

INTRODUCTION: SOCIETY HAS ITS REASONS TOO

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A solitary colonial bungalow standing on a high platform amidst a sprawling compound forms one of the persistent images of my childhood. The boundary wall surrounding the compound was spiked with sharp pieces of broken glass. The rooms were generally covered from view by thick chinks hanging over the arched verandas that ran all around the platform. From the school building adjoining the bungalow we could sometimes catch a glimpse of the interiors when the chinks were rolled up to reveal a large number of double panelled doors and windows, all painted a sanitary white, opening into the verandas. Occasionally, we could also see someone luxuriously reclining on the white painted plank swing cooled by the breeze from a huge pedestal fan. More often, however, we only saw the gardeners tending the green lawns, manicuring the hedges and shrubs, and watering the flower and vegetable beds with their bucket sprinklers. And during the winter we wistfully looked at the large white dahlias and myriad other flowers that bloomed in the compound.

The bungalow stood at the head of a small town of around three thousand households. The town itself was of recent origin, established in the early twentieth century. It was neatly laid out with two main bazaars running across the length, and a third, perpendicular to the other two, cutting the town in the middle. And there were five or six residential streets all of which ran geometrically straight either along the length or the width of the town. Houses along the outermost streets were relatively and uniformly tall, facing inwards to the street. The backs of these houses thus formed a closed perimeter wall. Entrance to and exit from the town were possible only from

the ends of the three main bazaars and two of the bigger streets. All these openings were provided with massive iron gates which were closed and locked early at night and opened at the crack of dawn. The bungalow of our school day musings was not a part of the town. It stood just outside the main gate and seemed to overlook the town laid out at its feet.

The bungalow was the official residence of the local magistrate, the officer representing the majesty of the government in that small town and its surrounding villages. Opposite to the bungalow there was the court complex; adjoining it the sub-jail and beyond that the civil hospital and the post office. These buildings together constituted what in a bigger town would have been known as the “civil lines”. But all of these buildings had been more or less taken over and subdued by those who, not too long ago, were barred from these precincts as the despised “natives”. Only the magisterial bungalow retained its imperial majesty and aloofness.

The bungalow seemed to interact with the town only through the agency of the police chowky, which was built into the main gate, symbolically straddling the town, with one half of it protruding on one side of the gate and the other half on the other side. On our way to and from the school we had to pass this chowky, and passing by we often saw men tied down in grotesque positions and heard heavy thuds of bestial beating and the helpless cries of pain. Sometimes the men in the chowky were among the known people of the town. At one time there were young neighbours caught at a game of cards. At another it was the old venerable grandfather of a fellow student brought in with his hands tied to the back for daring to brew his own wine. And at yet another time it was a tall, young and highly talented cabinet-maker being reduced to pulp for being involved in some little scuffle.–

But this, we were told, was only a chowky – a police outpost – used for mere minor chastisement. The really criminal types were taken to one of the two police stations falling under the jurisdiction of our magistrate and located in two of the bigger villages of the neighbourhood. And for the recalcitrant ones there were special interrogation centres in faraway cities. There were many stories that were told of the horrors visited upon people who had had the misfortune of being taken to the police stations in the neighbourhood or to the faraway interrogation centres.

To our young minds the bungalow and the police chowky represented another world, a world far removed from the ordinary day-to-day world of the town and its inhabitants. The policemen, of course, were a different, alien people, not governed by the usual norms of behaviour and the sense of dignity amongst the people of the town. And once when one of the neighbours was introduced as a policeman working in some distant police station we just could not believe it. How could a policeman be one amongst us?

And, the manicured lawns, the dahlias, the gardeners with sprinklers, the verandas with chinks and the swings in the magisterial bungalow seemed very distant from the bone dry patches of dust and the thatched sheds that often used to serve as our classrooms in the school. The sanitary white of the bungalow and the luxuriant green of its compound had little in common with the government school where we raised a collection to buy chalks for the teacher, and brought our individual small pieces of coarse cloth to spread on the bare floor. Not only did the school have no desks, it could not even afford to buy fresh rolls of jute sacking that had once served as seats for the children. And therefore we picked up small pieces of old cloth from our homes, stuffed these in our school-bags and carried them to school everyday.

For us, in our childhood, this separation between the world of the magisterial bungalow and that of the town seemed part of the natural order of things. It seemed natural that the universe was formed of two distinct worlds: a rarefied and powerful world of the rulers, and the ordinary, humdrum and powerless world of the ruled. And it also seemed natural that the rulers lived in distinctive isolated bungalows, wore different kinds of clothes, and spoke a different language. We were, of course, told that if we studied well and worked hard we could gain entrance to that other world of the bungalow. But that world was so different from anything we knew that it is doubtful whether the prospect of becoming part of it really meant much for many of us.

It was later, much much later, that we began to realise that the magisterial bungalow and the police chowky of our town were not really part of the natural order of things. They, on the other hand, were artificial and ugly impositions created with the objective of instilling the fear of the alien rulers in the minds of us “natives”. And being brought up under the shadow of such constructs – with the

persistent thought of being part of a lower, powerless world while power belonged to the world of the bungalow and the chowky – was an unnatural humiliation that the children of a free nation did not deserve to suffer.

To me, with the images of that bungalow and the chowky often fresh in my mind, the destruction at Ayodhya of December 6 seems somehow related to the undoing of that persistent sense of humiliation.

IMPERIAL MEN AND THEIR MEMORIALS

The Ayodhya events obviously have something to do with the way we have cluttered up our public spaces. That small town magisterial bungalow is only a minor example of this cluttering. The country is filled with similar bungalows, circuit houses and sundry other mansions. And, of course, everywhere there are loathsome colonial structures housing police stations, civil hospitals and courts of various kinds. We continue to govern ourselves from the same forbidding and alien structures that were occupied by the British rulers not so long ago. How the ordinary people must hate these monstrosities from which so much terror was and continues to be visited upon them?

We have not only continued to maintain these functional structures of the colonial masters, we have also lovingly retained the monuments and memorials they built to themselves. Thus, on one of the arterial roads of the city of Madras there stands a statue of Thomas Munro, one of the early governors of the Madras presidency, riding a horse. Munro was of course a great administrator. He had acquired that reputation by being a great tyrant to the people of the region around Madras – he brought every ryot down to his knees, he disarmed and dispossessed every person who claimed the right or the duty to protect his people from alien intrusion, he deprived every locality of the last paisa of its disposable income and then collected some more. Thus he “pacified” the region and made it “governable”. And he was bright enough to realise and record the benumbing impact tyranny of that kind would have upon the

people of India.¹ But he had to do his imperial duty, and he was indeed a great man from the British point of view. But what are we celebrating him for? Why do we have the statue of that tyrant standing on a main thoroughfare of one of our major cities?

There was another British officer, Lionel Place, a contemporary of Thomas Munro, whose enthusiasm for expanding the revenues of the empire through suppression of the “natives” proved too much even for the British and he had to be withdrawn from the field. He raised revenue demands so high that the peasants began to desert their lands. It had become more profitable to keep the lands fallow rather than pay such exorbitant rates. Lionel Place had to undertake extra-ordinary exertions to keep cultivators on the land. In this process, he once summoned three headmen of Salavakkam, a once prosperous town serving the fertile stretch of land enclosed within the elbow bend formed by the coming together of the Cheyyar and the Palar rivers, to his court at Karunguzhi and got them whipped for their failure to induce the cultivators in their villages to bring enough lands under the plough. Lionel Place was to claim later that he had administered only mild chastisement. But for the headmen, used to high dignities, the mere thought of being physically whipped would have amounted to a living death, and one of them, Muthu Gramany of Salavakkam, actually died of the whipping. The case went to higher revenue authorities, and to the government in London, who ruled that in this particular case Mr. Place had committed no wrong. It was an already settled principle of British jurisprudence that the master had a right to fair chastisement of the servant and if the servant died in the process it was no fault of the master.²

¹Thomas Munro, towards the end of his governorship, wrote a detailed minute surveying, in a grand historical and philosophical sweep, British aims and methods in India and their impact on Indians. See, Thomas Munro's 'Minute Reviewing the Condition of the Country and People, Stating His Sentiments as to How It May be Improved, 31 December 1824' in Madras Secret Proceedings, August 25, 1825, vol.103, pp. 305-458.

²The story is from Dharampal, *Erosion of Norms and Dignity and Origins of Callousness, Pauperisation and Bondage in Modern India*, unpublished note, 1981. Dharampal bases his narration upon, Tamilnadu State Archives (TNSA): Madras Board of Revenue Proceedings, December 1796 and January 1797.

Incidentally, it was William Jones, the renowned orientalist, whose memory is cherished deep within their hearts by most educated Indians and whom Indian scholars, especially those engaged in the study of classical Indian texts, continue to revere as the wise guru and a great benefactor, who first enunciated this principle of the right to fair chastisement in the Indian context. Addressing the grand jury at Calcutta in 1788, in his capacity as a judge of the Calcutta supreme court, William Jones referred to the question “of a master moderately correcting his apprentice or servant” and expressed the view that if the punishment were moderate, but yet the servant died, the master was not to blame.³

Dharampal, who has studied the British society of that time in some detail, adds that “in the Britain of that time some 30-50 lashes would have been considered as a moderate punishment, while 1500-2000 which at times were awarded in certain grave cases in the British army would have been considered as rigorous and hard.”⁴ Lionel Place must have been relying upon such usages in Britain and on the formulations and enunciations of scholars like William Jones, and his counterparts in the British academia of the time, to brazenly assert in response to queries regarding the Karunguzhi incident: “I found it necessary to inflict a slight corporal punishment of two dozen strokes with a rattan upon each of the three headmen. ...It were almost unnecessary to observe that so slight a punishment could be inflicted more as a disgrace than as an exercise of severity. In other circumstances, I should have thought it sufficient merely to have mentioned the nature of it...”⁵

The whipping of the headmen of Salavakkam occurred in the open in front of the court of Lionel Place at Karunguzhi, on the outskirts of Madurantakam, a temple town to the south of Madras. The court was probably located near the overflow sluices of the Madurantakam tank, one of the most impressive irrigation tanks of this coastal region which abounds in these grand structures for managing

³Sir W. Jones’ Charge to the Grand Jury for 1788, National Library of Wales: MS 5476 D. Quoted from Dharampal, 1981, cited earlier.

⁴Dharampal, 1981, cited earlier, p. 13.

⁵Lionel Place to the Madras Board of Revenue, TNSA: Madras Board of Revenue Proceedings, January 1797.

water. Near the overflow weir of this tank there stands an imposing, but aesthetically unimpressive and functionally useless, colonial bungalow, which the local people refer to as the old collector's residence. The bungalow is maintained as another of the rest-houses for the high officers of the government. On the tank bund opposite to this bungalow there is a plaque in honour of Lionel Place, mentioning his efforts in repairing the bund, and recording to the last penny the amounts spent on such repairs. These are the amounts he extracted many times over from the inhabitants of the region, through methods similar to the ones used upon the headmen of Salavakkam. And we continue to preserve his memory on that grand tank bund in front of that atrocious colonial bungalow. But, the memory of the man is preserved even in the great Madurantakam temple dedicated to Sri Kodandarama!

Statues of men like Munro and Place and memorials to their exploits abound in all towns of India, small or big. And the great cities have greater—and more humiliating—of these memorials. Thus we have the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta, celebrating the arrival of the crown prince of an alien empire on Indian soil in 1906, we have the Gateway of India in Bombay reminding us of the triumphal visit of the same prince in 1911, now crowned as King George V, and we have the India Gate in Delhi commemorating the death of 90,000 young men of India forced to take part in the foreigners' wars and die in alien lands for alien causes. None of these structures is of any great architectural significance and beauty. But we preserve these with great effort.

We preserve the memory of not only our erstwhile British masters, to whom we happen to be particularly attached, but also of other invaders and desperadoes of different hues and different times. We thus lovingly maintain and proudly display the Qutb Minar complex in Delhi, built by early Islamic invaders from the ruins of numerous temples. History recognises those invaders and pretentious rulers of Delhi—the Slave Kings, the Khaljis and others—as barbarians. The nucleus of the Qutb Minar complex is formed by the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque, founded by Qutb-ud-din Aibak in 1191 to commemorate the capture of Delhi and to celebrate, as the name of the mosque implies, the 'Might of Islam'. An inscription on the

east gate of this mosque states that it was built from materials collected from the demolition of “twenty-seven idolatrous shrines of the unbelievers”. And, we have made this complex into the major landmark of Delhi.

It seems that we want to carry the whole burden of our historical defeats with us. We do not want to forget or erase any of it. We therefore have victory towers, triumphal arches, and statues of the victors occupying prominent public places in most cities. We have tall church spires rising from the holiest towns, especially in south India. And we have victors’ mosques standing in the most sacred spots of Indian collective memory. The public spaces of India have thus become unbearable to the good sense of ordinary Indians. They look weird to the good sense of even perceptive foreigners. One such foreigner, Arnold Toynbee, tried to remind us of the weirdness of such cluttering up of public spaces with symbols of defeat in his now famous Azad Memorial Lecture⁶:

“As I have been speaking, some vivid visual memories have been flashing past my mind’s eye. One of these is a mental picture of the principal square in the Polish City of Warsaw some time in the late nineteen-twenties. In the course of the first Russian occupation of Warsaw (1814-1915) the Russians had built an Eastern Orthodox Christian Cathedral on this central spot in the city that had been the capital of the once independent Roman Catholic Christian country, Poland. The Russians had done this to give the Poles a continuous ocular demonstration that Russians were now their masters. After the re-establishment of Poland’s independence in 1918, the Poles had pulled this cathedral down. The demolition had been completed just before the date of my visit. I do not greatly blame the Polish Government for having pulled down that Russian Church. The purpose for which the Russians had built it had been not religious but political, and the purpose had also been intentionally offensive. On the other hand, I do

⁶ Arnold Toynbee, *One World and India*, ICCR, Delhi 1990, pp. 59-61.

greatly praise the Indian Government for not having pulled down Aurangzeb's mosques: I am thinking particularly of the two that overlook the ghats at Benaras, and of the one that crowns Krishna's hill at Mathura.

"Aurangzeb's purpose in building those three Mosques was the same intentionally offensive political purpose that moved the Russians to build their Orthodox cathedral in the city-centre at Warsaw. Those three Mosques were intended to signify that an Islamic Government was reigning supreme, even over Hinduism's holiest of holy places. I must say that Aurangzeb had a veritable genius for picking out provocative sites. Aurangzeb and Philip II of Spain are a pair. They are incarnations of the gloomily fanatical vein in the Christian-Muslim-Jewish family of religions. Aurangzeb – poor wretched misguided bad man – spent a lifetime of hard labour in raising massive monuments to his own discredit. Perhaps the Poles were really kinder in destroying the Russians' self-discrediting monuments in Warsaw than you have been in sparing Aurangzeb's mosques. Anyway, it is Aurangzeb, and not the Hindu holy ground on which his mosques are planted, that suffers from their very conspicuous presence...

"Aurangzeb's mosques are not outstandingly beautiful works of Indian Muslim architecture. But the standard of all Mughal works is high. I have noticed the loving care with which the Indian archaeological service looks after such world-famous masterpieces as the Taj Mahal and the forts at Agra and here in Shahjehanabad. Not only the Islamic World but the whole World ought to feel grateful to India for this. But the careful preservation of public monuments is perhaps not so meritorious when these are supremely beautiful as it is when they do not have this intrinsic appeal. The British rulers of India followed their Muslim predecessors' practice of perpetuating the memory of their fleeting presence by leaving monuments behind them. Unfortunately for the British, the style of their epoch in India was no longer the Mughal; it was the Victorian Gothic. If any of my countrymen still had a say in determining the policy of the Indian Ministry of Public Works, I suspect that they

might press for the demolition of some of these Philistine reminders of the British phase in the history of India. But not so the Indian authorities. They are, so far as I know, being as tender to these British monstrosities as they are to the Taj...”

We, of course, take this gentlemanly rebuke by an Englishman seemingly exasperated by the inscrutable ways of the Indians as an ode to our peculiar tolerance. We are never tired of repeating it. And, strangely, even Muslim leaders of India keep quoting these bemused observations of Toynbee.

ASSUMING THE MANTLE OF THE CONQUERORS

Till the coming of independence in 1947 we had no opportunity to attend to the task of sprucing up our public places, and public life in general, according to our political, ethical and aesthetic sensibilities. For almost eight centuries we were busy countering and containing the Islamic onslaught. By the early eighteenth century, however, we had more or less gotten over that difficult phase of our history and were about to begin the task of national reconstruction. But then the British came, and their arrival not only arrested the emerging Indian resurgence, it also so impoverished us in mind and body that we could not muster the spirit and the determination to get back to the task even after they quit India in 1947.

Since independence we seem to have been afflicted by a strange inability, or perhaps a lack of inclination, to discriminate between the good and the bad, between the great and the merely ordinary, in all spheres of life. We seem to have given up the responsibility to discriminate, to choose, to select and reject, to pass judgements. We do not wish to look upon our history through the perspective of our civilisational commitments and ethical and aesthetic preferences, and decide what aspects of it constitute valid civilisational experiences and what are mere aberrations that keep arising and disappearing in the flow of time. We do not exercise such discrimination even about the multitude of ideas, techniques and artefacts that are flooding the international bazaars of today. And this shirking of responsibility is of course one of the reasons why we have left our public places in such a clutter.

Though we seem to be equally tender towards all structures of the past, we are particularly attached to the memorials and monuments that commemorate the past defeats of the Indian society. And this has not happened merely because of a lack of discrimination. There seems to be a deliberate design in it. Those of us who came to positions of power and relative affluence after independence began to think of ourselves as successors to the various conquerors of India. And in our eyes the symbols of Indian defeat indeed became the treasured inheritance of the Indian state.

Thus it is that immediately after independence the first prime minister of free India began to covet the house of the commander-in-chief of the alien forces, and that the first Indian governor-general was installed in the viceregal estate, later renamed the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Lesser political and governmental leaders and officers all over the country then moved into the colonial offices and residences, newly vacated by the imperial British masters, complete with the “native” ardalis and khansamas in their elaborate long-turbaned dresses which the British had designed probably as a spoof on the Indian princes of their time, though the latter themselves were also creatures of the British and were indeed caricatures of the authentic Indian royalty of a better age.

Having taken over the levers and the trappings of imperial power in India, the new ruling elite quickly convinced itself that the police-stations, the court-houses, the circuit bungalows and the magisterial residences built by the British, as also the various manuals and codes of departmental and courtly procedure created by them and the earlier Mughal rulers, were essential to the governance of the people of India. And, the various statues, memorials, triumphal arches and victory towers, and even the rituals associated with the foreign state, came to be seen as necessary for keeping the people reminded of the pedigree and majesty of the new dispensation.

It was thus not merely an act of forgetfulness that the dead body of Mahatma Gandhi, the avatara who came to re-establish the meaning of Ahimsa and swadeshi, was put on a gun-carriage and subjected to the alien ritual of a salute by canon fire. The mood of having taken over and inherited the mantle of the dead and departed imperial conquerors kept persisting, and even years later a marxist government in west Bengal could put a red cap on the victory tower built in honour of Sir David Ochterlony, the victor of Nepal, and

own it up as Shaheed Minar, the martyrs' memorial. Whose martyrs? And, for what causes?

There is a story about Indira Gandhi told by a former diplomat and later a minister in her government that graphically conveys the attitudes of the Indian ruling elite towards the alien marauders of Indian history. Srimati Indira Gandhi was the daughter of the first prime minister of independent India who later occupied the same position herself and sought to rule India with a firm hand. It is said that during her visit to Kabul in Afghanistan in 1968 she asked to be taken to the grave of Babar. The request put the hosts to quite some embarrassment: they had not cared to remember the man. Somehow the grave was located and spruced up for the Indian dignitary. Srimati Gandhi visited the grave, paid her respects, and then, according to the former diplomat who had accompanied her on the tour, she was lost in a deep and respectful reverie that lasted a long time.⁷

It is not our public places alone, but also our minds, that are cluttered up with associations with the victors of the past. We have conjured up a cosy image of our being successors to all those imperial masters and hence entitled to rule India without reference to the sensitivities, seekings and preferences of the Indian people. And the events at Ayodhya seem to have demolished, not so much an old tottering structure, but this self-serving faith in our imperial inheritance.

The events have indeed broken the reverie. They have come as a rude jolt to many who had begun to imagine that they were now in a position to do what the conquerors of the past had failed to accomplish: To make the people of India forget their intrinsic Indianness, their essential rootedness in the Indian civilisation, and

⁷The incident was related by K. Natwar Singh in a popular magazine several years after the death of Srimati Gandhi. Srimati Gandhi probably learnt her deep reverence for the memory of Babar from her father, who in his letters to her, later collected as *Glimpses of World History*, talks about the greatness of Babar with unconcealed fascination and also refers to the garden in Kabul where Babar was buried. Babar died in Agra, and in deference to his wishes, his remains were later taken to Kabul. Some extracts from the *Glimpses* are reproduced in Supplementary Note 1, pp.239-41

turn them into obedient followers of the whims and fancies of their current masters. The Ayodhya events have shown that in spite of all the tomtomming of the virtues of European modernity and unmitigated vices of the Indian past, the people of India have not really changed. They continue to keep their own counsel about what is worth preserving in the Indian past and what needs to be forgotten. And, what must seem worse to the ruling elite, they have not even learnt the virtues of being docilely obedient to the powers that be. Centuries of slavery under the alien rulers have not extinguished their spirit, and even now they can rise up and express their likes and dislikes in as forceful a manner as they did in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992.

This realisation—that the people of India have not become really obedient, that they do not care for what the educated and the presently powerful think and believe, that all the maligning of the Indian past and the Indian ways indulged in by the articulate sections of Indians have not changed anything—was perhaps the most galling aspect of the Ayodhya events. It is no wonder that most of the political commentators and analysts reacted to the events with a sense of personal injury and instinctively began to hurl choicest abu-ses at those who had dared to disobey. But the more perceptive of the observers also realised that the events signified the beginning of the end of a phase of Indian history: The republic, constituted as a successor regime to the British and the Mughals, was no more so viable.

The urgency of this perception has given rise to an intense questioning. The ideas and concepts that have so far formed the unexamined basis of public functioning in India are now being looked into. And the examination seems to reveal that we have not really clarified any of these ideas for ourselves. Having taken over the governance of the country from the British as a going concern we did not care to evolve a consensus even on the basic principles that would regulate the polity of independent India. All basic questions therefore remain open: What constitutes Indian nationhood? What is the relationship between the various constituents of Indian society and the state in India? What are the relationships among various constituents of the society themselves? What are the principles for the resolution of

disputes among the constituents, and between the constituents and the state? What is the role of the judiciary in the national life and what are its limitations? And at another level, what is the relationship of India with the world? What are the principles that determine Indian interaction with the rest of the world? What are the aspects of life about which we may learn from the world, and what aspects are sacrosanct to the Indian ways and thus beyond compromise and negotiation?

These and many other questions have repeatedly been arising in the context of discussions on the Ayodhya events. The constitution of India, based as it is on the western model of state and society, implicitly incorporates one set of answers to these questions. But those answers do not seem to agree with the conceptions of public functioning that are ingrained in the Indian consciousness, and there obviously is no consensus.

This lack of consensus has been quite visible to the outside observers. At an unarticulated level we – those of us who are part of the Indian ruling elite – too are probably conscious of it and therefore in spite of our feeling of being successors to the imperial regimes of the past, and our attachment to the symbols and privileges of conquest, we have not seriously tried to push the Indian society or the Indian state in any particular direction. We have not attempted to do anything really hard and decisive in any field, whether it be the field of economy, or politics or social transformation. We have held on to the various beliefs acquired from our previous masters and current mentors, but we have not tried with any seriousness to transform the Indian reality to conform to our beliefs, except in a very superficial manner. Aware that our beliefs have no legitimacy in the minds of the Indian people, and perhaps even in our own consciousness, we have been merely carrying out a holding operation – keeping things unchanged, not making any decisive movement in any direction, and not allowing any spontaneous movement by the people themselves.

It is therefore a matter of relief that the Ayodhya events have jolted us out of this holding pattern and forced the essential questions back on the national consciousness and national agenda. Srirama of Ayodhya is once again helping us recollect ourselves and reflect on the state of India.

Almost all the questions that we have mentioned above arise in one form or the other in the talks and discussions collected in this volume. Different speakers and participants have formulated the questions in different ways and have approached the answers from their different perspectives. There are, of course, no final answers to be found here for any of the essential questions. But there is no mistaking the serious concern and the urge to find a consensual answer to the problems of nation building. In these talks and discussions, there is an obvious willingness to go beyond what till now have been seen as the only answers acceptable in genteel company and an openness to search afresh and seek new grounds for consensus. And there is a great yearning to settle the basic issues so as to get on with the task of reconstructing this ancient nation with deep determination and high spirits, secure in the knowledge that we all agree on our seekings and preferences, and on the ways of going about fulfilling them.

The basic question that appears again and again in different forms and contexts in these discussions is the one about the appropriate relationship between the state and the society. S. Gurumurthy makes this the centrepiece of his presentation, and the question appears with great intensity in the discussion following the presentation of Sri Dharampal. But the question lurks behind much of what others have said too.

This of course is the first issue a nascent state aspiring to lead a society and rebuild a nation has to decide. And in this matter, the framers of the Indian constitution had two clear options to choose from: the Indian way that Mahatma Gandhi had succinctly articulated in his *Hind Swaraj* and that he had fought for all his life, and the western model that the British had been preparing India for, for two hundred years.

STATE AND SOCIETY IN INDIA

According to the Indian way, society is an organic formation composed of myriad groupings of people that emerge spontaneously around a locality, a profession, a kinship community, or a religious faith. All these groupings of people are taken to be inherently legit-

imate. They have well-defined and irreducible roles to perform in the public polity. In fact, it is the activities of these groups in their respective domains and their mutual interactions that constitute public polity in the Indian sense.

The king or the state in such a polity is constituted to guarantee harmonious functioning of the diverse groups of the society in their different domains and roles. The king guards against the disruptions of the natural balance and order in the functioning of the society. This natural balance and order is what is termed dharma in the context of the society. And it is of course the business of the king to protect dharma.

The natural balance and order, the dharma, is especially important in a complex society that has no single source of authority and whose functioning depends upon the smooth working and coming together of a multiplicity of inherently legitimate centres of power. That is probably why there is so much stress laid upon the protection of dharma in the classical Indian texts of politics, and in the collective consciousness of the Indian people.

The king and the state are thus assigned a crucial role in the Indian scheme of political organisation. But though crucial, the role of the king and the state hardly involves any intervention in the internal functioning of society. Society functions through the spontaneous groupings of its people, all of which are recognised to be legitimate constituents of the polity. And since normally all members of the society ascribe to dharma, to the natural balance and order of society, and are under the discipline of one grouping or the other, their deviations are handled internally, without the state coming into the picture. In fact, every member of the society is a part of a number of groupings, each of which provides him the scope to participate in some specific aspect of public functioning and also regulates his functioning in that particular role.

The intervention of the state is called upon only when some individual or group begins to assert its freedom from the constraints of dharma and thus becomes alien to the society and its groupings, or when outsiders who have no conception of and respect for the natural balance and order of the society begin to disrupt its functioning. The king and the state are thus meant essentially to deal with the outsiders, whether those who though living in the same geographical area have chosen to fall outside the pale of the society

and its dharma, or those who belong to alien lands and cultures and come as aggressors.

The primary duty of the king and the state is to protect the society from external aggression and from those who decline to be bound by its discipline. The Mahabharata says, “Like a bull that does not bear loads, like a cow that does not give milk, like a wife that does not bear children, a king that does not protect is of no use. A wooden elephant, a skinny deer, a carriage without a driver, a Brahmin without scholarship, a land that bears no crops, a cloud that does not rain and a king that does not protect, are all purposeless.”⁸ And a little later the text defines what it is that is to be protected and against whom: “*Krishi* (agriculture), *goraksha* (cowkeeping) and *vaniya* (commerce) are the livelihood of people here on earth. These with *trayeevidyas* (the knowledge of the three Vedas) lead to the greater good of society. Those who obstruct these functions of the society are indeed the *Dasyus*. It is for their destruction that Brahma created *kshatra* (the group of protectors). Oh, King of the Kuruvamsa, be victorious over the enemies and protect the people. Perform *yajnas* and exhibit bravery in wars.”

Protection of the normal routine of the society against alien disrupting forces is thought to be such an important function of the king that the Mahabharata goes to the extent of asserting that a king who after declaring ‘I shall protect you’ does not protect his subjects should be killed by the people, ‘like a dog that is afflicted with madness’. And the sentiment is repeated in different forms at different places in the text.

The king and the state present the fierce and forbidding face of their society to the outsiders. But the same face assumes an aspect of benign non-intervention when turned inside. With respect to the society, the king or the state have no coercive or legislative powers. Their role is only to let things go on as usual and to let the customary conduct of various groups continue undisturbed. In fact, along with *prajarakshana*, protection of the people, the other major attribute of the king according to the classical Indian texts is *lokaranjana*, keeping the society in good humour. The Indian term for the king,

⁸The passages from the Indian classical texts on polity, corresponding to this and subsequent quotations on this subject, are reproduced in Supplementary Note 2, pp.242-4

raja, is derived from this *ranjana* aspect of kingship. And the early British observers were indeed surprised to notice that the kings in India took this function so seriously that they often seemed to be afraid of their subjects.⁹

The ancient Chinese probably caught the essence of this concept of kingship in their image of the ideal king, who sits facing south doing nothing and lets the natural course of events flow uninterrupted. This doing nothing and letting things happen, however, requires a great deal of effort. It requires being deeply aware of and sensitive to the times and the moods and aspirations of the society. And it even requires interceding with the gods to ensure that the natural order does not get disrupted, because the king has to bear responsibility for all disruptions, including those caused by the vitiation of the natural phenomena. Bhishma in Santiparva of the Mahabharata says that, “*Yogakshema* (well-being), *svrishi* (appropriate rains), *vyadhi* (epidemics), *marana* (untimely deaths) and *bhaya* (fear) in society are all *rajamula*—all of these are to be ultimately traced to the king.” And there is many an instance in Indian classical texts that locates the vitiation of the times in the *adharma* of the king.

The king has to constantly guard against committing any violation of the natural balance and order of the times in his personal conduct and demeanour. And at the same time he has to be constantly aware of and jealously protect the ways of the people and their groupings. Because the *dharma* that the king and the state are constituted to protect keeps changing, according to the Indian conception of the world, from group to group, place to place and time to time. The *Sukraniti* recommends that, “Whatever be the *desadharmas* (*dharma* of different places), *kuladharmas* (*dharma* of different lineages), *jatidharmas* (*dharma* of different kinship groups), whether these are *sanatana* (without beginning) or *muniprokta* (enunciated by a wise man), and whether these are ancient or new, the king must strive to know them and protect them for the sake of the *rashtra*.” And another text advises the king to protect the *samaya*, the customary arrangements of different groupings, whether these groupings be

⁹James Mill, Evidence to the House of Commons Committee in *House of Commons Papers*, 1831-32, vol. XIV, pp.6-7. Quoted here from Dharampal, *Civil Disobedience and the Indian Tradition*, Sarva Seva Sangh, Varanasi 1971, pp. xxv.

of “*pashandas* (unbelievers), or *naigamas* (town councils), or *srenis* (guilds), or *vratas* (assemblies), or *pugas* (localities) and *ganas* (regional groupings).”

Notwithstanding all the effort that the king and the state are required to put in and the responsibility they carry, they are supposed only to protect and establish the already established norms and customs of the society. They do not change or reform the society that they are constituted to defend. They do not legislate new laws, they do not innovate. According to the Indian texts they do not acquire this right even in the conquered territories. The texts in fact affirm that a king on acquiring victory on *paradesa*, alien lands, should not disturb their *desadharmā*, dharma specific to those lands; and advise the victorious kings to pay appropriate respect to the people of the defeated lands, to assure them of protection, to coronate a ruler from amongst them in accordance with their conventions, and generally to perform the basic kingly duty of *prajaranjana*, of keeping the people in good humour, even in the conquered territories.

The state thus is not an instrument of change or reform in the Indian conception of the relationship between the state and society. Even Srirama could not claim that right, and notwithstanding his great love and affection for Sri Sita and his implicit faith in her, he had to send her into exile, in order to conform to the norms of personal behaviour that the Ayodhya society had set for its kings. He shared the humiliation and pain of Sri Sita’s banishment. But he did not set out to change the norms and reform the society according to his personal ideas of love and justice. He, as the king, had no choice but to accede to the norms of society. Within the Indian view of the relationship between the state and society, he could do nothing else. He had no right to transform or transcend the society he represented.

This, of course, does not mean that there are no mechanisms of change or reform within the Indian polity. The initiative for change however does not lie with the king or the state. The impulse arises from deep within the society, is taken up and articulated by the great rishis, munis and sanyasis, and works itself through the different constituents and groupings of the society, ending up in the establishment of a fresh balance and order. Such changes keep occurring all the time. Change is in fact so common that it is taken as

part of the natural order and balance, of dharma. That is why the Mahabharata enjoins upon the king to vigilantly study dharma of varying *desa* and *kala*, time and space, because as *desa* and *kala* change so does dharma, and what is dharma in one place and time may turn out to be adharma in another.

This then is the Indian model of political organisation where effective power and functioning belongs to the multiplicity of groupings that emerge spontaneously in a society, and the king and the state merely stand guard, protecting the society against alien disruptions and ensuring that the different groupings continue to function unperturbed in conformity with their natural order and balance, in conformity with dharma.

STATE AND SOCIETY IN THE WEST

The western conception of political organisation is almost the exact opposite of the Indian way. In that conception, the state and its institutions are the only legitimate actors in the public domain. No natural groupings of the society are accorded any legitimacy. In fact, there is no society in the sense we know of it in India. There are only atomised, powerless and unattached individuals at the direct command of the state. There is also no dharma, the natural balance and order of functioning. Order and balance are created by the state through its decrees and its coercive and legislative powers.

The western ideal of political organisation is perhaps best articulated by Plato through his graphic vision of the philosopher king creating a republic out of the raw material of unformed malleable individuals. There are no pre-existing groupings and constraints of society that Plato recognises. He begins with individuals. And the individuals of Plato have no identity of their own. They are brought up, trained and appointed in their respective roles according to the needs of the state as determined by the philosopher king on the basis of his rational thinking. The individuals of Plato are not even conceived in freedom. The state determines the number and kinds of people it requires, brings together the right number of genetically correctly endowed parents, and thus creates the appropriate raw material for the creation of its ideal polity.

The Platonic polity is thus an entirely man made construct. There is nothing natural or organic in it. The constituents of the polity and the desirable balance and order between them are both the creations of the state. The constituents, the atomised individuals of the polity, are created through eugenic selection, regimented upbringing and controlled education. And the order and balance is decreed by the state through legislation and coercion. The whole edifice thus serves the reasons of the state, and there is no place in it for the reasons of society or those of nature.

The Platonic ideal seems to have always excited the imagination of the west. But though one may wish to reconstruct the world in the image of man's rationality, it is not easy to do so in practice. For the Platonic ideal of polity to be implemented it was necessary first to exorcise the society of all its natural formations and combinations, and to remove diverse ideas of natural order, virtue and justice from the minds of men. And this, as Plato realised, could be achieved only by having the capability to remake man to the orders of the state.

The state in the west, whenever it had sufficient power and sweep in history, probably did look upon the people as mere individuals at the mercy of the stately whims. But it is doubtful whether the state ever succeeded in destroying the natural combinations and formations of the people, or their faith in and commitment to what they considered to be the appropriate balance and order within the context of their locality, community, kinship and professional groupings. The possibility of achieving such an extinction of the natural combinations and beliefs of a whole society seems to have seriously arisen only with the beginning of western modernity about five centuries ago.

And with the beginning of this new phase of western resurgence, there also arises a new interest in the ideals articulated by Plato some two thousand years ago. The ideal of breaking the society down to atomic individuals and restructuring it according to the rationality of the state begins to find a new and forceful expression in the work of western philosophers and thinkers from around the sixteenth century onwards. This time, however, the idea of atomising and restructuring human society is formulated in association with the even more ambitious idea of breaking through the harmony and integrity of nature and restructuring the whole world according to the rationality of man and the state.

One of the clearest expressions of this new project of western modernity is found in the works of Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes, English philosophers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. While Bacon meditated on the ways of unravelling and restructuring nature, Hobbes did the same for society. An essential component of their exposition is the insistence that neither nature nor men possess any virtue in themselves. Virtue arises from their being appointed in appropriate roles according to the reasons of the state. For Bacon, nature in itself is an enemy that needs to be put on the rack, forced to yield its secrets, and then remoulded to serve the purposes of the state. For Hobbes, man within his natural social setting, with his intrinsic and group-defined discretion of good and evil, is a dangerous person, who must be uprooted from his natural moorings, purged of the dignity of discretion and made into an obedient individual subserving the designs of the state.¹⁰

This denial of essential virtue in man and nature is the foundation of the idea of secularism, a fundamental component of the project of western modernity, which we shall discuss in some detail a little later. The project, of course, was not initiated by philosophers and thinkers like Francis Bacon or Thomas Hobbes. It had already begun in the fifteenth century with the disruption of rural Christian communities in much of the western world and the accompanying redefinition of Christianity in fundamentalist terms on the one hand, and the successes of western navigators across the world and consequent accumulation of new unearned riches on the other. As the project unfolded in time, it led to unprecedented disruption of harmony and balance both of nature and of human communities all over the world. Men, working on behalf of the western states, ruthlessly meddled with natural resources everywhere and caused their large scale destruction and relocation. Equally ruthlessly, they meddled with human communities across the globe, forcing elimination and relocation of large populations.

Within the western world men were progressively uprooted from their moorings within their localities and communities and made to

¹⁰See, in this context, J. K. Bajaj, 'Francis Bacon the First Philosopher of Modern Science: A Non-Western View', in Ashis Nandy (ed.) *Science, Hegemony and Violence*, Oxford Delhi, 1988.

appear in the market place as unattached individuals, entirely at the mercy of the state and its allied institutions. The Platonic ideal of restructuring society according to the reasons of the state, combined with the Baconian project of reordering nature according to human rationality, seemed to succeed beyond the expectations of western thinkers. And they began to project this new condition of man, alone and in competition with every one else around him, as the ideal for mankind. Competition, conflict and struggle began to be presented as the motive forces of history. Even evolution of the universe became a story of conflict and struggle between competing species and different components of nature, and the ancient concepts of harmony and balance, of community and locality began to acquire pejorative overtones.

As the project of western modernity proceeded further, the concept of the state was expanded to include large scale systems of production and trade as parts of the state. These systems, operated either through the bureaucracies of the state or through the captains of industry and trade, proved much more effective tools for removing men from their secure niches within their communities and localities than mere decrees and dictates of the state. With time these production and trading systems along with centralised bureaucracies of the state acquired a life of their own. These systems and the state machinery together formed an iron-frame that could function autonomously of the vicissitudes of the state as embodied in the monarch or the oligarchy of landed or industrial and trading interests or the party and the parliament.

It was at this stage that some of the western states began to think in terms of expanding participation in their parliamentary systems. Western societies by then had been almost completely atomised. Individuals, uprooted from their communities and localities, deprived of their sense of right and wrong, and made powerless against an all encompassing yet faceless system, were now to be invited to become accomplices in the system. They were to be asked to legitimise the system through their votes cast once in a few years.

The ever cautious British, before beginning to expand suffrage in Britain beyond a very limited club in the mid-nineteenth century, in fact, took the precaution of establishing a permanent bureaucracy

that was to keep the decision making powers of the parliament within a narrow range acceptable to the system. The precaution was perhaps not really needed. Parliament, within the scheme of western modernity, was in any case merely a place where different interests lobbied for their share in the spoils and patronage available in a system that had taken all political and productive initiative out of the hands of the individual and his immediate locality and community, and had concentrated all surplus and all opportunities for action and enterprise within itself. Such a parliament was unlikely to transcend the system of which it was a creature. It was not for nothing that Mahatma Gandhi, who was hardly given to using strong words, chose to compare the British parliament with 'a sterile woman and a prostitute'.¹¹

THE DISRUPTION OF INDIA

In the near future, when India comes into her own and begins once again to look upon the world and its evolution from the perspective of her *sanatana* understanding of man and the universe, Indians will wonder at the enormity of the arrogance and the ignorance that drove the enterprise of western modernity. They will wonder how any people of the world could think of nature as a human preserve and harbour thoughts of reordering it according to their fickle whims and fallible rationality? How did they imagine that they could remove man from his natural moorings in his locality and community, could deprive him of the security and the discipline of his immediate grouping, could purge him of his inborn discretion

¹¹M. K. Gandhi, 'Hind Swaraj' in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. X, p. 16. 'Hind Swaraj' was first published in Gujarati in two issues of *Indian Opinion* in December 1909, and was issued as a book in January 1910. The book was immediately proscribed and Mahatma Gandhi responded by publishing an English version from Phoenix in March 1910. The first Indian edition, published by G. A. Natesan & Co., Madras, appeared in 1919. In his preface to this edition, dated May 28, 1919, Mahatma Gandhi wrote: "I have re-read this booklet more than once. The value at the present moment lies in re-printing it as it is. But if I had to revise it, there is only one word I would alter in accordance with a promise made to an English friend. She took exception to my use of the word 'prostitute' in speaking of the Parliament. Her fine taste recoiled from the indelicacy of the expression." The word however remained in this as well as the later editions.

of right and wrong, and yet create a society? How could they disrupt natural harmony and balance, the inherent dharma of both nature and society, and presume to construct a world on the principles of unbridled competition and conflict? Indians will then appreciate why Mahatma Gandhi felt such disgust for western civilisation and its pretensions of a democratic polity.

After independence in 1947, however, when we set out to frame a constitution for ourselves, we chose to adopt the western model of political organisation in its entirety. The constitution defined individuals as the constituents of the polity of free India and scrupulously avoided any reference to the locality or the community. And, following the western philosophical precepts, it refused to recognise any inborn dignity or virtue in the individual or any dharma in the polity.

The polity of free India was to have no balance and order, except what was to be created through the many chapters and clauses of the constitution. The people of India were to have no inherent rights and dignities, except the ones that the constitution was to grant explicitly, and those were then made subject to the limitations inserted in the constitution and could be abrogated by the state for its own reasons. Even the right to life and liberty was to become a gift of the constitution, a gift that was supposed to be conferred by the state and therefore could be withdrawn by the state, as it was indeed done in the mid-seventies. Framers of the Indian constitution thus tried to create citizens and a society *ab initio*, from scratch as it were, in the true Platonic sense, and that is probably one of the reasons why the Indian constitution turned out to be such a long document.

At that point of time we probably had no choice. The physical and spiritual emaciation caused by the long experience of living under alien rule had probably left us with no energy or courage to undertake any radical changes in the polity, and we were thus doomed to continue for a while with the alien systems of governance and public functioning even after gaining independence. The constitution of India, therefore, could not have gone beyond merely giving high recognition to the public systems and institutions that were already in place and were functioning to some extent. Though alien, these had the merit of familiarity. And we were not yet ready to explore unfamiliar grounds.

For two hundred years the British had strenuously attempted to mould public life in India to the western ways. The first phase of British administration in every part of India was marked by disruption of the functioning of the local communities, dispersal or elimination of large parts of their populations, and consequent emaciation and atomisation of the society. In practice, localities, kinship communities and professional groupings must have been active in many parts of the world before the onset of western modernity. In India, however, all theoretical reflection on political organisation was also woven around these natural groupings of man. It is therefore not surprising that in India such groupings had become the main constituents of the polity, and were perceived by the British as the most serious hurdles in their search for absolute power in India.

For the region around Madras, which was one of the first parts of India to come under British administration, detailed records are available of the functioning of an elaborate polity based on the local communities.¹² The localities, each of them separately or in collaboration with a few others in the neighbourhood, organised their own administration, registry and militia. They ran their own religious, cultural, educational and health services. They arranged for the availability of the necessary industrial and manufacturing skills, and the essential sanitary services. They looked after the maintenance of their irrigation systems. And, they made arrangements for the functioning of the trans-locality military, political, administrative and cultural establishments at the regional level. Every locality made meticulous fiscal arrangements to provide for these varied functions and services. Almost one third of the produce of a locality was assigned for these purposes, and there are records of locality budgets from almost two thousand localities, which describe in detail the provisions made from the local produce under numerous heads.

¹²Information about the eighteenth century polity of localities around Madras is based on work in progress at the Centre for Policy Studies, Madras. An intensive survey of about 2000 localities falling in the Chengalpattu district, that surrounds Madras city from three sides, was undertaken by the British in the years 1767-1774. Summary records of the survey in English are available in the Tamilnadu State Archives, and the original palm-leaf accounts from which the summary English records were extracted are lodged in the Tamil University, Thanjavur.

The records also show that this locality-based polity was capable of generating great affluence. Average agricultural productivity of the region in mid 1760's was more than twice our national average today. This level of average productivity was achieved in the localities of this coastal region which is not known to be too well endowed in terms of natural fertility. The localities that fell in the relatively fertile belts around the coastal rivers of the region had much higher productivity, and the yields in at least some of these localities matched the best achieved anywhere in the world today.

An average family in the region disposed of almost 5 times the quantity of foodgrains available to an average household in India today. And this amount of foodgrains was produced by just about half of the population, the other half being involved in industry and manufacture, and in providing various kinds of services for their local communities and the region.

Local communities that could create such prosperity for themselves, in a relatively difficult region of India, would of course also carefully arrange for their corporate needs, and meticulously budget for every necessary service, from that of the local water-woman to that of the great scholar in the region, as was done by the eighteenth century localities of the region around Madras. Or, perhaps it was this attitude of carefully and meticulously organising and providing for all components of the polity that made these localities so prosperous.

Intimations of that great prosperity can be found today, not only in the archival records, but also in the ruins of the once great temples that are found scattered in almost every other locality of the region. That prosperity is felt even more immediately in the almost deserted but yet enchantingly inviting habitations of the region. Sites of these habitations had been so carefully chosen to merge with the neighbouring hills, slopes, woods and water-courses and they had been laid out with such grandeur and care that even in their ruined state they make the observer ache with envy for the people who lived amidst such abundant beauty and prosperity.

These were the localities –largely self-sufficient, self-governed, meticulously organised and abundantly prosperous –that the British had to contend with after they subdued or beguiled into subjugation the nominal rulers of any region. Lionel Place, whom we have

encountered earlier, has left fairly detailed accounts of how he went about dealing with the localities in the region around Madras.¹³ In these accounts he tells of how he went after the *palayakkarar*, the militia leaders of the localities, got them branded as thieves, robbers and dacoits, and systematically “reduced them to beggary”. He tells of how he chose a few of the locality functionaries, especially those associated with administration, registry and local policing—the *kanakkupillais*, the *vettis* and the *talaiyaris*, severed them from the discipline of their localities, made them into servants of the state who were to guard the interests of the state against the communities they had served till then; and how he refused to recognise most other functionaries of the locality establishment. He tells of how he played havoc with the fiscal arrangements of the localities, arrogated to the state what was meant for the various services and functionaries of the locality, and thus made it impossible for the indigenous arrangements to continue. And he tells of how he kept on raising revenue demands to make cultivation so un-remunerative that he had to use force to make peasants plough their lands.

Exertions of British officers like Mr. Place extinguished the corporate life of the local communities within years of their coming under the British control. Unable to draw sustenance from the impoverished localities, many of the service households and most of those skilled in artisanal and industrial crafts left in search of a living elsewhere. The literate groups within the local communities probably left voluntarily to seek greener pastures in the service of the new masters in the company towns. The militia households were anyway disarmed and made destitute by the British. Among the cultivating households too, the relatively more resourceful, like the headmen of Salavakkam, were specially targeted and finished off. And, those who escaped found security in collaborating with the British and serving their interests against those of their own localities.

The localities were thus left with the resourceless peasantry alone. There were no local communities any more. There were only individual ryots, at the mercy of the British collectors and their

¹³Lionel Place, Report on the Jaghire (Chingleput) 1799, TNSA: Board of Revenue Miscellaneous Volumes, Vol.45.

servants, seeking their indulgence to continue to eke out a minimal living. The ryot, unlike his more unfortunate brethren in the Americas and Africa, lived, but without any security or dignity, and without any further say in the conduct of public affairs of his locality, neighbourhood or region. The transformation of the polity of the region and atomisation of the society was so quick and so thorough that Thomas Munro, who in the 1790's was a junior contemporary of Lionel Place and had later returned as Governor of Madras, could afford to turn philosophical while surveying the devastation around him at the end of his governorship in 1827 and bemoan the hard fate of a conquered and enslaved people.¹⁴

What happened in the region around Madras was repeated in every part of the country, and society everywhere was disrupted, atomised and impoverished through largely similar methods and stratagems. Every region had its Lionel Places and Thomas Munros, who assiduously performed the initial task of breaking down the local polity and reducing the people of the region to subservience. And the subdued, impoverished and atomised India was then left to the arbitrary powers of the collectors and their servants for many decades. It was the considered British policy that a conquered people had to be first taught the habits of absolute subordination and unquestioning obedience before they could be bestowed with the blessings of regular governance.¹⁵ It was therefore only towards the latter half of the nineteenth century that the British began to pay attention to restoring some order in the chaos they had created. It was then that they began to establish the various codes of civil and criminal procedures, and write the detailed manuals of departmental bureaucratic functioning that continue to govern our public life till today.

EMERGENCE OF AN ALIENATED ELITE

Around this time the British also began to create a class of alienated Indians, trained to observe the world from the British perspective

¹⁴See, Thomas Munro's minute, referred to earlier.

¹⁵For authentic British pronouncements on the subject, see, Dharampal, *Some Aspects of Earlier Indian Society and Polity and their Relevance to the Present*, New Quest, Pune, 1988, pp. 16-17.

and thoroughly repudiate the Indian ways, to man the relatively lower positions in the imperial bureaucracy. The process of breaking down the faith of educated Indians in the Indian way of looking at and comprehending the world had begun much earlier. Already in the late eighteenth century, when men like Place and Munro were disrupting the corporate life of the localities near Madras, William Jones in Bengal was interpreting the classical Indian texts from the perspective of the west and attempting to alter India's understanding of herself. And his missionary colleagues were so mis-representing and maligning the Indian ways as to make the educated Indian of a somewhat later age begin to hate himself.

Incidentally, the President of India recently released a postal stamp to mark the second centenary of one such scholar from the Serampore mission, Mr. William Carey, who in his zeal to show the light of western truth to the idolatrous Indians had gone to the extent of demonstratively insulting Sri Jagannatha of Puri. Efforts of these aggressive westernisers did succeed in polluting the minds of some Indians, and in early nineteenth century there had already appeared men like Raja Ram Mohun Roy, who detested most things Indian and wanted India to quickly refashion herself in the western mould. And, the western educated and alienated Indians, sharing the responsibilities and perquisites of imperial power in India as a junior partner with the British, emerged as a distinct class towards the end of the nineteenth century.

This class of alienated Indians – consisting largely of petty officers, government contractors, teachers and lawyers – began to dominate the public life of India and define Indian aspirations. It was partly to fulfill the aspirations of this class that the British, later in the twentieth century, began to experiment with some kind of legislative institutions, where the deserving Indians could play the game of parliamentary democracy under the watchful eyes of their British mentors. And sharing of the fruits of power at that level made Indians of this class even more committed to the western ways of political organisation.

Great sons of India, like Vivekananda and Bal Gangadhar Tilak did try to bring the nation back to her anchorage. And, Mahatma Gandhi, in fact, marginalised the alienated westernisers and brought the Indian ways and the Indian people back to the centre stage of public life for about twenty-five years. The efforts of Mahatma

Gandhi restored the spirit, and brought the resurgence of Indian civilisation within reach. But the revitalisation of India, emaciated in mind and body by centuries of enslavement, was perhaps to take somewhat longer to accomplish. By the time of the coming of independence, the initiative had once again slipped away from the hands of the Indian people, and the alienated westernisers acquired a dominant role in determining the future polity of India. It was thus that though the constituent assembly had many members with Gandhian background and commitments, the responsibility of drafting a constitution for free India was shouldered by the westernisers alone.

They of course drafted a constitution that was a statement of Indian intent to continue with the public arrangements put into place by the British. The draft was in fact merely a rehash of the 1935 Government of India Act, padded up with generous borrowals from various constitutions of the western world, especially from the British and American constitutions. It took the constitutional adviser, B. N. Rau, a keen student of Euro-American constitutional history, just one month to produce his draft. And most of the members of the draft scrutiny committee of the constituent assembly did not find it worth their while to spare time for the purpose. Everyone concerned with the making of the constitution had, it seems, taken it for granted that India was to be governed by western precedents and there was nothing much to be discussed in the matter. It was that conviction that made the constituent assembly entrust the job of drafting and scrutinising the constitution, not to the leaders of the independence movement, but to the experts of western constitutional jurisprudence most of whom were unconnected with the movement, and many of them had in fact been openly contemptuous of the struggle waged by the people of India.¹⁶

Even during the crucial years before independence there was hardly any debate on the form of political organisation free India was to adopt. Mahatma Gandhi in 1945 did raise the question in a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, reminding him of his commitment to the

¹⁶ For the composition of the drafting committee of the constituent assembly and its deliberations, see, Supplementary Note 3, pp. 245-8

Indian ways: “I have said that I still stand by the system of Government envisaged in Hind Swaraj. These are not mere words. All the experience gained by me since 1908 when I wrote the booklet has confirmed the truth of my belief.” Nehru in his response stated that the Congress had never adopted Gandhiji’s idea of swaraj, but also affirmed his resolve to avoid public debate on the issue.¹⁷

The issue could not, however, be entirely evaded in the discussions of the constituent assembly. Many of the members of the assembly were deeply hurt that the draft constitution did not even once mention the word ‘panchayat’, the basic unit of the locality-centred Indian polity, and to placate their sentiments it was found necessary to introduce a one sentence clause, in the non-enforceable chapter on directive principles of state policy, requiring the state to encourage the development of village panchayats. Before accepting the amendment, however, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, chairman of the draft scrutiny committee and the main architect of the constitution, alluded to the sentiment and forcefully stated his position thus:¹⁸

“...Another criticism against the draft constitution is that no part of it represents the ancient polity of India. It is said that the new constitution should have been drafted on the entire ancient Hindu model of a state and that instead of incorporating western theories the new constitution should have been raised and built upon village panchayats and district panchayats...

¹⁷Mahatma Gandhi’s letter to Nehru, October 5, 1945. Nehru replied on October 8, insisting that the Congress had never considered, much less adopted, the picture of India presented in Hind Swaraj, and wondering whether it would be desirable for the Congress to consider such fundamental issues at that stage. A similar, and somewhat sharper, exchange of letters had taken place between Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru in 1928, when Mahatma Gandhi suggested a public debate on the issue, but Nehru hoped that the matter could be resolved through personal discussions. See, *A Bunch of Old Letters*, Oxford, 1958, Reprint 1988, pp. 58-60 and 505-511; and PPST Bulletin, May 1983, pp. 3-11.

¹⁸B. R. Ambedkar, speaking during the second debate on the second reading of the draft constitution, November 4-9, 1948. Quoted here from Dharampal, Panchayat Raj as the *Basis of Indian Polity: An exploration into the proceedings of the constituent assembly*, AVARD Delhi, 1962, pp.24-25.

“...I hold that these village republics have been the ruination of India. I am therefore surprised that those who condemn provincialism and communalism should come forward as champions of the village. What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism? I am glad that the draft constitution has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit.”

The form the constitution of independent India was to take was thus determined not by the debates and discussions in the constituent assembly or outside, but by the two hundred years of British efforts to atomise Indian society and polity, and reconstruct Indian public life and thought according to western theories and practice.

INDIA BEGINS TO ASSERT

The constitution makers however could only refuse to accord a formal place to the localities and communities of the people in the polity of independent India; they could not wish these groupings out of existence. Even the British, notwithstanding their commitment to the ideal of atomised individuals each making a direct and separate compact with the state and notwithstanding their intense efforts to achieve that ideal in India, had not quite succeeded in finishing off these preferred groupings of the people of India. They had of course made the legitimate corporate functioning of the localities and the communities impossible. But the localities had survived – impoverished, emaciated and deprived of much of their skills, yet retaining their identity and the memory of their corporate ways, and keeping their corporate functioning alive in limited spheres. And the communities had often coalesced into large conglomerates, trying thus to ensure a place for their constituent groups within the new centralised polity.

The British had recognised the persistence of these formations. They had even tried to restore some sort of locality level functioning through the 1920 Government of India Act. And in the community conglomerates they had discovered the possibilities of putting the people of India at war within themselves, and presenting the alien state as a neutral umpire between the contending communities and a protector of the weaker among them. This of course was the beginning of the so-called communal problem of India.

With the coming of independence, it was only to be expected that these groupings of the people of India, that had survived the British with such perseverance, would begin to stir themselves afresh and search for their legitimate place in the public life of India. But since the constitution of India did not provide any role for them in the polity, all their efforts to express and assert themselves had to be through ways that would seem to subvert the system. They could enter the polity only through the back-door, as it were.

In any case, in the centralised bureaucratic polity that we had adopted there was very limited scope for the participation of the people, even as individuals, in the public affairs of the nation. Such participation could occur either through the elected legislative bodies at the national and provincial levels, or through the all-pervasive bureaucracy, stretching from the secretaries to the government sitting in their fast proliferating capital complexes to the constables and clerks in every village and every public place in the country. The localities and communities, therefore, necessarily had to exploit these two avenues if they were to become active in the public life of India. It is not surprising that as these groupings began to come alive in the atmosphere of freedom from alien rule, they began to assert themselves in elections to the various legislative bodies by voting collectively as locality and community groups. And, they began to find ways of inducting their own people into the bureaucracy, the police and even the military, by utilising their group contacts within these organisations.

The political parties and their leaders, largely attuned to the pulse of the people as they were, went along with the process. They too began to cultivate committed vote-banks in specific communities and localities. And they began to accommodate members of their constituent groupings in the expanding state establishment, both indirectly through disbursement of discretionary patronage and directly through the evolving mechanism of community and region based reservations.

All this was of course a perversion of the constitutional arrangements. But it was a perversion that had to happen. We had opted for arrangements that did not recognise the reality of the groupings of the Indian people. And the reality then insinuated itself into the system by perverting it. The unfortunate aspect of the emerging scenario, however, was that since the preferred groupings of the people

had to be accommodated in the polity more or less clandestinely, there could not have been any norms governing such accommodation. There were no mechanisms within the system through which the localities and communities of India might have interacted together and arrived at a balance between themselves.

The situation obviously was full of extreme tensions between individuals, and between localities, regions and communities. It is a tribute to the political sense and skills of the people of India that they have managed such tensions without any great violence. India is perhaps the only country in the world where such a large scale redistribution of power, privilege and patronage has taken place in the relatively short time of less than five decades, more or less peacefully.

However, while engaged in obtaining a share of the privilege and patronage available within the state system, nobody seems to have had any great stake in its functioning. For the locality and community groupings of the people of India, participating in this game was essentially a matter of survival. The polity did not allow any other form of legitimate public expression or activity. The localities and communities that had organised numerous economic, cultural and administrative services within themselves were thus compelled to vie with each other for petty government jobs for their members, and for a road, or a school or a hospital in their localities or the region. And when they succeeded in obtaining any one of these, they were not particularly interested in making it work. They extracted these things out of the state system as their share, but the system was not theirs. In any case there was no scope for their participation in the running of what they obtained from the state. The system conceded to the demands and pressures of the various groupings of the people, but it had no use for their organisational capabilities, or for their ingenuity and skills.

The growing class of westernised professionals perhaps had somewhat more empathy with the system. But for them too the tensions of living in a complex and evolving polity often proved too much, and the most talented of them opted for the simple solution of selling their newly acquired skills in the international marketplaces. Those who continued to stay in the country endeavoured to keep some contacts abroad, and retained the option of quitting if the

situation became more difficult. Even the highest bureaucrats and important ministers of the union often placed one or two of their sons and daughters somewhere abroad, to whom they could revert in difficulty or in retirement.

The Indian nation thus became nobody's responsibility. The state had burdened itself with the almost impossible task of providing and maintaining all kinds of services, and even that of initiating basic economic activity, everywhere in the country. The task would have been difficult in the best of circumstances; it was impossible to perform in the face of the sullen indifference of the localities and the communities, and the wavering loyalty of the professionals. The state in India, therefore, did not even begin to address itself to this task. Instead, it simply took to generating privilege and patronage for their own sake, for the sake of keeping the emerging pressure groups satisfied and quiet.

Overwhelmed with the unnecessary domestic burdens it had imposed upon itself, the state in India also abdicated its primary responsibility of keeping the world at bay. It did undertake some desultory industrial, technological and military activity to keep itself afloat in the world. But none of these activities had the sweep and the grandeur that would impress anybody with India's prowess. And whatever little of these activities there was, was so dependent upon essential inputs from the rest of the world that there was no reason for anybody to take us seriously. Even we did not take ourselves seriously.

As the state began to flounder, many of the local, regional and community groupings of the people of India began to ask for a more direct say in the running of their own affairs. They were no more willing to continue the game of seeking a place in the polity indirectly through manipulations of the electoral and bureaucratic systems. They wanted a formal and legitimate place and role in the polity of the nation. This happened especially with groups and regions that were not too adept in the art of manipulation and had been outmanoeuvred at the game. Thus the Jats in Uttar Pradesh, the Sikhs in Punjab, the Assamese in the east, and others in other regions, began to insist, in their different ways, upon the right to run their affairs without external interference.

Since, within the constitutional arrangements we had adopted, there was no scope for recognising the local, regional and

community groupings as legitimate components of the polity, the efforts of the Jats, the Sikhs and the Assamese, etc., were treated as an affront to the state. Instead of sitting down with these different groupings of the people of India and finding ways of making them partners in nation building, we began to find ways of crushing them, both through political manipulation and police action. In the process some of those movements indeed acquired secessionist overtones. And communities and regions that had stood firm as defenders of the nation against alien onslaughts for millennia suddenly began to look like enemies of the Indian state.

At times like this nations revert to their roots. Faced with a seemingly blind alley they turn to their civilisational moorings to redefine themselves and reassess the way. The people of India thus sought refuge in Srirama. They tried to find solace in Him. Through Him they tried to rediscover the essence of being Indian and recapture the lost spirit of Indianness. And, they tried to reawaken their determination as a nation by dedicating themselves to the building of a great temple to Srirama at his birth-place in Ayodhya. In the effort to build the temple, they were in fact trying to rebuild themselves.

To many of us this turning of the people towards Srirama seemed like an escapist rush away from reality. Many wondered why and how the Indians had suddenly diverted themselves from their day-to-day wrestling with the intractable problems of economic scarcity and the fraying unity of this nation. But, there are problems that cannot be solved by continuing to directly grapple with them. And, there are times when a nation must turn away from the immediacy of day-to-day living, take stock of its past and present, and begin to look within to find a new way of living and being.

The Ayodhya events are a call to the nation for intense introspection. These events have, of course, posed a challenge to the established order. But it is of no use bemoaning that. That order had in any case become incapable of fulfilling the national aspirations and keeping the nation together. We should instead search within and find a new order that expresses the ways and seekings of the people of India. We should look for ways of establishing a state that does not set itself above and against the Indian society, against

the preferred groupings of the people of India, and instead makes a new compact with them, guaranteeing them the freedom to run their affairs in their Indian ways and undertaking to provide them with protection from a threatening world order. That is the compact Indian state rooted in the Indian tradition has always made with the Indian people.

That is the compact Srirama made with the people of India. And that is probably why the people of India have chosen to recall His memory at this juncture, when having enjoyed the experience of freedom from alien rule for a few decades, India is beginning to regain the courage to be herself again.

RECLAIMING THE JUDICIARY AND THE EXPERTS

Many, if not all, of the questions and issues that have arisen in the context of Ayodhya events are in fact related to the basic question of the appropriate relationship between the Indian state and the Indian people. Take for instance the issue of the role and status of the judiciary in the affairs of the nation. Arun Shourie discusses this question in great detail and with obvious relish in his presentation collected in this volume. His argument is that the judiciary, like all other institutions of the state, has been so thoroughly compromised by the politicians in power that people have lost all faith in its functioning. And he marshals a long list of instances where the higher judiciary has allowed itself to be suborned by unscrupulous leaders.

Sri Shourie did not have occasion to talk about the functioning of the lower judiciary. But most Indians have some personal experience of the courts, and do not need to be told about the frustrations and the indignities that any dealing with the judicial system invariably involves. In spite of this knowledge, however, the belief persists, especially amongst the professional classes of India, that the judiciary is constituted to protect the citizens from the inequities of the state, and that it is somehow above the pressures and the temptations to which other institutions of the state seem to have succumbed.

The belief is based on a misunderstanding of the role of the judiciary in the western model of the state. It is of course one of the functions of the judiciary to mediate in disputes between different components of the state and between the state and the

citizen. But the more important, and more essential, of its functions is to uphold and assert the majesty of the state over the people. One of the fundamental principles of western organisation of the state is that all disputes between the people are the business of the state: once any dispute arises anywhere it must not be settled without the intervention of the state, it must come before the judicial arm of the state for adjudication. Similarly all violations and misdemeanours are treated as crimes against the state, which must not be condoned or atoned for by the concerned individuals and groups, and must be brought before the judiciary for due punishment. This principle gives the judiciary enormous power of intervention in the affairs of the people, and thus takes the coercive apparatus of the state deep into the life of the localities, families and communities.

The British in the early stages of their administration in India were in fact extremely wary of the Indian habit of resolving matters amongst themselves through compromise and arbitration, and of their abhorrence of punishments that involved bodily injury of any kind. James Mill, the British historian whose book provided the first introduction to India for generations of British officers, remarks that in the eighteenth century, Indians were “so much accustomed to terminate their own disputes, by their own cunning or force that the number of applications for judicature” was “comparatively small.” And he goes on to say that the Indians had not yet learnt that it was “for the good of the community that they should not terminate, and that they should not be allowed to terminate either by force or fraud, their own disputes.”¹⁹ Following the principle, British officers in the field often took upon themselves to reopen disputes, that had been settled by the localities or communities, and dispense what they believed was just punishment.

We got British judges much before there was any codified law for them to administer. They were here not to dispense justice, or to administer the law laid down by the state. They were here to help break the Indian habit of settling their disputes within their localities and communities. The more perceptive of the Indians then realised that this kind of intervention in the affairs of the people would

¹⁹James Mill, ‘Indian Jurisprudence and Revenue’, quoted here from Dharampal, *Institutionalisation of Callousness and Cruelty*, unpublished note, 1970.

ultimately be more subversive of the Indian polity than even the depredations of British revenue collectors and soldiers. And, Hyder Ali in a desperate call to arms sent to his fellow rulers warned them of the coming of the British judicial officers, “who affect the solemn gravity of old age sinking into eternity” and who “assume powers far superior to Princes and Emperors.”²⁰

Conceived on such principles of sovereign intervention, the judiciary in India today of course claims the right to oversee all affairs of the individual, the state and the society. In fact we seem to have taken the western principles somewhat more literally than the westerners themselves, and nothing seems to have remained outside the pale of judicial interference. From mere municipal violations, to tiffs within the family, to disputes between the provinces, to high affairs of the state, every matter has become the domain of the judiciary. And now we are asking the judiciary to pronounce upon what is essentially a civilisational question: Whether the people of India may build a temple to Srirama at Ayodhya or not?

There is of course no question of the judiciary being able to handle the role it has assigned to itself. The courts at all levels are already clogged and nothing ever gets decided there in any reasonable time-frame. There is no way we can remedy the situation except by restricting the domain of the judiciary, and by beginning to put more faith in our people and in their capabilities to decide their affairs among themselves. We shall also probably need to have more faith in the political processes and learn to value, especially in matters of larger national and civilisational concerns, the live fluidity of political negotiation and compromise over the dead certainty of judicial pronouncements.

Similar discretion needs to be exercised in determining the role and place of professional expertise in public affairs. Arun Shourie in his presentation has pointed out the pitfalls of putting too much reliance upon the experts in matters that are crucial to society. Sri Guhan takes the contrary view, and his presentation is woven around the thesis that professional experts of history and archaeology have so

²⁰The note of Hyder Ali to his fellow rulers makes for fascinating reading. English translation of the note in the British Museum Library, made available by Dharampal, is reproduced as Supplementary Note 4, pp. 249-52

far not seen any valid evidence, validated according to the canons of their disciplines, to show that Ayodhya is the place where Srirama was born. And he goes on to say that according to those same canons of proof it cannot even be established that Indians have ever held a widespread belief that Srirama was born there. The experts not only cannot vouch for the fact of Srirama's birth at Ayodhya, they cannot even endorse that Indians have believed it to be so.

The thesis has to be only stated to realise the limited relevance of professional expertise in matters of serious public concern. It is one of the vain beliefs of modern western societies that their individual members, alone or in their various groupings, do not have to make any substantive decisions themselves: all issues are decided for them by the accumulated knowledge and the precise logic of expertise. This of course is a legitimate vanity amongst people who have moulded themselves on the Platonic ideals of reconstructing the society and polity *ab initio*, from scratch, on the basis of human knowledge and logic. But the west knows that decisions that really matter to a people are not made by the experts, that civilisational urges and seekings have a logic of their own that transcends the limited boundaries of professional expertise.

In societies like India, however, which are merely playing the game of being modern and western, even the vanities of the west acquire a life of their own, and professional experts begin seriously believing that they are the arbiters of the validity or otherwise of the beliefs, seekings and urges of their civilisation. Such vanities will of course vanish once India begins to come into her own. India will then know how to utilise the services of her experts without being overwhelmed by them and without conceding to them the authority to decide and pronounce judgements upon her civilisational moorings.

SECULARISM AND THE INDIAN CONSCIOUSNESS

Finally, we must come to the question of secularism. One of the meanings of secularism is that the state shall deal only with individuals in a society, it shall not recognise any local, regional, sectorial or kinship groupings amongst them. Secularism in this sense of a peculiar form of political organisation has been discussed in some detail in the earlier sections. We have argued there that

this form of organisation is essentially western, and that the Indian way is the exact opposite of it. For Indians, the diverse groupings of the people are the basic constituents of society and polity, and interactions between and within those groupings form the stuff of political functioning. This sense of the sanctity and inviolability of the natural groupings of society is so deeply entrenched in India that it is impossible for any state to ignore their existence. State in India has necessarily to deal with the various groupings of people, whether it formally recognises the legitimacy of those groupings or not. And therefore a state that claims to be secular in theory can only be “pseudo-secular” in practice.

There is another, philosophical and theological, meaning of secularism, from which the political meaning above seems to have been derived. We have hinted at this meaning of secularism while referring to the western philosophical doctrine that neither man nor nature have any virtue in themselves, virtue arises from their being appointed in appropriate roles through human ingenuity. That thought needs some elaboration.

The Archbishop of Mylapore, Madras, in his presentation and especially in the subsequent discussion, explains the philosophical and theological meanings of secularism in some detail. His Grace begins with the simple formulation that secularism means to take the world seriously. This is perhaps a way of saying that the world is not to be taken as a mere extension of Brahman, His playful manifestation, the *Leela*, as the Indians call it. The world must be seen as an independent aspect of reality, independent of the God who creates it. God creates the world but does not inhere in it. He stays separate from it. And therefore God and the world must both be taken seriously, but separately.

Indians have long been aware of this doctrine of the essential separateness of the creator and the creation, and they have recognised it to be the distinguishing characteristic of alien thought, the *yavanamata*, as the classical texts put it.²¹ The doctrine, as is well known, is the cornerstone of what are known as the semitic religions. For Indians such thoughts constitute what they know to be primal ignorance, the *avidya*. According to the Indian view of

²¹See, for example, *Sukraniti*, chapter 4, *rashtraprakarnam* 62, in the Chowkhamba, Varanasi, 1968 edition, p.231.

the world, the universe is a manifestation of the creator Himself. Brahman, following the immutable flow of time, manifests Himself as the universe in its diverse forms, and in time contracts those forms back into Himself. The universe is not something that He creates from without. He is the universe. There is no separation between the creator and the creation. There is nothing in the world that is not divine in itself. And there is no way to split the universe into two distinct realities, the secular and the divine.²²

For Indians, therefore, secularism is an impossibility; they cannot be both Indian and secular. These two ways of perceiving the universe are fundamentally incompatible. Though the Archbishop, answering pointed questions in this regard, graciously allows that if we try hard and somewhat stretch the fundamental principles, it may be possible to reconcile the two, yet such reconciliation can at best be artificial. After all, for the believers in the external God, the Indian way of perceiving the divine in all created things is the essence of idolatry that must not be countenanced to exist in the world, and for Indians the mere thought of living in a godless world is an existential nightmare. In fact, there are unlikely to be many Indians – not even among the western educated and supposedly secularised elite or among the Muslims and Christians of India – who can maintain their sanity without the comforting thought that the creator is always near and amongst them.

We are of course aware of this fundamental incompatibility of the secularist thought with the Indian way of being. We therefore have tried to put an Indian gloss upon secularism and tried to equate it with the practice of *sarvadharmā samābhava*, equal respect for all religions. This latter concept, as Sri Gurumurthy points out so forcefully in his presentation, is something that Indians are well used to. With their perception of the divinity of all creation, respect for all forms of creation and all kinds of beliefs, even the beliefs that they hold to be erroneous, comes naturally to them. But this respect for diverse thoughts and beliefs has nothing to do with the concept of secularism. This is merely being Indian.

²²For a more detailed discussion of the Indian understanding of the relationship between man, universe and the Brahman, see, Dharampal, *Bharatiya Chitta Mānas and Kāla*, tr. Jitendra Bajaj, Centre for Policy Studies, 1993, especially chapter IV, pp.41-47.

The conception of a secular world, a world devoid of God, and therefore of virtue, has its consequences. In such a world it becomes possible for man to ignore the intrinsic balance and order of nature and human societies, and to reorder them according to his knowledge and reasons. In certain formulations of the concept of the external God, where man is seen as the vice-regent on earth of God in the heavens, it in fact becomes the duty of man to reconstruct the world and human societies according to his current perceptions of truth for the sake of the greater glory of God. Indians on the other hand, aware as they are of the divinity of all forms, must approach the world with reverence, must respect the inherent balance and order of nature and human societies, and must organise life and polity in ways that keep that balance undisturbed and intact.

The difference between these two ways of perceiving and approaching the world is so great that it cannot be just glossed over. It is also not much use to keep dreaming about changing the essential Indian consciousness to bring it in conformity with the currently ascendant western thought. It is not given to human beings to change the essential consciousness of a whole civilisation. Centuries of efforts by alien rulers of various hues have failed to change the Indian consciousness in any meaningful way. And the four decades of our own efforts to secularise Indian consciousness have not been of much help either. It is time to give up the fight against ourselves, accept ourselves as we are, and begin meditating on how to organise ourselves today so that we can face western modernity while remaining firmly rooted in our Indian consciousness.

COMING OF INDIA INTO HER OWN

While thus asserting the essential identity of India and bringing ourselves back to our civilisational anchorage, we must however always remember that the sanatana Indian perception of the universe as the manifestation of the divine encompasses all. All human beings, deep within themselves, are always imbued with this sense of being part of a natural order that keeps flowing and unfolding on its own. All of them somewhere harbour the belief that this order ought to be obeyed and the universe ought to be revered in its entire diversity of expressions and ways.

Of course, while organised as a state, a church or a fraternity of believers, those same people do often undertake missions for subverting the natural order, for conquering and re-forming the universe according to their own temporal rationality and designs, and converting all mankind to their own singular ways and beliefs. But even while participating in such crusading missions, man retains the essential reverence for the divinity of creation, at least within his private self. And even texts that on a simple reading seem to deny the possibility of divinity in man and nature, and invoke crusading zeal to convert and re-order the whole world, acquire quite different meanings in private prayer, meanings that have no connection with the words of the text, and in fact somehow put the prayerful reader in touch with the divine within him.

This essential divinity of man – that keeps expressing within him irrespective of his faith and belief – seems to become even more pronounced in India, and even the crusading faiths somehow get mellowed once they begin to take roots in this land. That is why in India it becomes possible to reconcile in practice even those faiths and beliefs that are irreconcilable in theory.

The belief that all faiths and all communities, irrespective of their fundamental doctrine, acquire an essentially Indian face in India comes through almost all the talks collected in this volume. But it comes through most tellingly in the presentation of Abdus Samad. His presentation captures the essence of the Indian attitude of acceptance of the diversity of human ways and human groupings, and of retaining a sense of balance and order within this diversity through continuous dialogue, interaction and negotiation between different groups. The presentation also shows how the differences between Indians begin to disappear when they begin to recall their moorings within their community, their locality and their kinship groupings.

Such recall of their moorings by all groups and communities of India and restoration of intense interaction and dialogue between them will greatly smoothen the process of reassertion of the Indian identity. It will ensure that the coming of the people of India into their own does not lead to any serious disturbance of the harmony and balance between their diverse communities and groupings. The remembrance and the dialogue have so far been blocked by the interventions of the state and the apprehensions of the western educated

professional elite. The Ayodhya events have helped in overcoming these obstructions to some extent.

Rediscovery and reassertion of the Indian self in the present world in any case cannot be very easy. Such reassertion will open many issues that till now have been settled by unthinking reference to the current practices and sensitivities of the west. New questions will arise in all fields – in ethics and aesthetics, in economics and politics, in philosophies and sciences. And answers to these questions will have to be thought through within the contemporary context of the modern world, and yet from the timeless civilisational perspective of India and the essential Indian consciousness. K. N. Govindacharya in his presentation raises a number of such questions and suggests that it is one of the major achievements of the Ayodhya movement that such questions are being raised and discussed in India today.

Sri Dharampal in his seminal and concluding presentation offers an overview of the Indian situation, and gently yet firmly reminds us all that the coming of India into her own in the modern world is not going to be a painless process. Before India can regain and reassert her identity in the wide world outside, she will have to undertake a great house cleaning within. The unbearable load of useless ideas, sentiments and structures, accumulated over centuries of slavery and self-forgetfulness, will first have to be cleared up before any meaningful effort at national reconstruction can even begin to make sense. And in this task of cleaning up the cobwebs, both of the mind and the body, India will have to display a certain amount of ruthlessness. All sentimental and unthinking attachments will have to be suspended, and every idea, every institution and every structure will have to be rigorously evaluated from the Indian perspective.

In this great turning around of India we need to hold fast to nothing but our faith in the Indian civilisational consciousness, and in the essential soundness of the ways of the Indian people. Ayodhya events are probably the harbingers of such a turning around. May Srirama of Ayodhya be our guide on this difficult path!