

THE BUCKLING STATE

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Friends. The most important point to notice about the recent destruction of the Babri structure is the spontaneity of the act. It is better that we call the structure a mosque. If people want to believe that a mosque has been pulled down, well a mosque has been pulled down. So, I will not keep referring to 'the structure which some people call a mosque'. Let us assume that there was a mosque and it has been pulled down. It has been pulled down spontaneously, by ordinary persons, in the face of appeals from their leaders not to do so. There was no planning, no conspiracy behind the act. In fact, I can speak from personal knowledge of conversations with the highest persons in the government; they themselves do not believe that there was any conspiracy to pull down the mosque.

Telling evidence of the spontaneity of the event is available in the video records of the happenings of that day in Ayodhya. Though many of the cameras were smashed – and there is a lesson to be learnt from that – yet such evidence as has survived is extremely vivid. I hope that each one of you will persuade the prime minister and others to show it on television. There is, what nobody knew existed but Sharad Pawar in his enthusiasm disclosed in parliament, the video film recorded by intelligence agencies of the defence ministry. They made a video recording of the entire proceedings from 6.30 a.m. till about 12.30 or 1 o'clock, and again from around 7.30 in the evening. There is also the raw footage which Vinod Dua's troupe was able to bring back from Ayodhya. And, then there is the raw footage recorded by the video-magazines, Eyewitness and Newstrack.

In all these video recordings you see a common feature. You see a small number of people doing the pulling down and breaking. You see that it is being done in a very inexpert manner: They pick up something, it does not work, they pick up something else, then somebody says break that first, someone else says break some other

side first, it goes on in that manner. Then in the Newstrack footage, for instance, you see the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS) persons – they are easily identifiable because of their shorts and dress – trying to beat back, and actually beating back, persons who are trying to climb up the mosque. You see Ashok Singhal getting into a scuffle with some persons. His angavastram comes off, and he is seen trying to beat back somebody and making others sit down. All this evidence is available.

From the recordings it is also evident that a spontaneous frenzy had overtaken not only those who were involved in the actual demolition, but also everybody else there. The same sentiment had affected everyone. The police was there in great strength. It was the same police that had killed a number of people there in 1990. And now, on the video recordings, you see them smiling and climbing down the mosque, one by one, in single file. They just go away like that. That was the Uttar Pradesh police. But there were also the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) – the forces of the union government. They also start walking out. In one sequence in the Newstrack recording you see a Senior Superintendent of Police shouting at the CRPF men, abusing them and saying, “*Are yaar kuchch to karo!* Do something! Fire in the air.” Nobody fires.

The fact is that nobody could have fired. Nothing could have been done in view of the strong sentiment which had permeated the gathering there. And, I believe that the karsevaks who destroyed the mosque, and the police personnel who walked away with folded hands, were merely echoing the sentiment that has come to prevail in the country.

The actions of the union government itself are the best evidence of this. The news that the mosque is being attacked reached Delhi almost as soon as sections of the gathering began to move towards the mosque. The union government had the obvious option of deploying the army units stationed at Faizabad. Faizabad and Ayodhya are two adjacent habitations. It is not that Faizabad and Ayodhya are 6 kilometers or 8 kilometers away from each other with nobody staying in between. They are like one part of Madras and another part of Madras. In Faizabad we have the largest cantonment of north India. And about 5,000 armed jawans of the Indian Army were there on that day. However, the union government was warned

by the highest authorities in the army, that it would not be prudent to ask the army to move in because the sentiment for the temple in the army was running unbelievably strong. I can vouch for the fact of such a warning having been conveyed to the union government. I can vouch for it on the authority of one of the senior-most officers of the National Security Guard.

Also, recall that Kalyan Singh, the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh at the time of the Ayodhya events, resigned in the afternoon of that day at around 3.30 p.m. From then to the morning of December 8, for almost 40 hours, the union government did not move in any forces to that spot. There could not have been any conspiracy in holding back the forces. It is not as if the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha or the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government were in charge of these forces. They were under the command of the union government, and they could not be moved to the site of demolition for 40 hours. That was the objective situation on the ground. That was the strength of the sentiment.

So the facts of the situation are: One, ordinary persons pulled down the mosque in a state of spontaneous frenzy, without any planning or conspiracy on the part of anyone. Two, the sentiment for the temple was wide-spread and was in fact shared by not only the police forces of the state of Uttar Pradesh and the union, but also by the army. And three, while there was criticism of what happened from all articulate quarters, while the English press went to town proclaiming the event to be a national shame, and while even the BJP leaders tried to disown and distance themselves from what had happened, the Hindus of India appropriated the destruction; they owned it up.

That shows the strength of the sentiment that has come up. This sentiment has not arisen out of mere revulsion at what Babar did at Ayodhya more than 450 years ago. It is not mere indignation at that symbol of Babar's depredations, which stood there in the form of that mosque built on the Janmasthan. It is not a protest against something that happened long ago. While the sense of revulsion and indignation at that historical slander might have played its part, but the strength of the sentiment, I believe, arises from the politics of the last 15 years. The people are protesting against the current politics, which reminds them of the politics of the 1930's and the 1940's that had led to the partition of India.

It is that sentiment that we have to understand. We must try to understand what made such large numbers to take the law into their own hands. There is no doubt that if the events of Ayodhya become a pattern, and if that pattern of the crowds taking the law into their own hands comes to persist, then there will be great costs to pay by our country. The critics are completely right about that.

But the question is why ordinary people were moved to such an extent that they took the law into their own hands. If all we do is to heckle at them, but do not attend to the causes of that anger, so much anger, getting pent-up in them, then we will just be heckling, we will not be solving the problem.

CAUSES OF ANGER

Duplicity and cleverness of the leaders

This spontaneous welling up of anger among large sections of people is the consequence of two features of the anglicised ruling elite of India, of which the English press is a major component. One is the duplicity of this elite, and the other, which in a sense is a concomitant of their duplicity, is their great belief in their 'cleverness'. They seem to believe that cleverness alone will do, and that they themselves are very 'clever'. Look at the behaviour of four of the last five prime ministers, beginning with Indira Gandhi. Of them, Chandra Sekhar did not have a long enough time to become convinced of his cleverness. But everyone else was so convinced that by simply spinning out some formula, by telling one thing to one party and another to the other, by keeping both sides in the dark about his or her intentions, by encouraging both on the sly and keeping them in good humour, he or she will be able to solve the problem!

But this is only one aspect of the duplicity of our anglicised elite – this habit of telling one thing to one person and something else to another. The other aspect is the duplicity they practise on themselves. Let me narrate my personal experience of a conversation I had with one of the highest persons in the Indian government in the context of the events at Ayodhya. I said, "You feel hurt and therefore you are saying that there has been a conspiracy behind all this destruction in Ayodhya." He said, "Arun, you think I believe

there was a conspiracy! *Are Baba*, for heaven's sake, why don't you understand that sometimes the situation becomes such that the government has no option but to say such things!"

This apparent duplicity may probably be merely the reflection of the Indian tendency to readily agree with the person with whom one actually disagrees, just to get over the moment. It may be merely the Indian way of being good mannered. But this duplicity has become a habit with our politicians and it keeps landing everybody in trouble.

This sense of cleverness and habitual duplicity gives a queer sort of courage to the Indian politicians. They come to believe that today they can stoke up Bhindranwale and tomorrow they would be able to put him down, that today they can ban Salman Rushdie's book to please the Muslims and tomorrow they would open the locks at Ayodhya to please the Hindus, and then on the day after they would do something else to please somebody else. This faith in cleverness and duplicity is becoming a menace for the nation.

The problem is compounded by sheer weakness of will. We talk of fairness and firmness, we are neither fair nor firm. We are alternatively weak to one side, then weak to the other. Given these predilections of the political leadership of India, it is not surprising that the people of India get so sick of being made to run around in circles that once in a while they decide to take the law into their own hands and make things move.

Suborning the courts

While the politicians indulge in their cleverness, duplicity and sheer weakness, they also keep bending the law to their own ends, and in this the courts are often their accomplices. But the rule of law, which the critics of this destruction want to resurrect, is a seamless web. You try to tear it at some point, the whole edifice collapses. When you violate and bend the law to bail the leaders out of sticky situations, you also accustom the country to the violation of law in general. For instance, if a judge says that you are guilty of corrupt electoral practices, and you change the electoral law, as Indira Gandhi did in 1975, then the message that the people get is that the rule of law is after all not too sacrosanct.

In the Indira Gandhi election case the supreme court itself advised her lawyers to get the electoral laws amended so as to purge

their client of the charge of corrupt electoral practices. The charges against her had already been proved. The Allahabad high court had found her guilty and disqualified her from holding elected office. And, when her lawyers went in appeal to the supreme court and demanded an unconditional stay of the high court's judgement, Justice Krishna Iyer, sitting on the bench of the supreme court of India, told them that he could not give the stay as demanded, but suggested that if they could get the government to amend the law and come back to him with the amended law, he would assess the petition in the light of the new law!

The law was duly amended, and the amendment declared the four corrupt practices of which Srimati Gandhi had been held guilty to be no corrupt practices all. The amendment specifically named those four practices, and the law became that all practices so-named shall not be deemed to be, shall be deemed never to have been, corrupt electoral practices.

There are numerous examples of such subordination of the rule of law to the whims and conveniences of individual political functionaries. Recall the dispute over the sharing of Kaveri waters between Tamilnadu and Karnataka. The supreme court gave a specific direction. It was not implemented. The excuse was that if the direction were implemented, there would be riots in Karnataka. Again in the matter of Shah Bano the supreme court gave a clear judgement, that awarded nothing more than the right to a fair maintenance allowance to a divorced woman. But some people said that this hurt their faith, that this constituted an interference in their religious matters. And once again the law was changed.

One can go on recounting such examples. We are accustoming people to not obeying the courts, and the courts are helping in this process.

This climate of lack of a sense of sanctity towards the decisions of the courts, and the notorious delays and legalisms that have become part of the Indian judicial processes, have contributed greatly to the events of December 6 in Ayodhya. Just look at the delays and legalisms that have bedeviled the cases relating to Ayodhya. The current spate of litigation on this issue has been going on for 49 years. And, for 12 years the cases were stopped because somebody

said that there was a graveyard at the disputed site. Now the whole place has been turned upside down, but no graves have been found. But the legal cases in the courts were held up for 12 years just because someone had alleged that there were graves there.

An insider's account

It is such procrastination of the courts, and the cleverness, duplicity and weakness of the political leadership, which must be held squarely responsible for the Ayodhya events. In fact, Swami Chinmayananda, a respected sadhu and one of the leaders of the Ayodhya movement, openly said this in the parliament on December 18, while speaking on the no-confidence motion brought against the government of P. V. Narasimha Rao by the BJP. That was one of the most important and lucid speeches made in parliament on this issue, and in this speech Swami Chinmayananda offered first hand testimony on the causes that led to the denouement of December 6.

He began by saying that he had been listening to the debate on the Ayodhya issue for two days, and he had heard everybody passing on the responsibility to someone else. The BJP leaders were holding the Congress responsible and the Congress leaders were holding the BJP responsible. He would, he said, tell them who was responsible. It was the sadhus, like him, who were responsible. The sadhus, he said, set up the Ramajanmabhoomi Muktiyajna Samiti in 1984. Not a single member of the VHP, RSS or the BJP was a member of that samiti. It was an effort of the sadhus alone.

The sadhus, he said, wanted to liberate the Janmabhoomi through legitimate means. But the political leaders and the courts taught them two things: They taught the sadhus about their strength, and they taught them about the methods that would prevail.

And then Swami Chinmayananda went on to give several examples of how the sadhus were made to show their strength and bend the politicians and the courts. He said, on January 19, 1986 the sadhus declared that if the locks on the Janmasthan were not opened by March 18, 1986, the Sivaratri day, then they would themselves break open the locks. This they said in Lucknow. Nobody had till then paid any attention to the repeated pleas from different quarters for the opening of the locks. But once the sadhus gave their ultimatum, suddenly some unknown advocate filed a petition in the

court of sub-judge Faizabad on January 21, 1986. The judiciary, he said, heard the petition and disposed of the original plea and the appeal to the higher court in ten days sharp. On February 1, 1986 the district court passed an order directing the opening of the locks, and within hours the locks were opened. This, Sri Chinmayananda said, taught us what makes the judiciary and the executive move.

Again, Sri Chinmayananda continued, in February 1989 the sadhus declared that the foundation stone for the temple would be laid, the *silanyasa* would be performed, on November 10, 1989 at the spot selected and made known by them. The sadhus made this declaration on the occasion of the Kumbha Mela at Prayag. On November 2 they chose the precise spot for the silanyasa ceremony and hoisted a flag on it. Till the evening of November 7, 1989 the government, he said, kept insisting that the spot chosen for the silanyasa was on the disputed site. The courts kept declaring till as late as November 7 that the site was disputed and nothing must be changed on that site. But, on November 8, the leaders of the union and the state governments met with the sadhus, and everyone, including the courts, came to the conclusion that the silanyasa spot was not part of the disputed site. And the silanyasa duly took place on November 10, 1989, at the time and the spot the sadhus had chosen.

However, in November-December 1992, when the supreme court was meeting in Delhi day by day, from hour to hour, hearing cases on Srirama Janmabhoomi well into the night, the Allahabad high court, having concluded the hearings on 4th November, did not think worth its while to condescend to give its judgement till December 11. The sadhus, Sri Chinmayananda said, had believed that on this occasion too, like the earlier occasions, some way out shall be found by the political leadership and the judiciary to let the karseva happen. It was a legitimate expectation of the sadhus, based upon their experiences of the earlier occasions. And this failure of the judiciary and the political leadership to act as they had been acting earlier was what, according to Sri Chinmayananda, led to the denouement at Ayodhya.

Secular scholarship and the archaeological evidence

Like the political leaders and the judiciary, the scholars of India also seem to be enamoured by cleverness. The Ayodhya issue could

have been partly settled by archaeological evidence. Archaeological excavations were carried out near the site of the mosque in 1975. Detailed reports of those excavations were available with the archaeological survey of India. The excavations, it seems, had unearthed 14 pillar bases of *kasauti* stone with Hindu motifs. Details of these pillars were also available. When it became known that the archaeological survey of India had all this information in its possession, the so-called secular historians began denouncing archaeology itself as a science.

Dr. B. B. Lal, who was the director-general of the archaeological survey of India at the time of the excavations at Ayodhya, and who had personally supervised those excavations, is known to be one of the four or five most eminent archaeologists of the world. But once the information about the excavations became known, our 'secular' historians began to denounce Dr. B. B. Lal. They began denouncing him, after having quoted him at great length as the greatest authority of India in their own scientific work, in their own books!

So great was the compulsion and enthusiasm of the historians to somehow discredit the archaeological evidence unearthed at Ayodhya that one of them, Prof. Irfan Habib, who is known amongst his fellow historians as a great scholar of medieval India, ended up making a great professional howler. He announced that he had dated the artifacts found in the Ayodhya excavations, by the carbon dating technique, and found that these artifacts were of rather recent origin. And it so happened that an officer of the Archaeological Survey reviewed the procedures of Prof. Irfan Habib and found that if Prof. Habib's dating procedures were to be followed then one would come to the conclusion that the reign of Emperor Akbar is yet to begin: It shall begin in 2009 A.D.!

Again in June 1992, when the plot of land near the mosque was cleared by bulldozers for putting up a concrete platform, important archaeological evidence came into view. While clearing the area the bulldozers struck a thick wall. The bulldozers were stopped and the wall was scraped. And soon the foundations of an earlier structure became visible. In fact, four layers of the earlier structures could be clearly seen. But our scholarly archaeologists and our press would not go there and see it. They would not publish the photographs of that structure.

Besides the four layers of the older structures that came into view, the digging also revealed forty pieces of archaeological relevance. Amongst them there was a granite slab used for offering puja. But our scholars and our press simply refused to take note of all this.

That so many archaeologically significant pieces of Hindu antiquity were found near the site of the mosque, or that many layers of an earlier Hindu structure were seen under the foundation of the mosque, are not facts that would surprise either historians or archaeologists. In India mosques were constructed on the sites of the temples. And there were very good reasons for doing that.

A temple for an Indian community was not just a place of worship, not just a place that people went to on a particular day of the week or the year, but it was the heart of the community. Social life was organised around the temple. It was the centre of learning and education, it was the centre for arts and crafts, and it was the centre for everything that was of importance to the community. And, therefore, the temple became the central symbol of the identity of the community. And since a conqueror would want to smash the heart of the community, therefore he would locate his mosque on the site of the temple, on the ruins of what the community held to be most dear.

It was not only in India that the Islamic conquerors located their mosques on the sites of the temples. They did the same in the other countries they conquered. The Encyclopaedia of Islam gives, under the entry “mosque”, a long list of mosques in Europe and the middle-east which were built over older places of worship in those regions. The Kaba mosque itself was built over an older place of worship. The historians are quite aware of this detail connected with the mosques of Islamic conquerors.

What is more, since such mosques were invariably built by a few invading marauders, they had to use whatever material were immediately available on hand. They would break the temple and use the same materials for their structures. Very often in these structures, you find big stones which when turned around reveal idols of Indian gods. In excavations near and in Delhi archaeologists have come across many such instances of idols having been turned around and used as wall panels. The invaders would take an idol, turn it

around, sand the backside a bit, and it became a blank, that could then be used as an important part of the structure of a mosque.

The temple materials that the invaders could not use in their structures, they often dumped in pits nearby. Archaeologists are aware of this phenomenon. Their name for such a pit is the “robber’s trench”. And the discovery of a “robber’s trench” is always a very good indication of what existed on the site before the later structure came up. At and near the disputed site in Ayodhya two such “robber’s trenches” have been discovered, one in 1975 in the course of Dr. B. B. Lal’s excavation, and another in 1992 in the bulldozing.

And now, after the demolition of the mosque, another 283 objects have turned up in the debris. This of course is not a systematic excavation. Many of these objects are from 1950. When the idols appeared there in 1949, a canopy was put on them inside the structure. Objects associated with that canopy have also been discovered now. But amongst the objects found in the debris there is also a marble statue, painted black, in the Kodandapani mudra of Srirama, of Srirama holding the bow. And two stone inscriptions have turned up. One of them is 5 feet long and 2 feet wide. It is in Sanskrit, written in the nagari script.

All this archaeological evidence has become available. It is the kind of evidence which trained archaeologists should not be surprised to find, it is the kind of evidence that one usually finds at the sites of conquerors’ mosques. But our scholars are not willing to study the evidence, and our English press is not willing to report on it.

All those pieces are there. Those stone inscriptions are there. Why are these not studied? Imagine if some manuscript had turned up in Babar’s hometown in Uzbekistan, which said that Babri Masjid was not in India but, say, in Tashkent. Imagine the prominence that discovery would have got among our scholars and our press. Here archaeological evidence is lying under the open sky, under the custody of the district administration, and the scholars do not look at it.

Instead of studying the evidence some so-called historians have chosen to ask several questions regarding the authenticity of the evidence. And it is these questions that appear in the English press as box-items. Instead of studying the evidence the scholars seem

to be intent on asking irrelevant questions, in confusing the issues. This the secular scholars have been doing for quite some time.

In July last some of you may remember having seen big headlines in the English newspapers that ran: “Ayodhya was in Afghanistan: says Scholar”, “Structure was probably a Stupa – says Scholar”, and so on. And everybody was supposed to spend time trying to prove how Ayodhya was not in Afghanistan, or that the temple was not a stupa. Now the scholars are asking people to prove that they did not bring those pieces of archaeological evidence from outside. They do not go to Faizabad and study the evidence. They ask questions, and the English newspapers headline their queries: “Questions about Evidence – say Scholars.”

This kind of thing enrages people. This scholarly cussedness compounded with what the courts and the politicians are doing, convinces them that they have to take the law into their own hands.

Subversion of secularism

Just as we have subverted the political system, the judiciary and the academics by being selective in what we see, what we execute and what we report, similarly we have subverted the concept of secularism by more or less standing it on its head. The presumption which has governed our politics for the last not only 40 or 50 years, but perhaps for the last 80 years, is that while the majority must abide by the rules and norms of secularism, it is quite understandable and justifiable that the minorities shall depart from these rules.

Is it not a principle of secularism that in all dealings of the state the individual and not the group shall be the unit? Then what is this business of a separate personal law? Is it not based on the recognition of a group identity by the state? How do we continue to have separate personal laws for particular communities within a secular polity?

Again, we interpret the constitution to imply that institutions run by the minorities shall be exempt from specific constitutional provisions even if those institutions have nothing to do with the culture or traditions of the minorities. I may run a teaching shop for engineering students and charge huge amounts of capitation fee. But, as long as I am from the minorities, the laws and rules framed by the state shall not apply to me. The situation has become so

absurdly iniquitous that even an institution like the Ramakrishna Mission, in order to merely continue functioning without persistent state intervention, has to declare that it is not a Hindu institution, and that the mission is in fact a minority community. And the Calcutta high court upholds that plea!

A polity that continues to harbour such inequity cannot be secular. Secularism, like the rule of law, has to be adhered to by all or else nobody shall adhere to it. We have not paid heed to this basic principle of secularism, or of the rule of law. And the Ayodhya events are a consequence of this selective secularism that we have been practicing.

The Ayodhya events are an announcement that the Hindus shall not tolerate such inequity any more. It is an announcement that the Hindus have now realised that they are in very large numbers, that their sentiment is shared by those who man the apparatus of the state, and that they can bend the state to their will.

The Ayodhya events are also an announcement that the kind of politics, where a Shahabuddin can publish maps of Indian parliamentary constituencies, colouring 72 of them in one way and saying that in these 72 constituencies Muslims as Muslims will determine the outcome, cannot last. If the Shahabuddins persist in this kind of communal politics, then the others will say, well, in the other 520 minus 72 constituencies the Hindus as Hindus will determine the outcome.

That is an announcement of great consequence. And the way to stem the destructive consequences of this is not to heckle at the majority Hindus, but to become a truly secular polity, to do away with these discriminatory laws, and to give up the politics of vote banks.

LESSONS FOR MUSLIMS

The announcement carries important lessons for the Muslims. The Muslims of India for the last 40 years have chosen to deal with the state through men who indulge in bartering their votes on their behalf. They follow a Shahabuddin or an Imam Bukhari, who tells them to vote for a Bahuguna at one time, or an Indira Gandhi at another, and a V. P. Singh or Mulayam Singh at yet another. They tell them to vote for the Congress in one election, and for the Janata

Dal in another. And in return for thus delivering the Muslim votes in a single block to a particular individual or a party, they promise to obtain guarantees of security from the individual or party so favoured.

The Muslims should realise that this kind of politics is now at an end. Because, firstly those leaders who barter on their behalf do not have the interests of the community at heart. The Shahabuddins and the Imam Bukharis are just running their own shops. Secondly, the leaders who the Muslims think would protect them, as individuals or as individual political parties favoured by their block votes, are unable to protect them in the end. They, in fact, do not care, as was made obvious by the behaviour of P. V. Narasimha Rao and his home minister on December 6, 1992, both of whom, sitting in Delhi, did not move a finger while the mosque was being demolished at Ayodhya.

The realisation that these leaders shall not, and cannot, guarantee their security is now permeating amongst the Muslims. In the Urdu press and in the writings of important Muslim journalists there are now two constant refrains. One, that the Congress has fooled them for 40 years. And second, that their leaders have led them into a ditch. Everybody amongst the Muslims is now realising that these two together have not attended to their real problems and have landed them in a messy situation.

If we look at what the average Muslim has got as a result of the politics of last 40 years, we find that there is really nothing. He has secured nothing of substance. Of course the average Muslim knows it and this is a factor he holds against the Indian society in general. He asks: "Why do you people keep saying that we have received disproportionate benefits in the Indian polity? Count the number of Muslim officers in the Indian administrative and police services, or of Muslim industrialists. Where is the disproportion? Where is the favouritism?"

And the average Muslim is right. The numbers only show that the Muslims in India have been severely discriminated against, not for. That is a fact that others, the majority Hindus, should remember. But this fact should also make the average Muslim reflect how, in spite of his not having got anything of value, the impression that he is given undue favours has come to prevail in the mind of the average Hindu.

The entire responsibility for this state of affairs rests with the leaders of Muslim opinion and the brokers of Muslim votes who, to establish their own leadership, made the state demonstrably kneel before them on non-issues, like the Shah Bano case and the banning of Salman Rushdie's book. The Muslim leaders have diverted and fooled their people with mere toys. They told the Muslims that they would get a book banned, and it would be a great victory for Islam. How many would have read that book of Salman Rushdie in India? Not 500 copies would have sold, even if there were no ban. They told the Muslims that they shall get the government to amend the laws of the country to deprive a destitute, old woman of the meager maintenance granted to her by the courts. And that too would be a great victory of Islam.

The Muslims are now realising that these so-called victories, that they were told to fight for because their identity supposedly depended on them, got them nothing but ashes in their face. On the other hand, these conspicuous victories led the Hindus to believe that the Muslims were getting an inordinate share, and thereby built up this great reaction among the Hindus, which exploded in Ayodhya.

This realisation is important. And I think there are a number of lessons that the Muslims of India can learn from this experience. The foremost of these is: Do not put your faith in individual leaders or organisations. Do not think that your security is ensured, or your interests are served, by turning to a single leader or organisation and building a fortress around yourself. All fortresses ultimately turn into ghettos. You can ensure your security and secure your interests only by joining hands with everybody in this country to strengthen the institutions of parliamentary democracy. That is where our common security and interests lie.

Second, do not judge leaders by externals. Srimati Gandhi holds an Iftar party, and you think she is Islamic. Bahuguna wears a loose Achkan, like V. P. Singh now, and you begin to believe that they are the saviours of Islam. Do not judge a leader by that. See what he is doing for the institutions of this country. If he is destroying the institutions, he will eventually destroy your interests too.

Third, and this is very important, I think you have to learn to be less intransigent. Imagine for a moment, what would have happened

if your community had said: “Yes, we understand the intensity of the Hindu faith in Srirama and his Janmasthan. We recognise that for 500 years the Hindus have been trying to get this spot, to be able to pray here. In any case, we have not been using the Babri mosque for years. We have 20 odd mosques in Faizabad. This one mosque cannot be a point of honour for us. And, therefore, as a gesture of brotherhood we agree that this mosque may be relocated.”

What would have happened? The structure would have survived. An unanswerable and powerful signal would have been given to every Hindu in this country that Muslims also heed non-Muslim opinion and sentiment. And what has happened now? The structure is gone. It is gone in the most consequential manner. It did not go by the verdict of a court, not by the leaders negotiating and coming to an agreement, but by the people taking the law into their own hands in a spasm of uncontrollable fury.

Fourth, I really believe that there are aspects of the revelation which are just not compatible with living in a multi-religious, secular society. So you must endow the revelation on those points with new meanings. For instance, the exhortations to Jihad, to kill and be killed, to destroy places of worship of the heathens, which are largely the same in the Old Testament and the Quran, are just not compatible with harmonious living. So you must sublimate their meanings.

Gandhiji did it for a text like the Bhagavadgita. He said that no, Gita does not speak of an actual war. It speaks of the eternal war that goes on in our hearts, between the good and the evil within each of us. Similarly, you can also say, as Maulana Azad and others tried to do, that Jihad is not conquest in the external world, it is conquest in the eternal war that we must wage inside ourselves.

These are the four appeals I would make to the Muslims. I request you, my Muslim brethren, to think over these matters. Please do not listen to the “secular” press. Do not be misled by them into believing that because they write certain kind of editorials, your position in the society is invincible, and you do not have to pay heed to the signals that are emanating from this society.

And, do not listen to what the other Islamic countries say. You have to see the condition of the Islamic world. They are always fighting with each other. Every single neighbour is fighting with

everybody else. The organisation of petroleum exporting countries, OPEC, is broken. Saddam Hussain, the great symbol of Islam, is shattered. In Bosnia, Muslims are being killed on television screens, and the Islamic world is not able to raise a finger. In Somalia, people are dying of starvation, and not one Islamic country has sent them a single bag of wheat.

The Islamic world is unable to do anything where something needs to be done. It may try to do something in a soft state like India. Pakistan says they will take the Ayodhya issue to the security council. Some other country passes a resolution condemning the incident. Iran says they will rebuild the mosque at the same spot. But all this is mere bluster. None of them is going to be of any help to the Muslims in India. The Muslims of India, therefore, must pay heed to the society here, and solve their problems in interaction with the people here.

It is one of the tragedies of modern India that Hindus and Muslims have stopped dealing with each other socially. There is no more the interaction which, in the north at least, used to be there in my father's generation. And the state also has started dealing with them through these brokers of Muslim votes. Therefore, Muslims must reach out to the common Hindus, and Hindus must begin to reach out to the common Muslims, in their respective neighbourhoods, in their respective organisations, at every opportunity.

THE FUTURE POLITY

And now let me say something about what I think Indian polity will be like when the consequences of the Ayodhya events have been fully absorbed. There is absolutely no doubt that events of December 6, 1992 constitute one of the most powerful announcements that things must be different. In a sense the old shell of Indian polity has been cracked. Everyday brings new evidence of this.

Consider the alacrity with which the Allahabad high court has allowed *darsan* of Ramlala idols in the make-shift temple built on the ruins of the demolished mosque. It is the same court that had refused to condescend to expedite its judgement after having completed the hearings on the issue of the acquisition of land near the mosque. The same court now says that the *darsan* of Ramlala idols must continue. And the condition it imposes is that the make-shift

temple structure must be secured and strengthened to protect the idols.

Such judgements and announcements do imply that the climate has changed. But this change can also go out of hand. It can lead to everybody disowning the system, and small groups of people here and there taking the law into their own hands and attempting to bend the state to their fancies and whims of the moment. That would lead to further delegitimation and weakening of the Indian state.

We have to find a way of ensuring that the change that is going to take place does not become chaotic. Before coming for this talk, I was talking on this matter with Sri Dharampal, and he said that in order to smoothen the process of change we should quickly and explicitly spell out the elements in which the future polity of India shall be different from that of the past.¹ Once that is done the people shall know the direction in which they have to exert, and the minorities too shall know exactly what to expect from the future and how to adapt to the changed situation.

I, for one, can attempt to list out what I think ought to be the essential elements of the future polity. One element would be that anyone who raises a hand at the state or at the country, with a gun in it, will be dealt with not under Macaulay's criminal procedures code, but under the rules of war, according to which you do not get an order from the supreme court before shooting somebody.

I think it should also be clear that if a foreign country, like Pakistan, continues to finance and give shelter to elements in India that dare to raise their hands against the state, then those sanctuaries would certainly be open and fair game for the state. And we would seek all international help, collaboration and expertise from, and make common cause with, other countries which have successfully dealt with such problems.

Another element of the future Indian polity, according to my reckoning, should be that these groups which, in the name of Gandhiji and under the cover of words like 'satyagraha', paralyse the nation, either by strikes or by other methods, are no more tolerated. There would be a code for such protests. And if someone says that

[¹Dharampal also spoke in this series of discussions. His presentation appears later in this volume, under the title, *Undamming the Flow*, pp.213-38.-ed.]

he is a satyagrahi, he would be held to the strictest conditions of satyagraha that Gandhiji would have recommended. This business of “Fast unto Death between Meals”, “Relay Fast”, “I’ve had breakfast now, I’ll sit and fast till lunch-time, then you’ll”, etc., must be strongly curbed. This “work to rule”, which in reality means “no work according to rules”, on the flimsiest of pretexts must be firmly dealt with. I think this is an essential part of the process of firming up of the state and the society, which have gone completely lax.

And finally constitutional issues, like those concerning Article 29, Article 370, or Article 44, which have been matters of public concern for long, but on which no discussion has been allowed on the pretext that talking about these matters is communal, should now be taken up on the agenda of scholarly analysis. That should certainly be done by all groups that are equipped to do so.

I can go on spelling out what needs to be done. Other people may have another agenda. But it is important that we look at the India of tomorrow, pay attention to what Sri Dharampal said, and try to arrive at a clearly articulated and transparent outline of the future Indian polity. Sri Dharampal gave me a completely different example of how our policies need to be revamped. He referred to the anti-liquor agitation in Andhra Pradesh, and the manner in which it had caught on in the villages there. This too, to my mind, is a reflection of the same phenomenon that was witnessed in Ayodhya. Unless we begin to pay heed to the aspirations of the people, unless we convince them by our deeds that we have indeed listened to them, unless that is done, there is no way the state would be able to retain control. And then people will do things the way they know how to, the way they did them in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992.

DISCUSSION

C. N. KRISHNAN: I am a little surprised at the emphasis you put on the question of Muslims in India. I thought the Ayodhya movement was about much larger issues, that it was concerned with a deep and

wide-ranging reorganisation of the current Indian ways of thought and action. But after listening to you it seems as if all this was only about solving what is perceived as the Muslim problem of India, and about teaching a few lessons to the Muslims.

SHOURIE: I agree with you that the Ayodhya movement has little to do with Muslims as such. But the Muslim issue is certainly one of the elements which stoked the anger of the Indian people. The behaviour, the calculations, and the presumptions of the so called leaders of Muslim opinion certainly added to the intensity of feelings about Ayodhya. The Shahabuddins and the Imam Bukharis loom very large in the Hindu consciousness, especially in the north. But I entirely agree with you that the Ayodhya movement is about much larger issues. And the movement indeed has inspired much thinking on the state of India and the ways of putting things in order.

AMBADI: Sir, don't you think that this was not the right time to bring up a deeply emotive issue like that of Ayodhya. It is a time when we are engaged in a thorough restructuring of the national economy, and are beset with problems like an adverse balance of trade, and sluggish production. This is hardly a good time to raise issues that would distract attention from the economic problems. And, how would the world react to these events? What kind of response are we going to get from the world following the Ayodhya events, especially in the economic domain?

SHOURIE: Sir, there is no time which is 'good' in that sense for a great change. And as far as the economy is concerned, we may collapse independently of what happened or did not happen at Ayodhya.

As far as the international competitiveness of Indian industrial products goes, we are well equipped to compete with the world. But because of the manner in which we have conducted our economic policies for the last about 20 years, our industry and our labour have become accustomed to making a very good living by not working, by merely manipulating the apparatus of the state or the personnel policies of the state. This manner of working has tied us down to a growth rate of around 3.5 percent per annum, for decades.

There was a great restructuring that was required. We needed a restructuring that would redefine the nature of the state. It was the perception of this need for restructuring that gave rise to the

Ayodhya movement, the Mandal episode, and the efforts at economic liberalisation. Changes in all spheres are necessary. You cannot say one is necessary and the other is not.

The world will show great understanding of what is happening in India. I feel that the World Bank and the IMF will certainly support what is happening. Support, of course, does not mean that they will say, "Please, go ahead and break mosques!", but they will certainly say that, "We understand your great difficulties and, therefore, you may take a little longer to fulfil the conditions you have agreed upon with us." I feel that is what the reaction of the World Bank would be. I am not privy to the actual reactions of the World Bank. But this is my hypothesis, and I believe it is correct. The flow of foreign investments into India in the immediate future is a different matter. It depends upon a whole range of issues and perceptions, of which Ayodhya is very much a part.

Ayodhya and its aftermath are definitely going to be of relevance to a certain remoulding of the role of the state in the Indian economy, which is urgently required. In these matters, for twenty years now, we have been the way Britain was in the 1960's and early 1970's, till Mrs. Thatcher came along. Britain then was in a situation where every small group could influence the state and the conduct of its policies. Every trade union, every little union—the nurses' union, the airline employees' union, and even the BBC employees' union—could bring Britain to a halt. Anyone could rise up, declare a strike, and bring Britain to a halt.

The unions brought down three successive governments. Eventually Britain brought forth a person like Mrs. Thatcher, who embodied the aspirations of the British society to break the lobby that was holding the nation to ransom. In almost no time Mrs. Thatcher demonstrably crushed the power of the unions. And only then Britain began to get off the ground. Recent economic circumstances in the world have made Britain, like the United States of America and Japan, undergo a recession again. But that is a different matter. The power of the old blocks has definitely been broken.

Today in India we are exactly in the situation Britain was before the coming of Mrs. Thatcher. Public sector unions can bring things

to a halt. Datta Samant at one time and George Fernandes at another used to do it at the drop of a hat. Not too long ago two thousand engineers of the Uttar Pradesh electricity board paralysed the whole northern grid. In terms of area Uttar Pradesh, on its own, could count as the eighth largest country of the world. Two thousand employees could shut off the supply of electricity in that large an area! In fact, anyone and everyone can bring things to a halt in some part or the other. And nobody can do anything except conceding to the demands.

On the political side, the Shahabuddins have been doing to the state exactly what the Datta Samants have been doing to the industry on the economic side. The Ayodhya events, I believe, are a demonstration of the resolve that we shall not allow the industry or the state to be stopped in that manner.

S. KRISHNAN: You have discussed the Ayodhya issue largely from the political and the economic perspective. But there is also an undercurrent throughout the country that as a nation we are in need of a cultural transformation. That transformation would extend to all aspects of private and public life, and would thus include politics and economics also.

Srirama and Ramarajya are primarily the symbols of this great Indian aspiration for a cultural renewal of the nation. People have got so agitated about Ayodhya not merely because a temple was destroyed there and a mosque was built on the ruins. That of course did happen. But there are perhaps more than 3000 temples in the country which were thus destroyed by the Mughal invaders and replaced by mosques. If people have got so agitated about the one temple at Ayodhya, it is surely because in Srirama of Ayodhya they have seen a symbol of hope, a symbol that would help them fulfil their deep and urgent desire for a cultural and civilisational renewal of the Indian nation.

The mosque at Ayodhya, standing at the Janmasthan of Srirama, was certainly a national shame. That had to be rectified. There is no question about it. That rectification need not have become a question of the Hindus against the other communities of India. The temple was destroyed by the armies of a foreign invader and the mosque there was a symbol of the foreigners' victory over India. Nobody in India should have taken any objection to the removal of that symbol of Indian defeat. The Muslims and the Christians, in

fact, should have joined in the effort to rid the nation of that symbol of shame.

But that symbol of shame is now gone. And what we need to talk about now is that other symbol, the symbol of Indian cultural and civilisational resurgence that Srirama of Ayodhya stands for. We should be talking of how we shall rebuild the nation so as to be worthy of having invoked the name of Srirama and his Ramarajya. We should be projecting the idea of the future Indian society that will be built on the model of Ramarajya. And we should be sketching the outlines of that future society and the process through which we shall reach there.

The impression I get from your talk, sir, is that nothing substantive is going to change. That the institutions, organisations, and structures of society and governance shall remain unaltered, except that they would now begin to function more honestly and more effectively. You have been saying, sir, that the judges must become more judicious, the governments must exercise more control, and the workers must work harder. But how shall that happen within the present institutional structures that have spawned such laxity and corruption? What shall motivate the institutions and the people manning them to become socially and civilisationally responsive? How would the state be toughened? And what use shall the toughening be if there is not a national resurgence that somehow restores the dignity of every Indian?

I am reminded of an incident that I had the misfortune of witnessing recently. On one of the more important roads of the city a man was being beaten by a posse of policemen. People were watching that brutal beating, but nobody seemed to mind. I pleaded with the policemen. They just did not care. And then there was an old man. He said, "This is what is required. People should be taught a lesson." I reminded him that Indira Gandhi's emergency was all about teaching such lessons to the people. He said, "The emergency was good, sir. We should have that kind of ruthlessness amongst the police and other instruments of the state!" I told him, "During the emergency the policemen could have beaten you also. What would you have said or done then?" He said, "Oh! That is impossible, sir."

Gandhiji successfully mobilised almost all of the Indian people, because he gave them a vision of an India that would be like the India of their legends and dreams, where they would all be dignified

participants in the building and running of the nation. And people believed him, perhaps because he stood firm in his character and convictions. The people of India have responded once again to the call of national resurgence, made this time in the name of Srirama. Shall they once again be fobbed off by mere cosmetic changes and mere promises of more effective and more honest functioning of the same old institutions of colonial governance? Or, shall we begin thinking of ways of reorganising our state and the entirety of our public life, such that the resurgence symbolised by the Ayodhya movement gets the institutional frame it requires to manifest itself?

SHOURIE: I entirely agree with you that there is a great urge, a great recognition in large parts of our society, that our life today has really nothing to do with our heritage and is, in fact, deviating farther and farther away from our heritage. The Ayodhya movement has to be seen as the starting point of a cultural awareness and understanding that would ultimately result in a complete restructuring of the Indian public life in ways that would be in consonance with Indian civilisational heritage. I join you in proposing that we should all begin to seriously think about how to make it happen.