is a noble concept, but it must be practised honestly.

I propose that in addition to the construction of the Rama Temple at the ancient spot, Hindus rebuild a mosque where Namaz can indeed be performed. Besides, it will be fitting to build somewhere in the vicinity a monument to Hindu-Muslim unity and a monument to Amir Ali, the Sultan of Faizabad, who after the 1857 mutiny, which the Hindus and the Muslims fought jointly against the British, decided to return the presently disputed land to the Hindus to mark Hindu-Muslim brotherhood. These are the days of unification on all major socio-political scenes, and wisdom ought to prevail.

I. Deshmukh

D 12/9, Second Link Road,
IIT Campus,
Madras-600 036.

An appeal to Advani

Sir, — This is an appeal to Mr. L.K. Advani to consider the facts brought out by Khusro F. Rustamji in his article, "Babri-Janmaboomi dispute," (IE, Oct. 14).

He has analysed well the serious consequences ("a detonation that will shake us to our very foundation.") if the issue is not amicably resolved immediately.

He also referred to some recent cases of mosques being shifted from their sites while broadening roads in some Muslim countries including Saudi Arabia.

It is on record that during the time of Khalifa Omer, a newly-built mosque was pulled down on his orders as it was found to have been forcibly constructed by some over-zealous Muslims on the land belonging to a Jew who represented his case to the Khalif. Not only was vacant possession of the site given to the Jew but also severe punishment was meted out to the miscreants.

Thus, The present dispute can also be solved amicably if the claim of the unauthorised construction of the mosque is established. Even otherwise an amicable settlement can be reached if the rancour of communal underones is removed. Thus requires some more time to pacify the agitated parties and to educate them so that they are both receptive and calm.

Let us also draw Mr. Advani's attention to his speech in Ahmedabad on September 24 in which he said that if pseudo-secular elements and politicians keep away from the controversy the present tangle can be solved amicably. He said that Muslims could have accepted the idea of construction of the temple and contributed towards its construction had the Government and political parties educated them properly.

He himself launched a crusade, trekking 10,000 kilometres, to educate people. It requires more time to make people, particularly the Muslims, understand Mr. Advani's mission. There are so many misgiving in their minds, making them allergic to his arguments even though they may be frankly well-meant. He must wait for a proper understanding to the issue to be reached.

A person of Mr. Advani's calibre and standing heading the BJP, a responsible political party, is expected to display foresight, prudence and statesmanship to avoid a show-down which would create bad blood between Hindus and Muslims and also compel use of force by the authorities. He should strive to bring about an atmosphere of understanding and goodwill which may ultimately lead to the amicable settlement of this baffling dispute.

Eshwer Allah tere nam, subco Budhi de Bhagwan.

M. Asadullah Sayeed
IAS (Retd.)

M. Habibullah Farooqui
Retd. Sessions Judge

A. Raj Reddy
IAS (Retd.)

Rasheed Subhani

H.No. 16-8-903, New Malakpet,
Hyderabad-500 036.

'Hinduism will not die without the Ram Temple'

The Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid episode started like a storm in a tea cup. Local people of the two communities had said they would find a solution and had repeatedly urged outsiders not to intervene and complicate the situation. Unfortunately, this was not to be. The leaders of the two communities are seasoned politicians and here they found yet another opportunity to boost their political careers, unmindful of the fact that in the process they have not only given a new dimension to the problem but have brought the country to the brink of disaster.

After the partition of the country in 1947, Muslims here have enjoyed security, rights and privileges which have been denied to non-Muslims here have enjoyed security, rights and privileges which have been denied to non-Muslims in the neighbouring Muslim countries. Most of these countries are theocratic states and

their socio-political structure therefore conforms, to and is governed by the state religion. Religion in these countries has thus become a reason for discrimination. Those who profess other faiths are treated rather harshly as we know from the one-way inflow of refugees to India with their tales of woe. A backlash in India, unfortunate and regrettable as it is, is therefore not entirely unexpected. But it is a pity that India is not being allowed to remain a haven of all faiths and beliefs.

Those who are doing this must be thwarted. No sane person would want a solution other than a peaceful one. A solution which will not only put the problem behind us for all time, but will bring the two communities closer. So men of goodwill and wisdom from both sides should be asked to settle the matter with care to ensure that no one group emerges as a loser.

One solution could be that Muslims, in deference to the religious views of the majority, agree to shift the Babri Masjid about four-five km to a site of their choice. In response to this grievous gesture a magnificent mosque - four times bigger than the Babri Masjid - should be built by Hindus at their cost. Hindus should also perform kar seva to build this mosque. Muslims on their part should respond by offering kar seva at the proposed temple. Apart from resolving the impasse, such a gesture will become a unique example of cooperation among peoples of different faiths. The fallout could be worldwide.

Vishnu Sahai

Calcutta

Mulayam Singh Yadav deserves praise for the handling of the October 30 situation in Ayodhya. From the very beginning he was determined to thwart any move by Hindu fundamentalist to ignite the flames of communalism in his state. And his decision to post paramilitary forces in the entire town of Ayodhya to prevent any confrontation, has earned him a great deal of admiration.

Md. Rafique

Calcutta

People who have lived through the horrors and traumas of the communal holocaust of 1946 have hardly any justification to launch a movement after 43 years of Independence that will lead to another bout of large-scale killing. Earlier, we blamed the British for instigating communal tension in the country by driving a wedge between Hindus and Muslims; but now we ourselves are doing the same.

P.K. Mitter

Calcutta

Four decades ago, Nehru dreamt of building a nation where people of all religions would coexist peacefully. And we pledged to dedicate ourselves to the great cause of nation-building transcending the barriers of caste, creed and sex. We vowed to build a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic India. But our dreams have been shattered, we have been dismayed and we are disillusioned. Our hearts bleed to see the nation moving to the brink of disaster. Violence, arson and killings have become the order of the day. And in these troubled times, the BJP finds the construction of a temple on a disputed piece of land more important. The party is trying to create the impression that Hinduism would be threatened if the temple did not come up. Ram has become a commodity for the BJP that can be traded for political gains. What the party fails to realise is that it is innocent persons who get caught in the communal crossfire and suffer the most.

Amrit Kumar Mahanty

Hazaribagh

That the secular and democratic fabric of India should be torn asunder by a section of people who do not know what they are doing, is really unfortunate. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Buddhists have been living in this country since time

immemorial in peace and harmony. Should the nation therefore, be divided on religious lines 43 years after Independence? What answer will we have for those who sacrificed their lives for the liberation of this country?

N. Yeangphong Konyak

Kohima

Could it be that Mr. L.K. Advani is a CIA agent working here to disrupt India and balkanise it.

All Indians — Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains — must not forget that the British have not yet left India as communalism has not been solved by the creation of Pakistan.

A. Ahmed

Calcutta

I fail to see how a fictional character like Ram can have a *jan-mabhoomi*. I request Mr. Advani to read the *Ram Katha*. The Bihar chief minister has quite rightly said that these "VHP, Bajrang Dal, RSS, and the like, are idle sons of traders who have a lot of black money and time to waste on a legendary figure." Of course, the gravest error was made by Rajiv Gandhi and Doordarshan by screening *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat*.

Dr. Avinash

Ooty

Our Minority, Their Majority

Sir, — Your editorial, "Saving the Mosque" (November 1-2), invites the question why 10 Hindu temples were damaged and

about 100 shops owned by members of the minority community in Bangladesh looted on the very day Muslim leaders in India themselves admitted that the Babari Masjid had not been destroyed. No one in this country condemns events across the border.

It may be argued that we cannot do anything for the minorities in Bangladesh. But Muslims there have shown what may be done for the minority community in another country. Their co-religionists here clamour for a secular Constitution because they are in the minority.

There is no reason why Jammu and Kashmir should enjoy special status under the Constitution today. It was quite improper to release extremists in exchange for the kidnapped daughter of Mufti Mohammad sayeed. The work of putting upbarbed fencing all along the India-Bangladesh border has been delayed and Bangaladeshi Muslims keep crossing over. On the other hand, Hindus in Pakistan are second class citizens. Those who counsel abiding by the court verdict on the Ayodhya dispute should explain why we disregarded what the Supreme Court ruled in the Shah Bano case.

Your etc.

P. Chattopadhyay

Calcutta, November 2.

Sir,— The conclusion of your editorial clearly projects a deep-rooted commitment to secularism. The Statesman has always waged a war against forces bent on shattering the country's secular image.

But I am afraid the editorial will have little impact on bigots for these forces have been gaining strength in collaboration with the Congress (I), especially since 1980 they are now on the way to realizing their dream of turning India into a Hindu rashtra and forcing Muslims either to migrate to a Muslim country or to live in India under the guardianship of the majority community. In the latter event, Muslims must not talk of their shariat, adopt Hindu customs and practices and gradually lose their Muslim identity. This is the gist of speeches often made by Mr. Bal Thackeray of the

Shiv Sena and Mr. Ashok Singhal of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.
I wonder if these leaders truly serve the nation

Yours etc.

MAMOON RASHEED

Calcutta, November 2

Sir, — Your editorial blames Hindus in defiance of facts. It is absurd to conclude: “On the survival of this one mosque may depend the survival of India as we know it.”

The Babri Masjid was built after the destruction of a temple. Since the temple was one of the holiest for Hindus, the mosque continues to outrage Hindu sentiments. The deep wound inflicted on Hindus by Babar needs to be healed and Muslims must agree to shift the mosque and let the temple be rebuilt.

Yours etc.

Shyamsundar Mishra

Durgapur, October 3

BJP Obsession

Sir, — The Statesman deserves praise for publishing Biplab Dasgupta’s two-part article, “BJP and Religion” (October 23-24 and 24-25). The BJP professed unconditional support to the National Front to keep the Congress (I) at bay. In a bizarre turn-around, it has engaged in activities which mean almost an open invitation to the Congress (I) to return to power at the Centre.

Evidently, the BJP found it difficult to swallow its “overwhelming” victory in the Lok Sabha polls followed by its even more “spectacular” success at the Assembly elections in three States. It began talking about converting India into a Hindu Rashtra. Naturally, the Mandir-Masjid dispute came alive. The National Front’s failure in other vital spheres were sidetracked. As Mr. Dasgupta rightly emphasizes, the BJP’s obsession with Muslims constitutes the core of its rabid Hindu exclusiveness.

The primary consideration for a country of India's size and diversity is its unity. All political parties, including the BJP, swear by this. But is the concept of "Hindutva" compatible with this profession? What does it mean to India's oneness when there is an open call to demolish mosques, churches, gurdwaras and replace them by temples? Any place of worship is sacred to those professing that religion. If that is sought to be defiled in any way, would it be anti-Hindu to oppose this? Most Indians are susceptible to religious passions which inevitably lead to communal flare-ups. The killings in north India in the wake of Mr. L.K. Advani's rathyatra demonstrate this stark truth.

Yours etc.

P.B. Saha

Calcutta, October 31

Sir,—Biplab Dasgupta completely ignores the circumstances that led to the emergence of the BJP as a major political force. Some of its policies, if not all, are surely responsible for its success in last year's Lok Sabha elections. But Mr. Dasgupta condemns all of them. True, the secular mind cannot support the demolition of a mosque, but how the BJP has come to win such massive support for its programme should to be analysed. If all its supporters are communal, we must conclude that professing secularism for 40 years could not remove the seeds of distrust and that our secular policies need to be reviewed.

Mr. Dasgupta cites his experience of living in Britain for 15 years. But Indians there can in no way be compared with Muslims in India, who belong to the national mainstream. Minority commissions in the long run never benefit the minorities but only foment communal hatred and help political parties win votes.

I agree with Mr. Dasgupta that historical injustices cannot be rectified by another set of injustices. Nor can we support rectification of the historical injustice to the backward castes by doing injustice to the forward castes now. This is the way of the Mandal Commission and yet Mr. Dasgupta supports its recommendations.

Yours etc.

Abhijit Bhattacharya

Barrackpore, October 24

Sir, — I should like to ask Biplob Dasgupta whether Muslims in India are ready to abide by a common civil code instead of the Muslim Personal Law? Has not the Constitution been amended on this particular issue following the Shah Bano case? Is it the responsibility of the majority community alone to keep religion separate from politics?

A Hindu Government employee may lose his job if he commits bigamy, and forfeits benefits available for children if he has more than two of them. Muslim employees may have four wives each and as many children as they wish. This discrimination is not an inevitable condition for the so-called secularism; nor is it acceptable. Mr. Dasgupta should try to understand the majority psyche as he claims to have understood that of the minorities.

“Historical experience,” Mr. Dasgupta writes, “shows that secularism has never worked against the real interests of the majority community. The Christians of the U.K. and the U.S.A. have not suffered from a secular view of politics, nor have the Muslims of Turkey and Tunisia.”

All these countries have accepted the religion of the majority as their state religion. It is in India that secularism has become synonymous with an anti-Hindu stance.

Yours etc.

S.K. Roy.

Calcutta, October 26

On Ayodhya

Sir, — October 30 will mark a watershed in the history of the Indian Republic — the day fixed by the BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal and others for demolishing Babri Masjid and constructing a Ram Temple in its place. This is being done, we are told, all in the name of preserving “communal harmony.” However, the day will decide whether civil society in India will remain a composite one with different faiths and religions or whether it will roll down into

the abyss of disintegration and communal strife and hysteria.

The Advani Rathayatra scythes through the heart of India and leaves, in its wake, destruction and human misery. Hundreds of people have already been butchered to death, houses razed to the grounds, and property destroyed. As the Rath proceeds towards its destination, the violence unfolds with greater intensity and ferociousness as can be witnessed by the fact that even traditionally riot-free areas have become scenes of large-scale arson and killings. Of significance is not whether the Rathayatra finally enters Ayodhya but rather the communal hatred frenzy that it has helped generate as it meanders through the various states. It is not so much the prevention of the entry of the Rath into Ayodhya which is important but the fact that such a Rathayatra should have been allowed to proceed at all.

The yatra has already sown seeds of ill-will and enmity between different religious groups. It imputes lack of patriotism to the Muslims and unabashedly asks them to prove their credentials as Indian citizens, by agreeing to demolishing the mosque with their hands (proof of their goodwill) and to construct the temple in the same place (proof that they still want to live in India!) After all, it is argued, Muslims must sacrifice if further loss of lives is to be prevented. In short, Hindu fanatics are free to go on a killing spree whilst Muslims must give up what little they have, all in the name of patriotism. All such blatantly communal statements and actions attract several sections of the Indian Penal Code. For instance, Section 295 of the IPC specifically prohibits destruction, damage or defilement to any place of worship as an insult to anyone's religion. If the government was at all serious in preventing a communal holocaust, it ought to have immediately intervened, enforced these provisions and prevented the yatra from proceeding. That it did not do so speaks volumes about its so-called secularism.

The BJP and its allies have not learnt anything from contemporary events in the world. The Sinhalese chauvinists tried to impose their religion and language on their fellow Tamil citizens. The attempt has ruined the very foundations of the Sri Lankan state. The Zionists want to erect a Jewish temple with the Haram Alsharif in Jerusalem, where stand two mosques, the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aksa. Their claim, like the claim of BJP and others, is

that there was a Jewish temple in the Haram at around 70 A.D. The would-be temple will be a monument of conquest for Jews while it will be a mark of humiliation for the Muslims. The outcome of Ram temple in Ayodhya will be similar.

The Israeli police opened fire on the Palestinians who protested against the construction of the temple and killed 21 of them. This has stirred the conscience of the world has threatened to upset the American apple-cart in West Asia. In India, hundreds have already died in the wake of the Rathyatra. Will not the conscience of india and the world react against this madness before it engulfs the whole of India?

Gayatri Singh

Secretary, CPDR,
Bombay

Courtesy: Readers views from Statesman and The Independent

THE FALLOUT OF AYODHYA

Last Week, Sunday Mail had published the overall findings of a survey conducted separately in North and South India to gauge the mood of the people on certain burning questions of the day.

It was not our intention, but technical reasons demanded that we conduct the survey in this manner. The poll in North was conducted by the Current Opinion And Future Trends (COFT) and in the South by the Apt Research Group.

First, the North. The Survey was concentrated in the Hindi belt. It covered eight states, encompassing 82 districts. Sixty five surveyors polled 10,000 respondents over 10 days in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Delhi.

The survey was conducted both in rural and urban areas, with an emphasis on the rural areas.

It should be pointed out that the survey was conducted during a period when there were no major political developments no government fell, no new government was installed, there was neither any Cabinet expansion nor were there any new political realignments. The poll was conducted between November 19 and December 5.

The Findings: It appears that the entire region thinks alike, atleast on Ram Janmabhoomi with small variations, the Hindu sentiments have hardened. Whether taken caste, age of gender-

wise, there were no wide differences when it came to the construction of the temple. We posed the question: Do you want the construction of the temple even though there might be bloodshed?

Among the Hindus 22 per cent answered in the affirmative.

Among the Scheduled Caste respondents 17 per cent answered in the affirmative while the positive response among the OBCs was 19 per cent.

Age-wise, the affirmative response was as follows:

18-25 years	-	26 per cent
26-35 years	-	20 per cent
36 to 50 years	-	19 percent
51 plus years	-	26 percent

Gender wise, 24 per cent of Hindu men and 19 per cent of Hindu women felt that the temple should be constructed at any cost.

Income-wise, 23 per cent of both the lower and middle-income groups felt that the temple must come up, no matter what the consequences. Among the higher income group, only 20 per cent opted for such a step. What this means is that the higher the income, the more moderate a person becomes.

The real difference arise when one considers geography for location.

Surprisingly, in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi considered to be BJP strongholds — there is a lower percentage supporting the mandir despite bloodshed. The figure: Madhya Pradesh 19 per cent, Rajasthan 14 per cent and Delhi 12 per cent.

The greatest Hindu Hardliners seem to be in Gujarat (31 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (28 per cent).

Moderates are to be found near Bihar and Maharashtra. The figures: 15 per cent and 11 per cent respectively.

The Ram Janmabhoomi-Babari Masjid issue cuts across political leanings as well. The least number of militants are to be founds among those who profess to be Janata Dal supporters - 9 per cent. Perhaps this is because of the V.P. Singh factor. The next larger group is among the Congress supporters — 14 per cent.

Those who claim to be Chandra Shekhar supporters accounted for 16 per cent.

Nor surprisingly, 36 per cent of the BJP supporters say they want the temple at any cost.

As for the rural-urban factor more militancy — 23 per cent was found in the former vis-a-vis the latter — 20 per cent.

A slightly different question was posed to Muslim respondents: Are you in favour of saving the masjid even if there is bloodshed?

The average for the eight states was 28 per cent in favour.

As in the case of the Hindus, the positive opinion was more or less equal. Whereas the fluctuation in the case of the Hindus was 26-19, in the case of Muslims, it was 31-26.

Among the Muslims militancy was highest in the 51 plus category — 31 per cent.

Among other age groups it was:

18-25	-	28 per cent
26-35	-	29 per cent
36-50	-	26 per cent

Geographically, the most militant and the least are neighbours. Maximum militancy is in Maharashtra - 38 per cent. The least in Gujarat - 11 per cent. In between are Madhya Pradesh (32 per cent), Delhi (30 per cent), Haryana (29 per cent) and Rajasthan (26 per cent). The figure in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar is the same - 25 per cent.

The most volatile of the militants are supporters of the Janata Dal supporters accounted for 30 per cent, Congress supporters for 25 per cent and BJP supporters for 17. Thus, the ratio between the Janata Dal (S) and the BJP works out to 1:2.

When, it came to urban and rural areas, similar number - 28 per cent felt that the masjid should be saved at all costs.

The next question posed was: Who is responsible for the current situation? Here, there was a clearcut division. The Hindus believe that it is the V.P. Singh Government. The Muslims believe that the BJP is responsible.

Interestingly, the figure are more or less equal (47 per cent and 48 per cent respectively) for Hindus and Muslims. Eleven per cent of Hindus blame Rajiv Gandhi's Government while 25 per cent Muslims blame Rajiv Gandhi. (*See also Oddball States*).

Now for the Advani factor. Supporter for him cuts across party lines. We asked: For whose benefit did Advani undertake the Rath Yatra:

- (a) For himself/party
- (b) For Hindu religion.

Fortyeight per cent of Hindu respondents said that the Yatra was undertaken for the benefit of Advani and the party. This group was further asked: Will Advani or the party benefit? Fiftyeight per cent said yes while 42 per cent said no.

Fiftytwo per cent of the respondents said it was for the Hindu religion. They were further asked: Will Hindu religion benefit? Ninetyone per cent said that it would.

More importantly the pattern of majority thinking among this group again cut across party lines. Of the Janata Dal supporters, 82 per cent thought it would, of the Janata Dal (S) supporters, 77 per cent thought it would, and of Congress supporters 83 per cent thought it would. Not surprisingly, 96 per cent of the BJP supporters who felt that the Yatra was undertaken for Hindu religion felt that this would be the result.

Significantly, while the ratio among Janata Dal supporters is 69:31, there appears to be no large difference between the Congress and the BJP. The ratio in the case of Congress supporters is 91:9 while that for the BJP is 95:5.

Now for South India. The poll covered eight locations in four states. It was conducted in one urban and one rural parliamentary constituency in each state. In choosing these constituencies, we deliberately picked one constituency which returned a Congress candidate with a large majority in the 1989 elections. The poll covered 2,000 respondents between November 21 and 28.

The poll is not necessarily reflective of opinion in the South but should essentially be considered as a stress test.

Since the majority of respondents had evidently voted for the Congress in 1989 we posed the question: Do you feel the Congress will withdraw support from Chandra Shekhar mid-way?

Fiftyseven per cent said yes, 23 per cent said no and the rest fell in the don't know, can't say category.

Incidentally, more men - 63 per cent - against women, felt that the Congress might pull out earlier than expected.

Age-wise, large numbers among the young age group felt that the Congress would pull out the rug.

The Figures:

18-30 years	-	64 per cent
31-50 years	-	54 per cent
51 plus	-	49 per cent

Evidently, as age advances, there is still a belief in the South that a word once given would be honoured.

The other question posed in the South was: Who do you think would make the best Prime Minister?

Here, the division was very clear.

A little over four in ten - 43.42 per cent - opted for Rajiv Gandhi. Almost two in ten - 18.02 per cent plumed for V.P. Singh while 14.58 per cent chose Advani. Only 6.01 per cent of the respondents opted for Chandra Shekhar.

However, what is significant is that Advani has made tremendous progress in the last two months. This is at the cost of V.P. Singh who has lost his supporters in the South to Rajiv Gandhi and in the North to Advani.

Advani's maximum gain has been in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat but the surprise is in Karnataka where Advani is ahead of Rajiv Gandhi. (*See also Oddball States*).

In fact, Advani's biggest supporters is in Karnataka - 40.38 per cent. Rajiv Gandhi is second with 27.7 per cent and V.P. Singh third with a little below 2 in 10 - 17 per cent.

ODDBALL STATES

Much of the response to the survey, be it in the North or in the South, is somewhat along predictable lines. Yet, there are certain "Oddball States". Take, for instance, Karnataka. It is the only state among the 12 where the poll was conducted where Lal Krishna Advani is the preferred choice of the majority of respondents, ahead of both Rajiv Gandhi and V.P. Singh.

Then take the Bangalore City constituency. Thirty four point four per cent opted for Advani, 32 per cent for Rajiv Gandhi and 17 per cent of V.P. Singh.

But, when Bangalore city and the other Karnataka constituency - Kanakpura - are taken together, Advani's rating goes up to 37.5 per cent, while Rajiv Gandhi's is a little below 30 per cent. V.P. Singh stays at 17 per cent.

IN BIHAR THE RESPONSE WAS NOT AS EXPECTED

Hindus	Muslims
27	53
Congress	
42	9
Janata Dal	

AND SO IN UP

Hindus	Muslims
44	14
Mulayam	
33	16
V.P.	

AND OF THE FOUR SOUTHERN STATES, ONLY KARNATAKA FAVOURED ADVANI FOR PRIME MINISTERSHIP

ADVANI	37.5
RAJIV	30
V.P.	17

Perhaps the reasons for this is that the political division in Karnataka is on the same pattern as that at the Centre. Karnataka is the only state where there is no regional party. Traditionally, the Congress has always been in power while the opposition has been largely made up of Socialists.

Incidentally both constituencies returned Congress candidates in 1989 with large margins. Also, Kanakpura has the maximum militancy among Hindus in the South - 37 per cent said that Babri Masjid should be demolished for the construction of the Ram temple. (At the other end of the scale was Cochin, where only 3.7 per cent favoured demolition).

Now, take the North. When it came to apportioning blame for the present situation, V.P. Singh was held responsible by six of the eight states polled. Uttar Pradesh was one exception. The Mulayam Singh Yadav Government was held responsible by 44 per cent of the respondents. Those who blamed V.P. Singh accounted for 33 per cent. (Interestingly, in Uttar Pradesh, 21 per cent of the Muslims also believed that Yadav is responsible.)

Bihar was the other. Muslims everywhere believe that the BJP is responsible. But in Bihar, Rajiv Gandhi was blamed by 53 per cent and the BJP by 32 per cent.

Thus, V.P. Singh was second in order of blame in both the states.

Courtesy: Sunday Mail

WHAT THE INDIAN MUSLIM IN U.S.A THOUGHT

by Lavina Melwani

They and we. Them and us. The Hindus and Muslims of India have lived for forty years now in independent India entwined in a kind of uneasy truce, bound to each other in a love-hate relationship by the brotherhood of the flag and the soil, yet divided by religion and customs and upbringing. Often love and friendship have triumphed over petty bigotry. There is the story of a Hindu pandit and a Muslim maulvi in Lucknow, the best of friends, who in 30 years did not miss out on a single day of camaraderie, of mixed 'ghazals' and 'ragas'. One day the maulvi died. When his family went to inform his friend, they were told the Hindu pandit had expired that very evening.

The contributions of the Indian Muslims to the richness of India are legendary but often there has been doubt in the minds of the majority of the Hindus as to why they stayed behind, and to their loyalty to the flag. The Muslims, on the other hand, have often felt overt and covert discrimination where the job market and education are concerned. And perhaps, even 40 years after the partition, and rivers run red with blood in the memory, and old animosities arise, like a recurring ache in the joints during the rainy season.

One can stereotype an entire community but the community is made up of individuals, each with his own ethics and beliefs. Not all Hindus are flag-waving RSS fanatics, and not all Muslims are diehard Islamic fundamentalists. The majority of us are somewhere in the middle, striving to make a living, striving to be good human beings.

How can one explain the madness of 1947, the charred remains of Bhagalpur, the carnage of Moradabad and the total non-communication on the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue? Can bricks and mortar be more important than flesh-and-blood human beings? Can foreign power manipulate these doubts and frailties to its own ends?

As Rasheeduddin Khan, director of the Academy of Third World Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, puts it so aptly: "What goes into the making of the Muslim mind in India is not essentially or exclusively the tenets of Islam. It is rather patterned by the texture of faith, history, politics, cultural values, demography and, one might add, reason and unreason, compulsions and choices."

Here in the U.S. the Indian Muslims are an important part of the NRI community and have made a significant contribution to the Indian as well as the American economy. A 100,000-strong, they are visible in several fields including technology, education and science. The largest number of Indian Muslims live in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Washington D.C., Detroit, Miami and Houston. Most of them are professionals, while there are some businessmen too. They come from the length and breadth of India.

India Worldwide interviewed some prominent Indian Muslims living in the U.S. to get their opinions on the problems that have beset the two communities in India.

Kaleem Kawaja, who hails from Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh, is an Engineering Manager at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Goddard Space Flight Centre in Maryland. He is also the president of the Association of Indian Muslims (AIM) in the Washington D.C. area. He has strong views on the Kashmir issue: "Kashmir is an integral part of India. I condemn the terrorist activity in Kashmir, their infiltration through our border with Pakistan, and the secessionist movement." Yet at the same time, he believes there has been excessive use of force by the Indian army

against unarmed civilians. He says, "This has radicalised the large silent majority in Kashmir and is directly responsible for the present state of widespread insurgency. The Indian government will have to establish a political dialogue with the Kashmiris and make economic improvements in order to solve the extreme dissatisfaction of the Kashmiri Muslims. At the same time, the government has turned a blind eye to the many acts of organised violence perpetrated against Muslims in India and this has resulted in the alienation of many Muslims from the mainstream in India. Unless strong steps are taken to redress the situation, there is a danger that the Muslims in India may also get radicalised like those in Kashmir."

As regards the Babri Mosque/Ram Janmabhoomi issue, Kawaja says, "There is not an iota of evidence to prove that Lord Rama was born on the spot where the ancient mosque stands. This is in fact a non-issue for Indian Muslims. Their leaders made a serious mistake in making this event a big national issue. It has drawn attention away from the real issues which are sectarian riots, social and economic backwardness and poor educational status.

I believe the Muslims in India need support from the Hindus, so that, freed from the fear of losing their unique Indo-Islamic identity, they can devote themselves to moving into the national Indian mainstream."

Dr. Waseem Ahmed Siddiqui has lived in the U.S. for 33 years. A pioneer in the production of monoclonal antibodies using hybridoma technology, and malaria vaccine using gene cloning, he is currently the Professor and Chairman at the Department of Tropical Medicine and Medical Microbiology at the University of Hawaii. He says, "Living abroad, you look at the problems from a different perspective. I think the major thrust is economics. If there is job security, I don't think they'd talk about these things. Muslims may be finding it hard to get jobs but they should realise many Hindus are in the same boat. It is very easy to blame it on religion. However I see an encouraging trend in that there is more private enterprise and young graduates going into small businesses, rather than depend on jobs from the government.

"Even in Kashmir, I feel it boils down to economics. Sheikh Abdullah was probably the last righteous leader there who cared

about the people. Later leaders were all corrupt and the money didn't trickle down to the masses. I think the people are reacting to that and Pakistan is just exploiting that. At the same time, Kashmiris are very distinct; they are not pro-Pakistan, I can assure you. Respect the wishes of the people. Honour what they want - but within limitations. Perhaps a united Kashmir within the federation. They are better off with India, a secular state with economic opportunities. I think the leadership there has to be changed, otherwise the fundamentalists will take over.

"When you are abroad, you see that a Bengali, whether he is from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh, is still a Bengali. To me all these partitions are really very unnatural. The pull of cultural is strong. Religion can play a part only in the individual life, in creating values. We should be good Hindus, good Buddhists, and not quarrel with each other. We use the name of religion but it is all a vanity".

Abdul Rahman Nakadar who hails from Kadi in North Gujarat is a cardiologist in Michigan. He is the president of the local chapter of the AIM, and the Chairman of the Finance Committee of the Islamic Association of Greater Detroit.

He left India in 1964 but has gone back every year to conduct voluntary medical camps and encourage Muslim education. He says, "We have problems at almost all levels in India. We have made economic strides but there are divisions of castes and sub-castes, all trying to get a piece of the pie. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru understood very well the importance of the secular constitution. It is the heartbeat of India. The day it suffer. I think that certain parties like the BJP are bringing in communal feelings which will be very destructive to India. The Babri Masjid case is a superimposition of fiction on fact. People who do not have the basic necessities of life are discovering these issues. This communalisation of politics was brought about for the reason of getting votes, and it was dramatised to such an extent that emotions were inflamed. The main issues were neglected and that's what the political parties wanted.

"The present feeling that only the majority community is nationalist and the rest are not is nothing but pressure of one community to dominate another. You can demolish an historical structure but you cannot destroy historical facts. At least 22

temples in an 11-mile radius claim to be the birthplace of Lord Rama. I think it is just an assertion of chauvinism. The same thing is happening in Mathura and Banaras where two mosques are being claimed as the birthplaces of Lord Krishna and Lord Vishnu".

Nakadar feels the Kashmir issue is only a part of bigger problem. "We must not talk just of Kashmir, but also of Bhagalpur, Moradabad, Ahmedabad - all the places where riots have taken place. It is a much deeper problem. Deterioration of history has taken place. If you see, through the ages, when invaders have come into India, wars have always been between kings, rather than between religions. The kings who battled each other were often both Muslims. There has never been a war between the communities. Both Hindus and Muslims have joined together to safeguard their territorial integrity. Even the great warrior Shivaji had a Muslim animosity? The facts have been effectively distorted, and that has led to the problems".

Yet he believes the economic problems of the Indian Muslims are very real. Out of 144 public companies in India, not a single one is led by a Muslim; Out of 1430 members of the Board of Directors, only 22 are Muslims. The literacy rate in Gujarat, for example, is 43.47 per cent for the general populace, but only 5-7 per cent amongst the Muslims. He says, "Both the government and the Muslims are to be blamed. It is the fault of one, neglect of the other. Either the Muslims are being ignored or are just not participating. Both sides have to be aware and make more of an effort".

Dr. Ishrat Hussein is the Chief of the Division of Population Control and Demographics at the World bank in Washington D.C. She hails from the distinguished family of Chaudhry Haider Hussein, a famous lawyer and social leader in pre-independence India. She says, "I met V.P. Singh during his campaign, and believe he has the right intentions and integrity. I hope he can pull the different forces together so he can implement his programmes. But in Kashmir, the situation seems out of his hands. I think the U.N. resolution should be respected. My political philosophy is that people should take their destiny into their own hands. I don't think they have thought it through, whether they have adequate resources to function as an independent country. If you take the vote now, it will go in a very irrational way but if it's taken after considerable education, I am sure people will react in a more reasonable manner".

Hussein believes that the Babri Masjid case has been blown out of proportion, by pandering to the mob mentally. She says, "I am sure these things will disappear with economic development, with education. Take the example of Singapore: it is a multiracial society and people are living there in peace. In neighbouring Malasia, however, tensions run high among the local Malays, Indians and Chinese. Singapore has developed so fast and everyone is so busy participating in the economic boom and sharing in the fruits of development, that they don't care about these issues. So these communal differences become secondary when there is economic prosperity and jobs for all."

She adds. "I lived in India and studied in University there. I can honestly say that those were the best years of my life. Never did I feel any prejudice. In fact, I was favoured, even by Hindu teachers. Discrimination may be there, but it is not as common as it is made out to be. The government should try to push harder at programmes to help minorities to develop. That's the only way the communal tensions can ever subside. Prosperity can solve a lot of social and political problems. In its absence, religion becomes a stick of political dynamite. After all, religion is an easy solution to a lot of problems. It is the only thing people can hang on to when they have nothing else".

Courtesy: India Worldwide USA

BMMCC: CONVENER'S REPORT FOR DECEMBER, 1986-FEBRU- ARY, 1991

Muslim India

The Babri Masjid Movement is a spontaneous response to the unlocking of the Babri Masjid on 1 February, 1986 and its de-facto conversion into a temple, going much beyond the Injunction of 1950. The blatant illegality executed with the knowledge and approval of the State shocked the Muslim leadership and the masses alike. VHP's threat against thousands of historic Masjids in the country became an ominous reality. With the approval of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, the All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat formed a Central Action Committee for the Restoration of the Babri Masjid which accorded recognition to the Babri Masjid Action Committee UP and organised similar Action Committees in several other States.

During 1986 various memoranda and discussions had no impact on the Central Government which continued to maintain that the Ayodhya dispute and at best, a matter for the State Government to deal with, ignoring its national dimension and far reaching implication for the secular order.

Faced with the ostrich-like attitude, the Babri Masjid Move-

ment organised an All India Conference in December, 1986 to place the case before the nation and to organise a programme of peaceful and democratic agitation to force the Government to expedite the judicial process and to enact legislation to protect other places of worship. The BMMCC was born at this Conference.

During 1987, there was a massive response to the call for the boycott of the official observance of the Republic Day. However, it was withdrawn at the last minute, after the President of the Republic as well as eminent national leaders like Chandra Shekhar and the Late H.N. Bahuguna stepped in and offered their good offices. The historic Rally in New Delhi on 30 March, 1987 also made an impact on the national consciousness and the Babri Masjid dispute became a matter of national concern. The Central Government formed a Cabinet Committee and assured the Lok Sabha of using its good offices to resolve the problem through negotiations.

The BMMCC placed the Ayodhya dispute before the political parties, the parliament and the Government and the intelligentsia in the context of the threat to the secular order, the surging wave of Hindu chauvinism, the demands of the rule of law and the overriding concern for national unity and national integration. There was a rising appreciation of the Muslim case and first Janata Party and subsequently Lok Dal and the Left Parties broadly began supporting the basic demands of the BMMCC. But the Government continued to evade its responsibility. Neither the legal cases relating to the title to the disputed premises pending since 1950 made any progress nor even the BMMCC's offer of reference to a Commission of Eminent Personalities was accepted by the Government, Nor did the Government agree to hold a discussion in the Parliament or outside with political parties. Thus the BMMCC was forced to announce the Ayodhya March in May, 1988 and enter the electoral battle of Allahabad on the side of Shri V.P. Singh and helped him defeat the Congress (I). Then the Central Government first agreed in principle to hold negotiations for exploring the possibility of a settlement and then offered to do so within a specific time. This was the first victory of the Movement.

The Ayodhya March was first postponed and then the call was withdrawn after receiving the clear commitment of the Gov-

ernment that in case the negotiation did not succeed by end October, 1988, the Government would take steps to expedite the judicial process. This was the second victory of the Movement. Eventually the Special bench was constituted and began the hearing of the consolidated cases while the VHP challenged the jurisdiction of the Court. Unfortunately, in November, 1988 on the question of the withdrawal of the Ayodhya March, the AIBMAC was born with 5 members seceding from the BMMCC. The emerging political scenario also played a role. However, the BMMCC decided to avoid confrontation or conflict with the AIBMAC, in the hope of eventual reconciliation and in the interest of the unity and consolidation of the Movement. In any case, on the legal front they have been working together. The Convention should give a clarion call for unity, rising above personal differences.

1989 saw considerable progress on the legal front but the focus was on Shila Yatra organised by the VHP with the intention of performing Shilanyas and commencing the Construction of the proposed Temple on 9 November, 1990. While allowing the Shila Yatra, the Government gave a public commitment not to allow Shilanyas. Yet the Central Government, the State Government and the VHP reached a secret understanding on the performance of the shilanyas and so it was performed under official patronage, on the specious plea that the Shilanyas site was undisputed. The site-plan of the temple which included the entire disputed premises by itself sufficed to make the Shilanyas unlawful. This was done with an eye on the Hindu votes. There is no doubt that the Shilanyas played a decisive role in the defeat of the Congress(I) in the General Election, 1989 as the Congress lost the votes of the Muslims, without gaining the Hindu votes.

The Janata Dal Government, with its survival depending on the goodwill of the BJP, could not act resolutely to stop the VHP agitation and finally could not muster courage to stop Advani's Ramrath Yatra which led to unprecedented communal polarisation and violence reminiscent of the days of the Partition. Neither was any serious or sustained negotiations. The case pending before the Special bench was also held up by technical objections from the other side. To placate the VHP, the Government promulgated an Ordinance, with prior clearance from the BJP, but the Ordinance evoked strong reaction from the Babari Masjid Movement and had to be withdrawn. An enraged BJP withdrew its support

from V.P. Singh Government and he became a martyr to the cause of the Babri Masjid was assaulted and damaged by the VHP mobs on 30 October, 1990 - an event which, like Shilanyas, was hailed by the chauvinist forces as a historic milestone, as the beginning of a new era.

The Chandra Shekhar Government tried to bring down the temperature and buy time, first by negotiating with the VHP and then arranging direct negotiations between the VHP and the AIBMAC. The BMMCC refused to enter into negotiation under duress while the VHP was committed to Kar Seva Phase II beginning on 6 December, 1990. However with official approval Kar Seva Phase II was converted into 'Satyagraha' which lasted until 14 January 1991. Immediately thereafter, the VHP has announced a new campaign for mobilisation w.e.f. 1.2.91. As foreseen by the BMMCC, the negotiation between the AIBMAC and the VHP failed to produce any constructive results, though it tried to substitute the judicial process, give propaganda advantage to the VHP and prepare the ground for a political award.

Today we must assess what we have gained or lost during the last 5 years of democratic, peaceful and non-violent struggle.

The first fact is that the Babri Masjid still stands though its status as a mosque remains to be restored and for all practical process it remains converted into a temple.

The second fact is that despite high pressure mobilisation and exploitation of religious passions, vast segments of the Hindu community continue to reject the very idea of the demolition of the Babri Masjid to build in its place.

The third fact is that repeated threats apart, the VHP has not been able to march towards other Masjids and widen the battle front.

The fourth fact is that all political parties, with the sole exception of BJP, broadly support the demand of the BMMCC for the settlement of the dispute through the judicial process and for the enactment of a law to protect the status of all places of worship as on 15 August, 1947.

The fifth fact is that the Special Bench of three judges has made considerable progress; identified the issues, surveyed the disputed premises and set the stage for examining the witness.

The sixth fact is that the Muslim community has been forced to pay a heavy price by deliberate accentuation of communal violence and by the application of terrorism on a massive scale by Trishul dharis, giving them the choice of surrender or perish. But this has also exposed the real face of the Ram Janmabhoomi Andolan - a political movement using fascist methods to demolish the secular state and to erect the Hindu Rashtra, in its place. There is a growing appreciation of the fascist threat to the Indian society, in India and abroad. The result is that increasingly the intelligentsia has taken up the defence of the cause of the Babri Masjid, particularly the jurists, the academicians and the journalists. It is no longer seen as a Muslim problem but as a national problem.

The seventh fact is that despite volumes of 'irrefutable' evidence, the VHP has not been able to provide an iota of legally acceptable evidence to support either of its two basic assumptions that the Babri Masjid site is the exact birth-site of Shri Ram Chandraji or that a Ram Janmabhoomi Temple was destroyed to construct the Babri Masjid on its site. In fact now VHP has shifted its position; the Ram Janambhoomi Temple was not constructed by Vikramaditya in 50 B.C. but by an anonymous Rajain the 11th century AD; it does not assert that there was a miraculous divine manifestation of the idols of Ram lala within the Masjid on 22-23 December, 1949; unable to produce any primary record to support the existence of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple on the Babri masjid site, it speaks of a religious structure which stood on the same site, not necessarily in 1528. It now demands evidence from the Muslim community that the masjid was constructed on vacant land, as it has no evidence to support the existence of a temple within 200 years of the construction of the Babari Masjid on either side i.e. from the 14th to the 17th century. The so-called archaeological 'evidence' consisting essentially of 14 pillars and 6 pillar-bases has been challenged by experts and has brought into question and the identification of Ram with Ayodhya, there being no evidence of human habitation before circa 7th century B.C.

Hence the VHP has no Constitutional case, no legal case, no historical case, no archaeological case, no moral case, no religion case; its only argument is the argument of revenge, its only passion is hatred; its only method is coercion, its only objective is disintegration.

As for the future, since the negotiation at various levels, political and religious, have failed to provide any common ground for a settlement, the law must take its course; the rule of law must prevail; agitation must cease; the judicial proceeding must be expedited with state assistance, both communities must agree to abide by the final judicial verdict; all political parties, must agree not to exploit the dispute for political purposes.

The State must assert its authority, ban the militant Senas and organisations which challenge the Constitution and the rule of law, take strict notice of communal and inflammatory propaganda and make a firm declaration that pending final judicial verdict the state shall protect the disputed premises which are in the custody of the Court as an attached property against any unilateral change and that, after the final political verdict, the state shall enforce it, whatever the cost.

If the Hindu religious authorities, but not the VHP, wish to build another magnificent temple in honour of Ram Chandraj on undisputed land within the Janambhoomi, the State should, in my view, extend all possible assistance.

To the Muslim Indians as a community and to the secular Indians of all religious persuasions, the Babari Masjid has become a symbol of the confrontation between secularism and chauvinism, of the struggle between the democracy and fascism, of the conflict between the rule of law and mob rule, of the dichotomy between the vision of plurality and the pressure of assimilation. The Babri Masjid dispute is a part of the unfinished agenda of the nation and a test of our secular and democratic commitments, individually and collectively. The Babari masjid Movement, must reaffirm its commitment to the restoration of the Masjid, not just the protection of the structure, and to legal, peaceful and democratic means to attain these goals. The Movements must also consolidate itself and establish links of understanding and cooperation with all secular forces.

To battle for the Babari Masjid is, therefore, to battle for the vision of India which inspired for the vision of India which inspired the Freedom Movement and which promises freedom and equality, justice and dignity to all its communities, to all its people.