

## UNDAMMING THE FLOW

DHARAMPAL

Friends, I have been attending these meetings. And I have learnt quite a bit. But, let me begin by sharing something that deeply affected me. I heard some days ago that after the meeting addressed by Abdus Samad Sahib there was a discussion between two persons among the audience. One was a Muslim and the other a Hindu. And the Hindu, I think, asked the Muslim that this demolition in Ayodhya must have hurt him. The other said: Yes, but nothing happens that is not willed by Allah. And, anyway it has provided us a chance to talk to each other, we never have such chances!

What sort of society is this? One of the greatest Indian journalists of recent times, Girilal Jain, wrote in one of his articles that he knew very few modern Muslims. Girilal Jain, in his 50 years of journalism, must have met tens of thousands of people. And he said that he knew hardly any modern Muslims! Not that he would have known many traditional Muslims either. That was in any case difficult. But he could not come in close contact with even modern Muslims.

Girilal Jain was frank enough to say that. I think most of us also do not know any Muslims. We just don't know other people. We have a sort of study group here in Madras. It is a group of very bright high science people, sociologists, and so on. They have friends and colleagues in 8 or 10 places in India. But, as far as dealing with different people is concerned, their contact does not go very far. They are limited to mostly the Brahminical type. They have no contact with the peasants, with the craftsmen, or with any other people. There is very little contact with the Muslims. Maybe one or two of them know a Muslim friend or a colleague here and there, no more. And, this is true of all of us.

If you allow me to go on in this vein, I shall like to tell you an incident I recall. There is a place called Atiranji Khera in Uttar

Pradesh. This is one of our ancient sites, where artifacts of about 1500 B.C. have been found. I had occasion to visit this place a few times some years ago. It is a big mound, about a mile long and half a mile wide. I went there with other people, the collector and some other district officers, and later I went on my own, alone.

There is a person there who keeps a lonely watch on the mound. And he began to tell me some stories. He told Pauranic stories about some Raja, one of the earliest Rajas of India, who ruled when there was no taxation in the country. And then at some point he said in Hindi, "*Mein to Akela hun, ji!*" "I am all alone!" I said, "What do you mean? How are you alone?" He said, "*Mein to Isai hun ji, Isai. Aur Isai ka to ek hi ghar hai is gaon mein.*" "I am a Christian, and there is only one Christian house in this village."

I wondered, what is this? This man is well-versed in Pauranic lore. And, yet he feels alone in this village. How is it? Not that the local people would not talk to him. But he does not feel as if he belongs. The people have not adopted him. They have not made him one of themselves. I think this is the general condition we are getting reduced to. In many ways we are shrinking, splitting, fracturing. This is the sort of society, we have come to. And it is no wonder that this sort of society has problems like Ayodhya.

I think this splitting and fracturing of the society must have been going on for some time. This is not recent. This is not a post-independence phenomenon. This is not even post-1850, as Professor Guhan tried to say the other day: as if the problem arose only in 1850!<sup>1</sup> And, this may not only be because of the Muslim rule. This may be a problem which is somehow intrinsic to the Hindu society, which comes from Hindu thought, Hindu ways, Hindu institutions, etc. Or, it may be the result of a certain defensive interaction between the Hindu society and other societies. But this is a situation that I cannot understand.

I will tell you another episode. Some years ago, about 1960, I met some people, and I think in a way that meeting gave me a view of India, the larger India, not my India or our India, or India of the people sitting here. I was travelling from Gwalior to Delhi; and, got

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<sup>1</sup>[S. Guhan, 'Dark Forebodings', in this volume, pp.78.-ed.]

into a day-train around 10 o'clock in the morning. I think it was a 6 or 7 hours journey in a third class compartment. And I got in.

It was crowded. Then some people made a seat for me. Somebody moved down on the floor and I sat on the seat. And there was this group of people, about 12 of them, some 3 or 4 women and 7 or 8 men. I asked them where were they coming from. They said that they had been on a pilgrimage, three months long pilgrimage. They had been up to Rameswaram and to various other places. We got talking.

They had various bundles of things, and some earthen pots with them. I asked what they had in those pots. They said they had taken their own food from home. They came from two different villages, somewhere towards the north of Lucknow. And they had taken all the necessities for their food—atta, ghee, sugar—with them, and some of these were still left.

The women were sitting on the floor, not above on the seats, and people were passing by. And the people, in their attempt to move around in that crowded compartment, sometimes sort of trampled over them. The women didn't seem to mind that, but they did mind if someone touched their bundles and pots of food with the feet.

So we began talking. And then I said they must be all from one *jati*, from a single caste group. They said, "No, no! We are not from one *jati*—we are from several *jatis*." I said but how could that be? They said that there was no *jati* on *yatra*, not on a pilgrimage. I didn't know that. I was around 38 years old, and I suppose I was like other people like myself, who know little about the ways of the Indian people.

So it went on. And then I said, "Did you go to Madras? Did you go to Bombay?" "Yes! We passed through those places." "Did you see anything there?" "No, we didn't have any time!" It went on like that. I mentioned various important places of modern India. They had passed through most, but had not cared to visit any. Then I said, "You're going to Delhi now?" "Yes!" "You will stop in Delhi?" "No, we only have to change trains there. We're going to Haridwar!" I said, "This is the capital of free India. Won't you see it?" I meant it, I was not joking. They said, "No! We don't have time. May be some other day. Not now. We have to go to Haridwar. And then we have to reach back home."

We talked for perhaps 5 or 6 hours. And at the end of it I was

wondering, who is going to look after this India? What India are we talking about? This India, the glorious India of the modern age, built by Jawaharlal Nehru and other people, these modern temples, universities, places of scholarship! For whom are we building them? Those people on their pilgrimage were not interested in any of this. And they were representatives of India. They were more representative of India than Jawaharlal Nehru ever was. Or, I and most of us ever could be.

About the same time Queen Elizabeth II of England was visiting India. She probably came within one month of my meeting with the pilgrims in the train. And there was a write-up about her visit in the Economist of London. The London Economist, describing the visit of the Queen to India, said that she was bringing her own food from England, she was bringing her own chefs, she was not going to visit any temples, or any traditional places of India, she was only going to certain other places, modern places, Europeanised places, etc.

And I said, how similar! How similar were the ways of the Queen of England and those of the people of India I had met on their way to Haridwar? Those pilgrims were real royalty. And, they represent the Indian people. All of them, all of the Indian people, in their minds and at least to themselves, are royalty. It is not a matter of the Muslims and the Hindus. The Muslims of India would be similar; the Christians of India would also be similar.

The world of the people of India, it seems, is a different world. The world we are talking about is not theirs. Even the Hindutva we are talking about is not theirs. I think, their Hindutva and our Hindutva are entirely different. Or, for that matter the Islam we talk about, or the Islam Sri Shahabuddin talks about, or the great Imam Sahib of Jama Masjid talks about, is also not the Islam of the Indian people. We, the elite of India, and the people are living in different worlds.

What is the Shahi Imam anyway? And why do we keep calling him Shahi Imam? Why not just the Imam of Jama Masjid? I think that we, over the past few centuries, have got too much attached

to royalty, royal ways, royal manners – not the royal ways of the people, but to those of the alien despots. So we keep talking about the Islamic royalty, the Sultanate, or the Lodhis, or the Mughals, and so on. What kind of royal rulers were they anyway? They were tottering, most of them, and most of the time! And they were not the rulers of the whole of India. I think the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha and the Bharatiya Janata Party must partly be held responsible for exaggerating the extent of Muslim rule. The historians of course are responsible for originating such conceptions. But the historians do not matter, these people do.

What was Muslim rule in India? What were its dimensions? At no particular time Muslim rule extended to more than half of India. And, what is the period? I would say from about 1200 to around 1700, around 1690, in fact, because the power of Aurangzeb is broken by then. The British keep the myth of ruling in the name of the Mughal rulers of Delhi till 1857. But the British did it in the name of the Nawab of Arcot too! The Nawab of Arcot is a camp follower of the British. He is a boy of 16, when he joins them around 1748 and he lives till 1790. Then his son, or some kin, becomes the successor. And till 1799, when Karnataka is taken over by the British formally and legally, till then he is only the Nawab of Arcot. The day they take over Karnataka, he is turned out, and then termed as the Nawab of Karnataka.

This is the British way of doing things, of establishing legitimacy. And we have fallen for that. We have rejoiced in it. Ram Manohar Lohia used to say that if only Jawaharlal Nehru could have admitted that he was only the son of a Thanedar, not of a great aristocrat, it would have been better for him and the country. Because, what is this matter of being descended from great aristocracy? A few thousand Muslim families, perhaps most of them direct descendants of Arabs, Turks, Afghans, Iranians, etc., also unfortunately seem to feel the way Jawaharlal Nehru did. Whether he acquired this attitude from them, or they from him, may be worth enquiring.

Why can't we say we are descendants of ordinary men? Or, say that we are all descended from Srirama, Srikrishna, or some other great epic hero. And if we do that, then all of us, not only a select few, must trace our descent to such a great hero. This whole business of splitting the society into a few and the rest is wrong. We do such splitting and naturally the larger component of the society

has no interest in what the few do. And then nothing happens in the society any more.

Look at what has been happening in India for the last 45 years. Nothing has moved. I don't mean that the last 45 years are wasted. Nothing is wasted. But nothing very much has come out of it, except that we have survived those 45 years! That is all that we have done.

When I talk of these matters, people say, "But then we cannot give up centralism! Centralism is so precious, the world wants centralism. How can we give up centralism?" But what do we have to do with the world? If centralism does not suit us, if it is not according to our capacities, then how can we keep it going? What will it deliver for us? And, if we are keeping centralism only to be protected from Bangladesh or Pakistan, it is not really worth keeping.

We must have a system that delivers what we want, and we must know what we want. Or, let us say that we have become protected territories. Perhaps for 20 years we were, in a way, the protected territories of the Russians, now we may become the protected territories of western Europe or the United States of America. If that is what we want then let us say so. At least it would be clear, it would be in the open, and at some stage we would probably come out of it honourably.

In this kind of situation a society, a nation, begins to splinter. It is no wonder that in this situation the ordinary people of India have their grievances, some ancient, some of them more recent. From time to time they try to join together to redress one grievance or the other. For example, for the last six months a major movement is going on against liquor in Andhra Pradesh. Women are leading it. Probably tens of thousands of women are involved. Maybe lakhs are involved. It is indeed a great event that these women of India, or of Andhra Pradesh, have stood up and have given this fight and are still at it. And if they can give a fight against arrack today, they can fight against other issues tomorrow. They can fight for India, for her freedom and her honour.

It is in this sense of the people of India getting together to give a fight to redress some grievance of theirs that I look at Ayodhya.

Of course one could ignore Ayodhya, ignore the Babri Masjid. One need not even see it. One doesn't have to see everything. After all about 50 lakh people visit Varanasi every year, maybe more than 50 lakhs. I suppose most of them also visit the Visvanatha temple. And my feeling is that most of these people who visit the Visvanatha temple are not aware of the mosque there. Unless, of course, somebody tells them. They by themselves are not likely to be aware of the mosque. Because what have they got to do with that mosque?

The other day someone mentioned that there is no mention of Babri Masjid in the Ramacharitamanas of Goswami Tulasidas.<sup>2</sup> Why should there be a mention of Babri Masjid in the Ramacharitamanas? The Ramacharitamanas is not a historical record of that time. Tulasidas is not recounting what is happening from year to year in the 16th century. He is concerned about something larger, something precious to him. What he is concerned about possibly may not seem larger than the events of his time to some of us, but it certainly is precious to him. So he may not be bothered about the Babri Masjid.

Similarly these people, who come to pray at the Visvanatha temple, come there and are not bothered to notice the mosque. But if their attention is drawn then they are indeed disturbed. And their attention is drawn from time to time by various people. It has not begun to happen only in the last 45 years, and this drawing of attention has been done not only by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha or the Vishwa Hindu Parishad or even the Bharatiya Janata Party. A whole lot of sanyasis go around India, telling about what has happened to our country in the past and what is happening in it at present. People listen, most of it they ignore. But then at some stage something becomes an issue, it becomes an issue of honour.

And we know that there is so much dishonour, which we try to digest the best we can. But there are limits. And when the limits are crossed we simply remove ourselves from public activity, we detach ourselves from certain parts of public life, and become more private, more and more private, more and more shrunk within ourselves.

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<sup>2</sup>[S. Guhan, referred to earlier, pp.77-8.-ed.]

This process has gone on in our society for a very long time, especially during the last one hundred and fifty years, but perhaps since much earlier. Perhaps we have been shrinking like this for the last 3 or 4 hundred years, at least in north India, though not so much in the south. But there must have been repercussions of it in the south also.

When a feeling arises that one is being particularly dishonoured by some structure or the other, some left-over of the past or the other, then there is no way to stop it. Because, what is the test that we have attained freedom since 1947? How do I know as a craftsman, or as a villager, or as a Chamar, or whatever, that I am free? Where is that freedom? What is the test? Am I listened to more? Does the collector stand up and shake hands with me? Does a member of the planning commission meet me on equal terms? But he doesn't; neither the collector, nor the member of the planning commission. And, I am not talking only of the present members of the planning commission. I am talking of the members of the first planning commission itself, who were supposed to have been much more patriotic and who were brought up in the traditions of the freedom struggle. Even they would not have stood up for an ordinary Indian, and talked with him like an equal. Even they were contemptuous of the people.

So what does the ordinary man do? How does he know that he is living in a free country? Some test has to be there. Then he would say that they have not been able to do much about his food, his clothing, his housing and so on. He may say that it is alright, but that he must express his sensibilities, his sensitivities, in some form.

There is a note of the late 18th century, of around 1770, about the Indian peasant. It is written by one of the then judges of the Calcutta high court, Le Maistre, and he recounts how in his view the mind of the Indian peasant works. It is about one page note, where the Indian peasant recounts what has happened to him over a long period. The peasant recounts what his rent was in the beginning, how it was increased, and he remembers that it was increased some ten times. And, he keeps on reminding himself of many other similar

misfortunes. And then he says, perhaps a day will come, when all this will disappear.<sup>3</sup>

So these are the people who constitute India. They are waiting for the day when all these alien constructs will disappear from their life. Then, their attention is drawn to places like Ayodhya, or to Varanasi, or to what my friend Sita Ram Goel says about the 3,000 mosques which have been built over temples in India.<sup>4</sup> When their attention is drawn to such and similar things a time comes when they say, “But at least we should do something about this!” There is of course lethargy. There is the Indian indolence. But still people get mobilised. And they say let us do something about this.

So they go to such a place one year. Not much happens. Only ceremonial rituals take place, ceremonials of all sorts are performed. They go there the next year, they go the third year. And then people begin saying that these people, who had drawn their attention to it, don’t mean business, they are just tricking us. They used to say that even in 1977-78. Of course, people were very happy then that the Janata government had come in Delhi. But within a year a large number of people had begun saying, we wish Indira Gandhi were back. And she was back within another year and a half.

It is possible that on the 6th of December, 1992 some big conspiracy was hatched by the prime minister of India, or by the Indian police forces, or by the Indian army, or by the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha, or by the Bajarang Dal, or the Siva Sena – by all of them together, or perhaps separately – to demolish this mosque. It is possible. But, it is also possible that none of these parties themselves were capable of doing this, or had even thought of this. Because, these people, those of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, etc., they probably wanted to prolong the whole affair. They perhaps

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<sup>3</sup>[The note of Le Maistre on the Indian peasant is reproduced as the Supplementary Note 7, pp.258.–ed]

<sup>4</sup>[Sita Ram Goel, ‘Let the Mute Witnesses Speak: First List of around 2000 Masjids, Mazars, Maqbaras, Dargahs and other Muslim monuments which stand on the site and/or are built from materials of deliberately demolished Hindu Temples’, in Sita Ram Goel and others, *Hindu Temples: What happened to them: A Preliminary Survey*, Voice of India, Delhi, 1990, pp. 62-181.–ed]

merely wanted to have a big tamasha, a grand show, year after year. Because, we live on such tamashas. We have had threats from Pakistan for 45 years, we live on that. We move from crisis to crisis, so that we don't have to do anything in India for the people of India.

So this could have dragged on. I'm sure the Bharatiya Janata Party would have happily allowed it to drag on for some more time. I do not mean that Lal Krishna Advani or anybody else in particular wanted it to drag on. But as a party the Bharatiya Janata Party would have preferred that. The Congress has been playing this game of keeping various tamashas going for decades now, and the Bharatiya Janata Party is no different from the Congress, or the Janata Dal, or the leftist parties. All of them are about the same. Even Devilal behaves similarly, though he claims to be a great peasant leader.

But, either because of a conspiracy or because of the initiative of the people, the structure crumbled. They demolished the structure. And, when they demolished it, and when I read about it next morning or perhaps heard about it from somebody, I really did feel relieved. My feeling is that most of the people sitting here also would have felt the same. There of course are people here who are secular, who are not affected by the Bharatiya Janata Party or the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha, etc. But even they I believe would have felt relieved in a way. You know the kind of feeling one has at the end of a prolonged illness of an old man. There is sorrow, but there is also relief. And I think most Indians would have had this feeling of relief in this case. The feeling of relief could have also been accompanied by great happiness or great anger. These emotions can all go together.

Later, of course people had to strike different poses; they had to adopt public postures. And, there was rioting, there was police action, and there were police atrocities, perhaps. But our police is highly over-stretched, and we have to deploy the army to back the police system. Because we don't have that much police. I think for every one thousand citizens we have much fewer policemen than what are there in Britain, or in the United States of America. Therefore, perhaps half our army was posted at three or four hundred different places within the country. There was rioting, there was police action, and there were police atrocities, and people got killed, and a few thousands died.

But supposing the structure were not demolished. What would have happened? The frustration that it would have generated around the country would have been unbearable. I don't think anybody could have controlled the consequences of such frustration. Even if the great Indira Gandhi or the great Jawaharlal Nehru were to come back, they couldn't have done it. Jawaharlal Nehru couldn't do anything even in 1949, when the *murtis*, the idols, were installed at Ayodhya. Because, after all he knew the mood of the people.

And a political leader has to act according to the mood of the people. He can only do what is possible, what is acceptable. He can do no more. May be a Stalin could do more. But even that is not certain. Because whatever Stalin did crumbled at some stage. And, Stalin must have achieved certain things for the Soviet Union or for Russia. We cannot probably achieve that much, because we are not Stalins. We are not structured that way. We are not like Europeans. We are Indians. We are indolent. We move slowly. We want rest after every little step we take. We couldn't have done what Stalin did. We couldn't have crushed the people.

And so I would say that it was the best possible thing for India that this demolition came on that day, whatever the later consequences. Of course the killings that took place subsequent to the demolition are very unfortunate. But killings have been going on almost routinely in India. Such killing have been taking place not only between the Hindus and the Muslims, or between the Muslims and the police. All sorts of killings have been going on. I do not say that the amount of killing that has been routinely happening in India is more than what it used to be before 1947. Perhaps not. Because the amount of killing which went on in India in the 19th century is colossal. And, of course, we do not have so many starvation deaths now as we had in the late 18th and the whole of the 19th century, though we are still largely underfed, under-nourished and under-clothed.

The Ayodhya events have to some extent made us reflect on our problems. The amount that has been written and talked about Ayodhya is enormous. There are probably hundreds and thousands of forums, where this issue is being discussed. Various positions are being taken, long cherished positions are being altered, and

so on. In the midst of such intense retrospection and discussion there is a possibility that from this issue, we shall move to other issues.

Of course it is possible that we won't move to any other issues concerning Indian polity. We shall stick to Ayodhya and maybe build the temple, and then put a seal of approval on Sri Advani's statement of 2 or 3 years ago, when he offered to close all disputes if only the Muslims would agree on Ayodhya. Incidentally, I happened to be there when Sri Advani made his famous statement. I heard him. And, he said that if the Muslims were to accept the moving of the Babri Masjid – there was no question of demolition at that time – then he would try to persuade his people and his party that they should not demand any other moving or demolition, at Varanasi or Mathura, or anywhere else.

I was even then surprised at Sri Advani's statement. Maybe as a political leader he has to say such things. Though at that time there didn't seem to be any particular occasion or urgency for his statement. It was not a very important event that he was participating in while he made that statement. He was probably releasing two books at that time in the Himachal Bhavan, Delhi. It was no great event. But he made that statement. And many other people made similar statements. Some people said that the restoration of three historical temples would be enough, and others proposed other formulas.

But how can anybody decide on such issues? For that matter how can anybody decide that certain temples won't have to be demolished? Or, certain churches won't have to be demolished? In any case we seem to have too many of the churches, and also in many parts large numbers of ancient and later temples, which have no resources or persons to look after them, and there are also no ideas or plans of using them as centres of culture, education or crafts.

I was recently looking at the 1981 census data for Uttar Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh has only about one and a half lakh Christians. And there are some 58 to 60 districts in Uttar Pradesh. This would amount to some 3 to 5 thousands Christians on the average per district. But the number of churches, and the number of Christian educational institutions, etc., in most districts seems to be fairly large. It would seem that many of these churches and other Christian institutions probably have nobody to attend to.

The same would be true of Hindu temples in many areas. There would be many temples that have no devotees. For what do we keep having these temples? We even keep on saying that Hindu temples in Pakistan should be preserved. For what? There are no Hindus there, except a few in Sindh. Why do we want the preservation of things which are of no interest to anybody? We would probably have to enact municipal laws and evolve policies so that these issues can be handled in a reasonable manner. After all we have to live as reasonable people and reasonable beings. And we have to interlink amongst ourselves and with the places around us in a reasonable manner.

And why have we begun to create this picture of monoliths? Who are these monolithic Muslims and monolithic Hindus? Have they no other connections? Does a Hindu have no other identity except as a Hindu? But he is so many other things at the same time. He belongs to a locality, he is part of a kinship system, he is part of a professional system. And a professional system need not mean only theoretical physics, or engineering or some similarly high and esoteric activity. It could be carpentry, it could be shoe-making, or leather-working, or anything else. Similarly the Muslims are Muslims in only one sense. They are half a dozen other things also. Why are we clubbing people like that? Why are we making them shrink into only one identity?

I think our whole outlook would have to change. And if Ayodhya symbolises such a movement in one way or the other, then it is a welcome development. It doesn't matter what the leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad want, or their opponents want, or the various editors of newspapers want. Because all these leaders of political and other opinion do not matter. They would all fade away in another 10 years. These are largely residues of the British period. These are all people born in the early decades of the 20th century. They would end by the end of this century. So, they don't matter. But others, the younger people, those born after independence, they matter.

And this world of which we are so scared! Why are we so scared of the world? The world has always been like the way it is today.

The world is violent. The world has self-interests. Nobody is there for charity. We have had experience of the great civilising mission of Europe. It had a great mission. It conquered the world. It tried to change the face of man. This would go on. It would happen again and again. They can do it again, perhaps in the name of environment, or in the name of human rights, or something else.

Islam also has been fighting. Islam started conquest soon after the death of Mohammed in the 7th century A.D. And, within 50 years Islam had reached Spain in the west and Sindh in the east. And this vast conquest was not achieved through modernism. It was not done through modern technology produced in the great Institutes of Technology, or through the great discoveries of modern science. That conquest was achieved through sheer spirit, determination and will. They did it. Now this can happen again. And the people who did it, had very little in terms of material advantage. Europe, when it started on its world conquest, did not possess much more than the people whom it conquered. Similar was the case with Islam.

There are people in the world today who possess great machinery and means. They have a higher standard of living, and more economic goods, and so on. But, I don't think this is to the point. The point is, what is our spirit? What do we want? Do we have ingenuity? Can we make our point? Do we have a point to make as Indians? If we do not have a point to make as Indians, we should retire. We should give up. Because the world is not for those who have nothing to achieve of their own, who have nothing special to aspire to, who only wish to be allowed to follow the leaders.

I am amazed at ourselves, and the way we react to any assertion of Indian identity and Indian sensitivity. One can say that the ordinary people are ignorant, that they are moved by passions and emotions. But even Mahatma Gandhi—perhaps we should stop taking his name for the next 10 or 20 years—even he reacts to events that impinge on our identity and sensitivity as Indians. There is a temple desecrated in Gulbarga in 1924 or 1925, and he reacts to the desecration within a few months. And then two years later he goes to Gulbarga and makes a speech about the events. It is about one and

a half page speech as reported in the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi. I shall read you a passage from it:<sup>5</sup>

“Much as I would like to pour out my agony before you, I know that it will be a cry in the wilderness. I therefore daily send out my prayer to God: ‘Lord, do somehow deliver us from this conflagration.’ But I should be untrue to my creed if as a believing and satyagrahi Hindu I disguise from you the feelings within me. When I went into the temple I was shown the spot where the idol was removed and the Nandi was desecrated. I tell you the sight pained me. You may call me an idolator if you will. I see God everywhere and in everything. I tell you God will never approve of these acts of desecration. Whilst in Yervada Jail, I read Maulana Shibli’s *Life of the Prophet*, I also read *Usva-e-Sahaba* and can say that those who did the acts were wrong, that Islam never sanctioned such things and they were guilty before God and man...”

Now if a man like him, who is so restrained, who uses so few words, who does not ever expend emotion without reason, if this man can say this, then how much more, thousand times more, would other people feel? One would say that he was reacting to something which had happened two years previously, and these people are reacting to something which happened 500 years ago. But if people feel concerned about things which are not only two years old, but several hundred years old, what is wrong about it? Human beings are like that. They feel concerned about old things, and new things. And, we have to treat human beings as human beings, they are not gods, they are not sanyasis, they are ordinary grihasthas, ordinary householders, who are irrational, rational, angry, quiet, indolent, and

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<sup>5</sup>[The desecration of the Sharana Basappa Tempele at Gulbarga took place in August 1924. Mahatma Gandhi reacted almost immediately and with great sadness. For his detailed reaction, see, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 25, pp.45-48. More than two years later during his visit to Gulbarga he again took up the issue in a speech he made on February 22, 1927 in the courtyard of the temple. The quotation is from that speech. See, *The Collected Works*, vol. 33, pp. 114.-ed.]

so on. And they react in various ways. And, when the emotion is spent, they also settle down.

In any case, of what use would this argument be about history having gone stale, when the Rashtrapati Bhavan is demolished or the buildings of the planning commission; or if the south block, or the north block are brought down. And these will be brought down. I don't think this will take very long, another 50 years perhaps. Tughalakabad has gone, other places have gone. The British colonial structures will go the same way.

These things happen in societies oft and again. And these have to happen here. Unless they happen, all this debris which we have accumulated in ourselves, in our spirit, in our body politic, in our institutions, etc., would not disappear. And, I think the task really is that the debris which has accumulated has to be washed away. And, it is not only the Muslim and the Christian debris, it is also a lot of Hindu debris that needs to be removed. We have been probably accumulating this debris from the very ancient period, perhaps since the last great cleansing that the gods undertook for us in the form of the Mahabharata war.

Unless this house cleaning is done, I do not think that we would reach anywhere. We can of course keep on as we are going on now – as a stagnant society in which about a million families can have a living which in a minor way is similar to living in Britain, Europe or the United States of America. And a fraction of these one million have some sense of power, they have some authority. There are perhaps some fifty thousand officers in India, or a hundred thousand at the most, who can order other people around. It is, of course, possible to continue like this.

But if we think this is enough, then we should say so. And we should say that the others, the 800 million or more of Indians, don't matter. Let them die. Or, we should say that we will be responsible for them, as Europeans were responsible for their populations. Because Europeans did take responsibility for their people: both for looking after them and for eliminating them. Europe did both, and it does both even today, all over the world, and within itself. Europe

did not start cruelty abroad, it started cruelty at home, at least from the time of Plato, and probably from much earlier. This fancy liberal picture of Europe that many of us have is just not true. There is no such picture. Jawaharlal Nehru may have believed in this picture, Mahatma Gandhi did not. Mahatma Gandhi may have erred in many other things; he did not err on this point.

Let us be clear. Do we want a European type of society, and do we have the capacity to enforce it and keep it going? I don't think we have the capacity. We are too comfort-loving, we are too indolent. We cannot do this. And so we will have to come to terms with ourselves. We shall have to come to terms with what our people can do and carry forward. They cannot carry impossible loads. And we have been making them carry impossible loads. We have been living in an impossible situation.

My feeling is that these women in Andhra who are agitating against arrack, and also the people who assembled in Ayodhya on the 6th of December, 1992, and many other people who are now stirring themselves to take care of many other things, are harbingers of something. If what they are doing, and what they have done, reflects their innermost feelings—rational or irrational, reasonable or unreasonable—then there is a chance that we would be on the road to recovery and to a different polity. Otherwise we would keep stumbling along.

## DISCUSSION

### *Groupings of the people and the centralised state*

RADHA RAJAN: Sir, your talk has been very disturbing. In the first place, I don't think you are much in favour of centralism. And, you must have obviously thought of an alternative to centralism. I would like to know what is this alternative?

From your talk I also gather that you find many of the institutions and public places that we have accumulated to be offensive to good sense. And therefore you find the demolition of

the structure at Ayodhya to be justified. The structure, according to you, had to come down because it was one of the more offensive examples of the way we have messed up our public spaces. But the perception of what is evil, what is unaesthetic and what is offensive differs from person to person, from group to group. If groups of people were to begin removing objects that seem offensive to them for some reason, then there is going to be no end to the demolition of institutions and structures that are causing us concern – whether it is the planning commission, or the Rashtrapati Bhavan, or the mosques at Mathura and Kasi. I feel very strongly about this kind of destruction. Because, for some other group of people some other institutions or structures may be offensive. How do we settle what is really offensive to good sense, and what merely seems offensive because of the deviant perception of a particular group? How many institutions and structures do we destroy? And where do we stop?

DHARAMPAL: I do not really understand what the centralism that we keep talking about is. What we inherited from the British as the centralised administration, and that we are so attached to, was a tottering structure. It was tottering already in 1900, by the British standards. It was unusable. They tried to patch it up by bringing in some reforms here and there. But the patchwork didn't work.

We inherited that tottering structure, we took it over, we tried to plaster over the cracks, we got some stray experts from here and there to help us with strutting up the structure. Such stray experts had begun to arrive in India from different lands of the world already in 1948 and perhaps from even earlier, and we made much of them. They helped us with this plan and that plan. There were also some old plans about irrigation, power generation, engineering, and technical education, etc., lying around since the 1920's. We dusted up those plans, and began to build structures like the Bhakra Dam and institutions like the IIT's of which we seem to be so proud.

But this tottering British frame, pasted over by stray institutions and structures built according to long forgotten plans conceived by the British for different times, and according to the advice received from sundry experts invited from different parts of the world, does not constitute any kind of centralised polity. What we have in the name of centralised institutions are merely the tottering residues of the British Empire. Some parts of these residues the British had inherited from the earlier Delhi rulers, or what the British pretended

were the earlier Delhi rulers and their institutions. These residues do not work. And these kinds of institutions and structures hardly constitute centralism of any sort.

We should have created our own centralism, if we wanted to. We did not. We did nothing, either about institutions, or about laws, or about rules of office procedures. We have about 300 manuals left behind by the British, which govern the working of the departments of government, and of different offices, police stations, treasuries and so on. Most of the regulations were created between 1770 and 1830, in the Boards of Revenue, Military Boards, and other imperial structures, and later put together in these manuals with some modifications here and there. But, even our constitution was constructed similarly from old imperial regulations and acts, selections from which were brought together in a voluminous text with some minor modifications and additions picked up from different constitutions of the world.

Your other worry is about what would happen if groups begin to do things their way. But the people of India, joined together in groups formed around their communities, their localities, their castes, their professions and so on, will do things in their own ways. Who are we to tell them not to do this or that?

I remember having been in a party in Moradabad some five or six year ago, where a number of police officers of the level of DIG's and SSP's were present. It was around the time of Holi, and the police officers were talking about the people of a dominantly Muslim locality nearby. They were saying that the Muslims of that place and other towns around Moradabad were objecting to the invasion of television into their lives, they were worried that it was having a bad influence on their people and was spoiling their children. And the very responsible police officers in that party were wondering how the Muslims could dare to say such things? They were agreed that the television programmes were indeed bad, but they could not understand what right the Muslims had to object to them. The Muslims, they were certain, could not be allowed to stop their children from watching television. In fact, they felt that they, as high police officers of the area, could issue orders proscribing such objections to the television on the part of the Muslims.

What is this? We should sort out our minds and our information. Who is to run this country, the officers of this decrepit system

inherited from the imperial masters, or the people of India? We cannot keep this game of imperial governance going. This game has been played out. It has become purposeless. It doesn't even give any enjoyment to the players, not even to the officers of the Indian administrative and police services who run the country.

We should remember that the people have their ways of bending the strongest of the systems. They removed the statues of Lenin from all over Russia, and it happened much before Yeltsin came into the picture. At that time the Moscow News came up with the advice that only one statue of Lenin, erected at his birthplace, would be enough. If this could happen in Russia, it can happen anywhere.

Somebody here mentioned that our people should have been educated to make them appreciate the virtues of democracy. But, we know what the educated of India are doing. The money making is being done by the educated. Large moneys, in crores or hundreds of crores – everything is in hundreds of crores in India somehow – are being made by the educated people, by the ones who have been to Oxford and Cambridge, and the current counterparts of such institutions in the United States of America and elsewhere.

RADHA RAJAN: Sir, do we then transfer our hatred or objections from institutions to people?

DHARAMPAL: No, I am not saying that. What I am saying is that the Indian situation today is one of chaos and disorder. It is a situation in which nothing functions. Because, this is what the British system was structured for. The system was created so that all tensions, all resistance, all initiative of the people could be absorbed and aborted, so that control would become easier. They tried various other means of controlling the Indian people. They tried Christianisation, they tried westernisation, they tried these queer ideas of Indo-European Brotherhood. Nothing worked. None of this could subdue the Indian people. Ultimately the only thing that they could do was to make a system that would absorb everything and squelch all initiative. In that sense it is a well devised system. It can deliver order. But it cannot deliver dignity and prosperity. If we want only order, then let us say so. Let us not then talk of progress, advance, economic betterment and similar other things. Those cannot be delivered by what the British created. Order can be. If we cherish such order of the grave, we should continue to have this system. And we should protect it to the best of our abilities.

*Religion and politics*

SOUNDARARAJAN: Sir, there is no place of worship in India today that is free from the taint of money, or some vested interest or the other. The next stage of this mixing up of gross material interests with religion is the politics of religion that we are witnessing today. What happened in Ayodhya on December 6 was the culmination of a series of steps that flowed from the rampant political abuse of religion. Should we not keep religion as a completely private affair, so that such conflicts around religion are avoided?

DHARAMPAL: Who are we to decide this? If human beings are otherwise, if they want to mix up politics and religion, and various other things, as they have been doing for thousands of years, do you think we shall change it? We have had great prophets and great saints, not only we in India but in other lands also. They could not change human nature. So, let us only talk of what is possible and reasonable, not the impossible.

This earth is not meant for the gods. It is for ordinary human beings, with their human passions and human emotions. These passions and emotions are of all kinds, good and bad are all mixed up there. Human nature is a mixed business. And in this mixed up business, the arrangements have to be such that most things keep going on in a satisfactory manner. This functionality is all that is required, this is what social life is all about, and this is all that the state can deliver.

The state cannot revolutionise human nature. This whole business of imagining that artificial structures created by man would revolutionise human life is meaningless. About 50 years ago we used to hear that man will be completely changed by the Soviet experiment. It was said that there would be a different man by the end of the twentieth century. There were great books written about it in the 1930's and 1940's. What happened? Where has that new man gone? And what happened of that great Soviet experiment?

Or take Europe. It has been a Christian area, at least formally, for 1700 years. I am told that the reality was somewhat different. Some areas of Germany could be fully Christianised only by the end of the 15th century. Even then it is around 500 years of Christian living that Europe has experienced. How much violence has been perpetrated by the Christian Europe in these 500 years? Their

saviour is a messenger of peace, isn't He? But in spite of the saviour there was no peace. It was probably not possible.

Why don't we reflect on what has happened in history and recognise the limitations that man has been subject to even in the best of societies? We have to have a pragmatic attitude. Our sights must be lowered. Because by keeping our sights so high, we'll fail much more.

### *Hindutva and Harijans*

VAIRAVAN: Sir, I have a doubt that the appeal of the Hindutva ideology is confined only to the so-called upper sections of Hindu society. It seems that the Harijans and other so-called lower castes will never be attracted by Hindutva. The obstacles in the path of resurgence of Hinduism thus come not from the Muslims or other minorities, but from within the Hindu fold, from the groups and castes that have been defined to be low within the Hindu hierarchy. Gaining their support, I believe, is more important than building the temple for Srirama.

DHARAMPAL: I don't know if the Harijans have the kind of feelings we are attributing to them. If Hindutva is defined in some peculiar manner, it may be that they would not appreciate that. But if Hindutva means being Hindu, then I don't think the Harijans will keep out. I do not believe that the Harijans are any less Hindu. They are perhaps more Hindu than most of us. Their faith is greater, otherwise they would have left Hinduism ages ago. They haven't left it. They are there. They are attached to it much more than I would be, or many of us sitting here would be. We have escape-routes, we can run away from Hinduism, we can become moderners, we can become westerners; and we have become westerners. They, the Harijans and others, have not. They have stuck to Hinduism. They don't even have rights of entry to the great temples despite the constitutional provisions, but they have their little temples and they have preserved the faith. I don't think they are a problem. The way we define Hindutva may of course be a problem.

Let me tell you of an experience I recently had in a village near here. It is in the Chengalpattu district, about 50 kilometers from Madras. I have gone there a few times. It is an old village. There are still some Brahman families there. And the habitation

is divided into the main village, the OOr, and what you call the Chery, the Harijan hamlet. It is a large hamlet. And, there is a man there, who is a school teacher. I don't know any Tamil, he knows some English. And, through a little English and a little translation, I was able to converse with him a bit. We went through many subjects. I asked whether they happened to go to the village temple. Incidentally, there is a beautiful temple in the Oor. It is ancient, perhaps about 800 years old. So I asked, "Do your people go to the village temple?" He said, "We can go, nobody would stop us. But the people of the Oor would not like it. So we don't go."

Then the talk went a bit further. And he just mentioned that his daughter got married to somebody who set up house in the Oor, in the lane where the Karnam, the village accountant, lived. It is one of the major lanes of the village, and every year the rathayatra of the temple deity used to pass through this lane. But the year the daughter of this school teacher in the Chery and her husband began living in that lane, the rathayatra stopped entering the lane!

He was telling me this story without much emotion. And when he told me about the rathayatra avoiding the lane where her daughter lived, I looked at him and wondered what would happen to that beautiful, ancient temple. The Brahmans cannot look after it. There are only 15 or 16 of the Brahman families left there. There were many more about 200 years ago, but they have left. And those who are still there in the village are mostly older people. They too would disappear in another 10 or 20 years. What will happen to the temple then? If the Harijans are to be kept away from the temple, who would look after it? Who would protect it?

The Harijans, who could have looked after that great temple, have created their own little temple near where they live, and they have their own fairly grand temple festival every year.

So now, how does one define Hindutva? And who is for it and who is against? It is very difficult to say. There are different images of Hindutva that different people have. And because we have had a bad time for 200 years, or for much longer in some areas, we are in a bad shape. We are probably accustoming ourselves to breathe in the fresh air of freedom after those centuries of slavery. And may be one day we'll be able to reflect on these issues and find solutions. But it could also be that we are usually somewhat slow in these matters, and by the time we are ready to solve a problem

we find that the problem is gone, and we have got into some other difficulty. This has been happening to us in history. This perhaps is the Indian tragedy. I don't know.

*Gandhiji's way*

SEKHAR RAGHAVAN: Sir, I would like to know what would have been Mahatma Gandhi's reaction if he had survived to see this demolition.

DHARAMPAL: He wouldn't have been too happy, I think. But, he would have had a different attitude towards the event. Or, if he had felt as disturbed as most of the vocal sections of India claim that they have been, if he had felt that such an event would be a national shame as many of our commentators have described it, then he would have staked his life to avert the event. That is the kind of man he was. I don't think he would have gone the way we are going about it. He would probably have said that we must sit down and sort it out, but he would have done that much earlier, in 1948, 1949 or 1950 itself. He would not have allowed it to fester, the way we have done.

RADHA RAJAN: When they did not heed the Mahatma on the question of partition, do you think they would have heeded him on this?

DHARAMPAL: You are right that he was bypassed at that stage. My feeling is that he is on the losing side from around 1944, and he senses it, and other people sense it, too. And because other people sense it, they take advantage of the situation. In any case the world is encouraging these other people, the world wants them. For example, in Roosevelt papers there is abundant evidence of Roosevelt's insistence that everything should be done to ensure that India stays within the western orbit. Obviously, Mahatma Gandhi was not the man who would keep India within the western orbit. So they wanted other people to take over. And thus the events happened, the way they happened.

But if this man had lived longer and if he still had the spirit in him, he would have thought of ways of once again mobilising the Indian people, who were his source of power and authority. And then perhaps nobody in India could have challenged him. Because, after all, he had a close association of 30 years with the Indian people. Then certainly things in India would have moved differently.

They would not have moved in an ideal, utopian way – I wouldn't say that. But many things, which have remained unsorted and ignored under the illusion that we are now entering the modern world and these things do not matter, would have been attended to.

After independence we did not attend to matters that needed attention. We were swept off our feet by the idea of modernity and progress; we were carried away by the magic of these words. And, for about 5 to 10 years we lived on the basis of that magic. Then these foreign experts, like Rostov, came and pronounced that we were about to reach the "take-off point". And my feeling is that the day Rostov pronounced the take-off of modernity in India, the whole thing began to collapse the next day.

So modernism did not work; the older problems remained unattended; and our political situation became more and more complicated. The complications arose not because of the outside world alone; we also had more problems within ourselves, within our society. The splintering and the fracturing of the society became more and more acute.

And then we began to look at politics in a manner that, though seen as normal in the world outside India, was new to us. We began to look upon politics as the game of power, as the means to ill-gotten riches, as the means for acquiring control over men, and so on. The older purpose of Indian politics, the purpose that had made politics in India one of the noblest forms of service to the nation, the purpose that had prevailed in Indian politics from 1920 to 1950, disappeared. A new type of politician emerged on the scene, new values began to rule the world of politics. And from around 1970 the new culture became supreme. From then onwards everybody in public life came to be seen as corrupt. Probably, the real extent of corruption was not that large, but the way it was talked about, everything, even if it was not corrupt, became corrupt. The mind got obsessed with this.

We, the ruling elite, were thus further cut off from our people. And since we were cut off from the world of the ordinary Indian, we began living in a different world. We began cultivating people like ourselves in the rest of the world. We have about half a million Indian doctors, engineers, etc., outside the country. Thus we began to belong to a world fraternity. We became some sort of universal men, and universal women, who had no stakes in this country. And

this fraternity of the alienated now includes almost every Indian who has some little access to resources and thus some possibility of exhibiting some initiative.

I think the problem of India is very complicated. It is not easy to handle. And it is perhaps not fair to blame any individual or any group of people for this condition. There is so much accumulation of the past, which we are unable to understand, interpret and link together. And, we also do not have the courage to throw it away. So we feel stuck in the mire. And, therefore, those of us who find the opportunity run away from this sticky business, and try to find refuge in the world and its ways, that seem relatively simpler and easier to grasp.

We the elite seem to have given up on the problem of India. We have no clue how to solve it, and how to make India come into herself again. We are merely surviving; and that too at a rather low level of existence, at the mercy of the rest of the world. It is no wonder that in this situation the people of India take things into their own hands once in a while and try to show us the way.