

LIFTING THE VEIL

Communal Violence and
Communal Harmony in
Contemporary India



ASGHAR
ALI ENGINEER

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Foreword

This book is a collection of various articles written from time to time on Indian Muslims, communalism and communal riots. These papers, it is hoped, would interest the readers as the Muslim problem and communalism remain challenge areas for the Indian secular polity. Though we adopted secularism as the basis of our polity, secularism has been facing considerable problems. The recent resurgence of communalism has put a question mark before secular politics. Communalism remains a major challenge in India despite more than four decades of democratic functioning. These essays would help understand these sensitive issues.

I would like to thank those investigators who helped carry out investigations of communal riots in the field — Priti Arora, Rajkumari, Dr. Muniza Khan, and particularly Mr. S. Insaf and Shridhar. I would also like to thank *Economic and Political Weekly* and *Mainstream*, in which some of these articles were published, for allowing me to include these articles in the present volume. I would also like to thank Orient Longman for agreeing to publish it.

Asghar Ali Engineer

PART 1

Minorities, Ethnicity and Communalism: A South Asian Perspective

The Ethnic Problem in South Asia

Ethnic violence in the south Asian region has assumed serious proportions in the last decade and a half. Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan, and, to some extent, Bangladesh, face this problem. It is therefore necessary to examine this problem in some detail.

The question that arises is, what is ethnicity? Why does it get aggravated so as to express itself violently? These are, of course, related questions, and must be answered with some degree of clarity, if this phenomenon is to be understood.

First, let us try to define ethnicity. Ethnicity, anthropologists and sociologists maintain, is a feeling of primordial identity with one's racial, religious, linguistic or cultural group. According to an author in the *New Left Review*, "All through the twentieth century the significance of social life in setting patterns of political action has been extensive and usually unpredicted. Neither its treatment by 19th century 'rationalists' as a retrograde piece of barbarism nor its biological-racial explanations by their 'romantic' foes stood well the test of further experience."¹

The important question in this respect is: Is ethnicity, which derives its strength of feeling from race, region, culture, religion or language, historical, i.e., ever persistent and unchanging? The right-wingers in politics often take this view. Once you define it as something primordial it tends to be historical. While it is true that ethnicity derives its strength from primordial identity, its dynamics is derived from changing social structure. Ethnicity in a changing society, a society where the inter-group dynamics and inter-group balance of power are changing, becomes much more than a primordial feeling. It then acquires a more

complex structure. It is no more a structure of feeling; it is then also superimposed by efforts for newly negotiated inter-group social and power status. It is this negotiable inter-group social and power status that we are mainly concerned with in this paper.

Developments in the twentieth century indicate clearly that ethnicity can be ignored neither in a capitalist nor in a socialist society. It may remain subdued, or it may express itself in a violent form, depending on the dynamics of the situation. But it never vanishes. It reproduces itself from generation to generation. Even in the former Soviet Union the conceptual core of ethnicity was increasingly seen as self-reproducing cultural patterns linked to self-identity, significantly autonomous from the forces and relations of production.²

Can ethnic distinctiveness be done away with in either a capitalist or a socialist society? It is, at best, doubtful. The recent developments in the erstwhile Soviet Union and theoretical debates are quite indicative of this. The Soviet scholarship is seriously debating both points of view, i.e., complete disappearance of ethnic diversity or flourishing of this diversity or both. After all the Soviet Union is a region of high ethnic complexity. It is not for nothing that Andropov declared that "national distinctions will exist for a long time, much longer than class distinctions."³ He therefore called for a "well-thought-out, scientifically substantiated policy concerning national ethos. What has been happening between Azerbaijan and Armenia is also proof of what Andropov said in 1982.

II

South-east Asia is characterized by rich ethnic diversity. There is a serious Muslim problem in the four southern provinces of Thailand. In Malaysia too, there are Chinese, Indians and Malays. In Mindanao province in south Philippines, Moro Muslim groups are waging an armed struggle for their autonomy. In Indonesia, tensions between Christians and Muslims persist, the ethnic Chinese domination over the economy is resented, and there is a problem in East Timor.⁴

In South Asia the ethnic diversity is no less complex and rich. In Sri Lanka, there are Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims (though Muslims speak Tamil in Sri Lanka, they maintain their separate identity). Also, all Sinhalese are Buddhists, like all Tamils are Hindus (Muslims, as pointed out, are a separate group with an identity of their own). The ethnic

problem in Sri Lanka is becoming intractable.

In India, the Hindu-Muslim communal problem is the most persistent. Now it has acquired a new dimension with Hindu-Sikh problems erupting. There are other ethnic tensions, especially in the north-eastern region. The Nagas, the Mizos, the Assamese, the Bodos and now the Gorkhas have been fighting for their ethnic demands, although they have not engaged much of our attention so far.

In Bangladesh, there is not much of an ethnic problem except that of the Chakmas, which has lately assumed a violent turn. There was subdued tension between Hindus and Muslims, which erupted after the demolition of the Babri masjid on 6 December 1992. Nepal has much less diversity and is relatively free of ethnic tensions, at least of reported cases. Bhutan too falls in the same category. But it would be hazardous to predict that ethnic problems will never arise in these regions. They might.

In Pakistan, despite the East's separation there is ethnic diversity among Sindhis, Baluchis, Pathans, Punjabis and Muhajirs on the one hand, and Muslims, Hindus and Christians on the other. There are both inter-regional and inter-religious tensions. The former are of a much graver nature than the latter. The recent violence between Pathans and Muhajirs exemplifies the regional ethnic tensions in Pakistan today.

III

It is necessary to explore both the dimensions of the problem, i.e., ethnicity as primordial identity and ethnicity for renegotiating inter-group power and status. In fact the problem arises by the latter process, not by the former one. What are the forces that militate against ethnicity in capitalist and socialist societies? In capitalist societies the concept of nationalism is sought to be based on a common language, and a common market. Nationalism began to emerge in the West after the crusades when the relations of production began to change and capitalism began to emerge.

However, the emergence of nationalism was different in Europe compared to the countries of Asia and Africa which came under Western political domination in the nineteenth century. The ethnic make-up of Europe was not as variegated, with the formation of nations on a linguistic basis. These nations were not totally free of ethnic multiplicity,

particularly Britain. But the variety and complexity was not as great as in the Asian and African countries, which came into existence as administrative units of imperialist powers rather than as nations. However, when the educated urban elite in these countries began to fight for freedom, it had to borrow the concept of nation from the West.

In these countries the people of different ethnicities united more for the overthrow of foreign domination than forming a nation on the basis of capitalist relations of production. Nationalism was thus of a voluntary nature rather than a growth from below as in the West. Ethnic bonds remained stronger for lack of a proper base despite voluntary acceptance of nationalism. The primordial identity retained its organic roots in the society. We should not overlook this fact. Thus, the countries of South Asia are of a multi-national and multi-ethnic nature and not of a uniform character, like in the West, especially in Europe. We should not be surprised if ethnic bonds keep on asserting themselves from time to time. Also, nationalism would not strike roots simply by repeating that magic formula, as often as our politicians do.

While talking of its primordial character we should also remember that even in advanced capitalist countries ethnicity has not lost its appeal, though it may not assume a violent form. Now with increasing Black and Asian population, ethnic and racial tensions explode in England and Germany. There was rioting against Asians in the summer of 1986 in the UK. Many Indians and Pakistanis lost their property and some were killed. The high rate of unemployment was undoubtedly an immediate cause but racial hatred did also play its role. Thus the ethnic problem outlasts advanced capitalist and socialist societies.

Renegotiation of Power Status

The second aspect of ethnicity, renegotiation of power status between various ethnic groups, poses a greater challenge than its purely primordial appeal. This often explodes into unmanageable tensions and assumes violent forms.

After achieving freedom, the countries of South Asia — Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India — began to develop economically. Economic development, especially within the capitalist framework, changed the existing inter-group power status. For example, in Sri Lanka, Tamils were initially better represented in trade and government services. The native Tamils from the north and north-east (not Indian Tamils,

mainly plantation labourers) were relatively an advantaged group. With economic development, the Sinhalese began to wrest more advantages and conflicts arose.

Economic development unleashes many complex forces, both material as well as psychological. On a psychological plane, it brings awareness among the people, for not only does education create a large number of people belonging to the middle class, but the political process deepens and voting power plays its own role. In all the developing countries, the majority ethnic group, because of certain natural advantages it enjoys, begins to wrest initiatives and seeks to mobilize its people on the basis of their primordial feelings, either of race, region or culture. Thus in Sri Lanka too, Sinhala chauvinism began to have great appeal for the middle classes. Sinhala race and culture were glorified and so was Buddhism. Even the Buddhist monks played an important role in bringing this Sinhala consciousness among the Sinhalese.

Thus tension began to build up between the two communities, i.e., Tamils and Sinhalese. The Tamils were proud of their ancient culture and language and of their ruling class status in the north and north-east. When the Sinhalese began to assert their power the Tamils reacted strongly. It is true that the Tamils have some just grievances. Their language lost its political status with Sinhalese having been declared as the only language of the central government. These injustices encouraged the Tamils to demand a separate autonomous state of their own in the north and north-east. It is somewhat similar to the Hindu-Muslim problem in India. The only difference is that the Muslims in north India made and won their demand for a separate state.

There is one other difference. The Muslims who came together to demand Pakistan, or were constituted into Pakistan, were far from being of a homogeneous character, ethnically and linguistically. This has created serious problems of identity for the people of Pakistan. There is fierce controversy about Pakistani identity. Some, especially those who belong to the Jamat-e-Islami, maintain that Pakistan's ideology is Islam and hence the main content of their identity is Islam. Others, liberals and leftists, retort that if their main identity is Islamic then there ought to be no difference between them and Iranians or among Arab Muslims of various countries. The regional and ethnic identities have emerged more prominently in Pakistan than a Pakistani identity. We will come to this problem later.

In Sri Lanka, on the other hand, the Tamils have a definite identity, but there the problem is with the Muslims. Muslims are in a sizeable number in the eastern province which the Tamil militants want merged with the northern province. But the Muslims, though they speak Tamil, want to maintain their separate Moro Muslim identity and are reluctant to merge with Hindu Tamils. Hence there are riots not only between Tamils and Sinhalese, but also between Tamils and Moro Muslims. Generally a common language has its own bonds of affinity and even creates a sense of common ethnicity, but in Sri Lanka, for historical reasons, Moro Muslims have insisted on a separate identity. In fact most of the Muslims are not of Tamil and Indian stock; many have migrated from Malaysia and thus are of Malay origin. However, they started to speak Tamil after settling in Sri Lanka, as it was a link language and the language of trade.

It is not that there is tension between Tamils and Muslims only; there is tension between the Sinhalese and the Muslims also. There was a major riot between them in the early twentieth century and also in the late fifties. The reason is that in the south, Muslims are dominant in business and it creates a sense of hostility among the Sinhala petty bourgeoisie. Thus the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka is complex.

IV

If the situation in Sri Lanka on the ethnic front is complex, it is much more so as far as India is concerned. In Assam, the Bodo students have launched a violent agitation demanding Bodoland. The Gorkhas are demanding Gorkhaland and asserting their right with ample violence. India has, in my opinion, a distinct advantage over other countries in South Asia (except perhaps Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal), in that it has evolved an overall identity, clearly definable as an Indian identity. Other ethnic and sub-ethnic identities though, have heavy problems of their own, and do not directly clash with this Indian identity. Despite ethnic diversities, there is a sense of unity, and unity in diversity is not a mere political cliché. What is needed is to make it richer and impart it greater depth by showing mutual tolerance.

What worries us most today is that this tolerance is coming under greater strain for a variety of reasons. Firstly, our economic development is far from being imbued with a sense of justice. Those ethnic groups which had initial advantages have continued to grab, leaving

other disadvantaged ethnic, religious and caste groups in ever increasing adversity. What is worse, the advantaged groups have been using ethnic and caste affiliations with more aggressive assertion than even the disadvantaged groups. (Here we are using the term ethnicity rather loosely, including caste and religious groups. In a rigorous scientific sense, ethnicity it is not so, but the Indian situation is so complex that it is very difficult to use neat categories.)

The caste riots in Gujarat and Marathwada in Maharashtra in 1983 (there were caste riots in Gujarat in 1985 also) were mainly provoked by this changing status of caste groups and an attempt on the part of disadvantaged groups to renegotiate it in their own favour. The Dalits wanted greater representation in educational and governmental institutions which the upper caste groups would not permit. The caste riots turned serious in both places. The Dalit identity has assumed such great importance in view of this renegotiation of their status, that it militates to some extent even against their original ethnic identity. The Tamil, Andhra and Karnataka Dalits, for example, share a common sense of Dalit identity with the Mahars and Vankars of Gujarat. It happens in certain times of crisis, that a certain social or religious status assumes greater importance than ethnicity. Ethnicity is undermined. The same happened with the Muslims before partition. The common religious bond was viewed to be of greater importance than the common cultural or ethnic bonds with non-Muslims. Ethnic bonds again became important after the formation of Pakistan. It must be remembered that a real cohesive group (not conflict-free, of course) is possible only when religion and ethnicity coalesce; this is no more possible in modern society with its rapid mobility.

The Hindu-Muslim problem also does not fall, strictly speaking, within the ethnic category. The Hindus and Muslims, from one region, are from the same ethnic stock. However, as pointed out earlier, the present conditions are so complex and rapidly changing that ethnic and communal categories, like caste categories, get confused. But broadly speaking, the communal category does transcend the ethnic category. However, this does not mean that Hindus and Muslims would never unite on ethnic issues. The Tamil Hindus and Muslims might react together on the language issue. The same possibility exists as far as Kerala or Kashmir is concerned. The regional identities, on certain

occasions, assume greater importance than their religious identity.

However, there are much greater chances that religious identity might assume more serious proportions. It is not for nothing that the communal problem has become so acute in India today. Communal conflict, too, like ethnic conflict in a developing and changing society, is basically caused by renegotiation of inter-communal status. The Muslims in the post-independence period, if not earlier, were a disadvantaged group, and are even now getting increasingly marginalized. In a ballot-box oriented set-up, a large religious minority like the Muslims has its own political weight. This causes strain where politicians are tempted to resort to caste and communal appeal. All marginalized groups, including the backwards and Dalits, want to exploit their voting power to renegotiate their status and these pressures cause their own problems.

In a developing and mobile society, the ethnic and communal balance of different regions keeps on changing. When the ethnic or communal balance of a particular region becomes adverse due to immigration, an acute ethnic or communal conflict can arise. This is what is happening in Assam and in Sindh, Pakistan. Bangladeshi Muslims were supposedly migrating into Assam and upsetting both its ethnic and communal balance. Strong anti-Bengali as well as anti-Muslim feelings were aroused. It must be admitted that in Assam it was more an ethnic than a communal problem.

The Shiv Sena movement in Maharashtra was also basically a movement arising out of the changing ethnic balance in Bombay due to industrialization. However, with the changing political situation, it assumed stronger communal character.⁵

It is also important to note that the anti-Muslim tirade of the Sena is much stronger precisely in those places where Muslims from other areas have migrated and are relatively prosperous — like Bhiwandi, Aurangabad and other places. Muslims in these centres differ in their ethnic as well as religious affiliations.

In Gujarat's communal situation the ethnic factor is not totally absent though not of fundamental importance. A large number of Urdu speaking Muslims from the north have settled there, specially because it is a textile centre and during an upswing in the textile economy these Muslims weavers were in demand. However, due to the recent decline

in the textile economy, thousands of these Muslims were thrown out of their jobs and many of them took to crime. The arch criminals from amongst the Muslims were from outside Gujarat. The whole Bapunagar colony which was razed to the ground in the 1985 communal fury, was full of Muslims from Uttar Pradesh. However, this does not mean that Gujarati Muslims did not suffer. They too did. What I am saying is that the migration of outside Muslims to Ahmedabad, did add to the gravity of the problem.

Thus in a developing economy immigrations which upset ethnic balance create tense situations, which explode into violence in many cases. The problem is fundamentally economic but we are led to believe that it is fundamentally an ethnic conflict.

The ethnic situation in Pakistan has assumed very dangerous proportions. The smaller nationalities — Sindhis, Baluchis — resent Punjabi domination. So do the Muhajirs whose Muhajir Qaumi Movement is demanding recognition of Muhajirs as the fifth nationality in Pakistan. There is acute conflict among smaller nationalities also.⁶

The Muhajirs, mainly Muslims from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Gujarat, dominated the Pakistani bureaucracy and economy until recently. The Punjabis took over from them completely. The Muhajirs had initially settled in Sindh, mainly Karachi. Thus in Karachi the change in the ethnic balance created strong resentment among the Sindhis. The Sindhis were deprived of jobs and other facilities due to this adverse change of ethnic balance. No wonder then, that some Sindhi leaders demanded that those Muhajirs who came after 1948 after the partition riots ceased, should be expelled from Pakistan, or should be deprived of citizenship. It is similar to what the Assamese are demanding in respect of the Bangladeshis.

The migration of Pathans to Karachi created ethnic tensions between Muhajirs and Pathans. Many of these Pathans, for various reasons, took to drug smuggling on a big scale and promoted various crimes. They became slumlords where Muhajirs from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar lived. The tensions slowly grew between the two ethnic groups until violence erupted between Muhajirs and Pathans in December 1986. The violence between them has become a recurring phenomenon and is as frequent as communal violence in India. The riots between Muhajirs and Pathans in December 1986 were as brutal as the Ahmedabad riots of 1969.

Initially the Sindhis remained neutral, or somewhat sympathetic to the Muhajirs. But of late, violent conflict has started between Sindhis and Muhajirs as well. The mayor of Hyderabad, Sindh, was killed on 17 July 1988 and riots broke out between Muhajirs and Sindhis in which more than nine persons were killed. The Gujaratis so far used to identify themselves more with the Sindhis but now they have declared that they are Muhajirs.

Thus we see that even the religious bond cannot ensure stability as thought by the founders of Pakistan and ethnic conflicts come to the fore in a developing country, specially when migration upsets the ethnic balance and when one ethnic group gains more advantages than the other. Even when economic factors are absent, cultural domination of one ethnic group by the other can create very serious ethnic problems.

Thus ethnicity must be viewed both as a problem of primordial identity as well as a problem thrown up by developing and changing situations necessitating readjustment of equations between the ethnic groups.

Capitalist Development and Ethnic and Communal Conflict

Ethnic and communal conflict, apart from ethnic and racial prejudice, has to be understood in the light of capitalist development. Ethnicity and communalism have, in a sense, existed since time immemorial in the form of prejudice, and this is very much in keeping with human nature. But one should not confuse these ethnic and communal prejudices with the modern ethnic and communal prejudices. The dynamics of this conflict are qualitatively and quantitatively different from its medieval form. We propose to discuss, in this article, the dynamics of modern capitalist development and sharpening of this conflict.

The beginning of modern ethnic and communal conflict in the south Asian region took place with the introduction of colonial rule. There were various reasons for this. Firstly, a feudal society's social and political structure is not conducive to a competitive model of development. Capitalist and even colonial society is conducive to such development, and hence has dynamics of its own. Secondly, a feudal society rests on loyalty to the zamindar on the one hand and the ruling monarch on the other, irrespective of the religious community. It is precisely for this reason that loyalty becomes a fundamental value in a feudal society (mark the expression 'true to one's salt' which is so expressive of the feudal value structure). In a capitalist society, on the other hand, loyalty is replaced by efficiency and marketable commodity. Loyalty is not of much significance.

Thirdly, colonial society has its own characteristic structure. The colonial rulers find it detrimental to their metropolitan economy to encourage full capitalist growth in the colony. If there is no full

economic growth there will be considerable economic scarcity, and the greater the scarcity, the greater will be the competition between various ethnic and communal groups, exacerbating ethnic and communal feelings. Both economic and political competition exacerbate inter-communal relationships.

Under public pressure, the colonial rulers had to introduce certain democratic reforms in order to create an illusion of democratic functioning, and in order to co-opt the colonial elite. However, this was the beginning of democratic rule, and it was rightly expected that after the British withdrew from India, the only alternative rule would be democratic in nature. It was not possible to return to the feudal monarchy. This put the elite of both the communities on the alert. The minority elite was not really worried, as they saw no prospects of controlling political power in a democratic set-up.

The Hindus, on the other hand, enthusiastically welcomed the British education and introduction of democratic measures, however restricted they were. British education brought a tremendous awakening among the Hindu elite. W.W. Hunter has also made this observation. He wrote that it was "Our system of public instruction, which has awakened the Hindus from the sleep of centuries and quickened their inert masses with some of the noble impulses of a nation..."¹ He also took note of the adverse effects of British rule on the Muslims. He noted that the administrative policies of the British had dried up the sources of Muslim wealth: the permanent settlement had seriously reduced their income from land; the army under the British was taboo for Muslims of rank and no longer a source of gain; opportunities in government service and in the professions, which Muslims had monopolized one hundred years earlier, had come almost completely to an end.²

The fact that these observations of Hunter applied more to Bengal than Uttar Pradesh or elsewhere was of little consequence. It provided enough gunpowder to the Muslims who later presented a memorandum to the Viceroy. It is well known that even the British wanted this to happen in order to drive a wedge between the Muslims and the Hindus. We do not propose to go into the details of all this here. It is enough to say that with the introduction of colonial rule, the problem of communal conflict began to sharpen. It can therefore be hypothesized that colonial rule creates conditions to transform medieval religious consciousness into communal consciousness.

Hamza Alvi, a noted social scientist from Pakistan, has rightly pointed out that the momentum for Pakistan was provided by the salaried classes from amongst the Muslims. The Muslim educated classes knew that in an independent India they could not successfully compete with the majority community and obtain important government positions. In Pakistan, on the other hand, the jobs would go to them unchallenged. Though it was a fight between the elites of the two communities, the masses were mobilized under the garb of religion on both sides. Thus the communal divide ultimately resulted in the division of the country.

That the problem was not religious and that the dynamics of the communal problem were provided by purely secular issues like the struggle for political power and government jobs should be obvious to any perceptive observer of the Indian political scene during the pre-British period. The struggle for communal division was led by the secular and not the religious elite. It is also noteworthy that while the Muslim secular elite led by Jinnah gave leadership to the separatist movement, the religious elite led by Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad allied itself with the Indian National Congress and fully subscribed to the theory of composite nationalism. In fact, while Jinnah propounded the two-nation theory based on religion, the then president of Jamiat al-Ulama, Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, was entering into polemics with the noted Urdu poet Iqbal in favour of territorial nationalism.

A Perpetual Divide

Thus we see that it is British colonial rule that produced the political phenomenon of communalism and left its bitter legacy in the form of a perpetual communal divide. Communalism aroused deep passions and brought about the sharpest divisions between the two religious communities. This felt its own bitterness in the post-partition period.

In Sri Lanka too, competition between different ethnic communities during the colonial period brought about ethnic division in society. "Compulsion in trade," says Kumari Jayawardene, "is a key element in understanding ethnic and communal rivalry in Sri Lanka. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the colonial economy was dominated and controlled by the British as well as north and south Indian

merchant capital. A bourgeoisie class of the Sinhalese, Sri Lanka Tamils and Muslims derived their wealth from plantation cultivation and from services, mainly financial to the commercial sector, their Sinhala plantation counterparts accumulated wealth in liquor renting, graphite mining, and plantations. However, the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils were not strong enough to compete with the British, Bohras, Sindhis, Parsis, Chettiars, and Muslims in the export-import trade and in the large retail trade. Thus, as an alternative, members of these two economically weak groups competed for entry into the professions and government service. However, the small Sinhala traders were to become a vociferous pressure group which directed its hostility against 'alien' traders."³

Thus in the Sri Lankan colonial situation all the elements for ethnic trouble to germinate were present. Like India, there too, the conflict kept on sharpening, often bursting out in ethnic or communal violence. The dynamics of this problem was no different. It cannot be. Today, also like India, Sri Lanka is dogged by this problem in the most acute form one can imagine.

It would be totally wrong to look for the root of the problems in the medieval period as is often done by the communalists. Though there was strong religious and ethnic prejudice in that period – perhaps religious prejudices were stronger than in our time – the communal problems did not exist. In other words, one must distinguish between sectarian and communal differences. The former are accentuated by religious and metaphysical dogmas while the latter are generated by political and economic issues. It is important to understand this difference lest we should confuse the issues.

Development and Violence

Before we proceed further I would like to propose a hypothesis here: development and violence are integral to each other, i.e., whenever economic development takes place it is accompanied by a lesser or greater degree of violence, depending on the stage and pace of development. Further, if development takes place in a capitalist framework, the violence assumes an ethnic or communal form, but if it takes place in a socialist framework, it assumes a class form. Development in South Asia is taking place in a capitalist framework and hence the violence often assumes an ethnic and communal form.

No doubt the partition left its bitter legacy and a communal situation in the post-partition period in India. But this only partially explains the phenomenon of the rising tide of communalism in the post-partition period, especially since the late sixties and in the mid-eighties. Moreover, had it been due only to the partition, it would not have spread to other communities like the Sikhs in Punjab and the Christians in many places. Also, the pre-partition period had not witnessed ethnic conflict like the one between the Assamese and the Bengalis. How does one explain this spread as well as intensification in ethnic conflict in contemporary India?

Why is economic development accompanied by violence? Development either brings significant shifts in the socio-economic and political structure or completely transforms it. These shifts or transformations benefit some and hurt others. They may be individuals, groups, ethnic or religious communities. The capitalist form of development is uneven and accentuates exploitation and injustice. When capitalist development takes place some communities and ethnic groups benefit disproportionately and others lose disproportionately. When colonial rule came, a great shift took place in the socio-economic structure. This shift benefited the Hindus and harmed the interests of Muslims. There were several reasons for this. The Muslim ruling classes were mainly feudal and could not adjust to the shift in the socio-economic structure and consequently did not take to industrial capitalism, which the Hindus did. Even in Pakistan the social structure remains mainly feudal and industrial capitalism has not struck deep roots. It is for this reason that democracy could never stabilize itself in Pakistan.

In India too, the Muslims were left out in the process of development and it is the Hindus who mainly benefited from it. The consequences of this maladjustment or losing out in the process of development are very complex indeed. On the one hand, the community which loses out finds no incentive to modernize and clings much more severely to its primordial identity. On the other, this produces a reaction among other communities, especially the majority community. The minority community is perceived as 'fanatical' and highly 'communal' for stressing its primordial identity.

The majority community, on the other hand, raises the slogan of its own religion being in danger and spreads propaganda among members of

its own community that they must consolidate their ranks, promote their own unity in order to meet the threat of minority aggression against them. In the case of India, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and other similar organizations have been carrying on propaganda of this kind most systematically. It has its own telling effect on the members of the majority community. Thus recently the VHP's Maharashtra unit directed its followers to stick to time-bound multi-pronged programmes for unification of Hindus in the state. Accordingly, all VHP activists in Maharashtra immediately began a mass contact campaign.

Also, such fights are carried on under some symbols. The Shah Bano case and the Ramjanambhoomi – Babri masjid agitation provide such symbols. Thus the real fight is neither for or against the maintenance of women nor for the temple or the mosque but for much wider issues under their cover. Through the Shah Bano agitation the Muslims were expressing their resentment against their present plight in the country and by agitating for the Ramjanambhoomi the Hindus were trying to organize themselves against the Muslims. Thus the situation goes on getting more and more communalized, threatening the unity and integrity of the country.

There is another dimension to this complex process. The capitalist transformation of the social structure hurts medieval traditions and religious practices. This creates psychological stresses and strains. It also hits collective values and encourages individualization. Thus there begins to grow a sense of alienation. These psychological stresses are sought to be compensated by emphasizing a revival of religious and primordial traditions. This is why one witnesses the phenomenon of the growing trend towards fundamentalism in various countries today.

The revival of religion has a powerful mass appeal for other reasons as well. Capitalist transformation brings about the increasing trend of urbanization. Lakhs of job seekers migrate towards big cities with a concentration of commerce and industry. They land in slums and congested localities. Also, they are cut off from their organic affairs and seek to compensate for this by clinging to religion more fastidiously. Thus revival of religion develops mass appeal, which then is cleverly manipulated by the urban elite for their own political interests. The politicians can hardly resist the temptation to exploit such a powerful trend. The ballot-box oriented democracy makes it a very potent instru-

ment for winning elections, as most of the politicians manipulate the caste and communal sentiments for their ballot-box victory. In the Vile Parle (a Bombay suburb) by-election for the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly in 1988, the Shiv Sena openly campaigned for the 'victory' of Hinduism and thus exploited the religious sentiments of the common Hindu voters for political purposes.

The urban ghetto conditions, brought about by structural changes, are also to some extent responsible for communal tensions. Various religious and ethnic groups are forced into high density localities with minimum or no amenities. Often there are fights between individuals belonging to different communities over these basic amenities or lack of them and frequently, this assumes a volatile communal form. Or, some interested politicians from the locality pounce upon such opportunities and transform even an otherwise volatile situation into communal strife. Two studies conducted in 1990 in Hyderabad and Ahmedabad clarified this. The study on the inner city of Hyderabad clearly pointed out that high population density, total lack of basic amenities, the structure of the walled city with its narrow lanes and bylanes, make it ripe for communal tensions to erupt. Similarly, the study of the Ahmedabad riots bears this out. The situation here hardly differs from that of the inner city of Hyderabad. In the case of Ahmedabad one has to add the grip of the small and big time criminals in these localities. They manipulate communal tensions or even generate these tensions for their own ends. Similar trends can be seen also in the old cities of Delhi, Aligarh, Meerut and Moradabad, which have become centres of communal violence.⁴

Increased criminalization in urban areas plays havoc with communal and ethnic relations in many countries. Almost all the countries in South Asia are suffering from this malaise. The worst case is that of Pakistan. The unplanned and reckless growth of Karachi has brought two major ethnic communities of this city in direct confrontation. The Pathans and the Muhajirs in Karachi and Hyderabad (Sindh) have come in violent confrontation with each other. Several hundreds of them have been killed since December 1986.⁵ The Pathans, dealing in drug smuggling on a huge scale, monopolize the city's scarce transport facilities, and act as brokers for the slumlords.

The structural transformation of the economy is producing a great

deal of unemployment, of both the educated and the uneducated. Many of these unemployed youth not only fall into the hands of smugglers, drug-pushers and other criminals, but are also tempted to participate in rioting as it brings rich dividends in the form of loot and plunder. This writer has found an increased participation of educated youths in the riots that erupted in the period 1987-91 in Meerut, Ahmedabad, Baroda and several other places. They are in the forefront of the revivalist movements, and bring their emotional intensity to these movements. This phenomenon is not restricted to India. The leader of the Muhajir Qaumi Movement has attracted a large number of Muhajir youth. The cadres of the LTTE and the JVP in Sri Lanka are made up of educated youths and they are fighting with great ferocity.

The structural transformation towards capitalism in south Asian societies is building up tensions between the kulaks and the industrial bourgeoisie. And if the kulaks and the industrial bourgeoisie belong to two different religious communities, this may well assume a communal or ethnic form. This is precisely what is happening in Punjab today. The kulaks in Punjab belong to the Jat Sikh community, whereas the industrial bourgeoisie, by and large, belong to the Hindu community. The Sikh kulaks perceive that the Hindu capitalists are out to crush them and are treating them unfairly. Both the input prices in the form of fertilizer, electricity, tractors, tyres, as well as the output prices of food grains are controlled (via the Agricultural Prices Commission) by the Centre, in turn controlled by the Hindu capitalists, according to the perception of the Sikh rich peasantry. Hence these purely economic tensions between the kulaks and the bourgeoisie are transformed into communal tension between the Sikhs and the Hindus.

There is one more aspect to the dynamics of capitalist transformation. It brings about a change in what Gramsci calls "organic leadership". Capitalism thrives on modernization and change. And modernization threatens the traditional leadership. Secularization of leadership takes place and the religious leadership begins to lose its significance. The traditional leadership thus fights back with all vigour to regain its importance, as in the earlier Wahabi movement in Bengal and Uttar Pradesh in the nineteenth century and the Akali movement in Punjab after independence. The role of the Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka is of a similar nature in the ethnic conflict there.

The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka has become acute only lately, though it started with colonial rule. In fact, some time back, the island was considered a model of communal and ethnic harmony. But modern capitalist development and the consequent structural shift in the society brought about a sharpness in this conflict and disturbed the harmony. Here too, the Buddhist monks were losing their hold over the people because of modernization. They, therefore, began to play an important role in the Sinhala movement. However, they should not be seen as mere religious fanatics, but as guarding their own interests. Fanaticism, it should be noted, is more a function of one's interest than of religion. A person, a group, or a community would tend to be fanatical if its interests are threatened or consolidated and fanaticism would change into liberalism if the interests are secure.

We have thus seen that ethnic or communal conflict is a politico-economic phenomenon and becomes aggravated whenever a structural shift takes place, as one group or community, in the process of this shift, loses or gains. The group or community which loses emphasizes its identity in order to mobilize the entire community to fight for justice and the group or the community which has usurped all or most of the benefits tries to preserve them, again by mobilizing other members of the group through the stressing of its identity. Thus the ethnic or communal conflict spreads and gets sharpened in all the groups or communities involved.

This conflict cannot be resolved unless justice is done to all those involved. But the problem is how much the privileged group would concede and how much the deprived group would accept, in the name of justice. Such questions are more psychological than material and often remain unresolved, making the violent conflict inevitable, and hence development and violence inevitably go together.

Muslim Minority in India and Hindu Minority in Pakistan – A Comparative View

Minorities everywhere face a more or less similar plight – whichever the country, and whatever their legal status in theory. One can argue that minorities in a democratic set-up have a much better status. They enjoy, along with the majority, fundamental rights — including the right to vote and the right to any elected office. Such privileges may not be available to a minority in an authoritarian or undemocratic set-up. In a modern society, these rights and privileges give meaning to one's political existence and without them one would feel severely deprived and constricted.

However, physical existence precedes political existence. Everything depends on one's physical existence and well-being. Minorities, ethnic, racial or religious, do come across many problems in this respect. And much more so if there is a history of conflict between the majority and minority, as in the south Asian countries, especially India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. These countries have seen severe inter-communal conflict. Religious and ethnic minorities have suffered, whether it is in respect of physical existence or well-being. Muslims in India, Hindus in Bangladesh and Pakistan, and Tamils in Sri Lanka face a similar plight (though of course Tamils have taken to terrorism in their majority areas in the north and north-east and it is they who are dominant in these areas).

We will be dealing mainly with the Muslim minority in India and the Hindu minority in Pakistan. The first important question is: Can there be any comparison between the two? Well, the answer may be yes as well as no, depending on what aspects one is dealing with. If we talk in terms of sheer number there is hardly any comparison. In India, there

are roughly 100 million Muslims, whereas, as per the 1981 census there are no more than 1.27 million Hindus amounting to 1.51 per cent of the total population of Pakistan. Such a tiny minority can hardly exercise any political influence in the country.

As against that, Muslims constitute about 12 per cent of India's population and hence enjoy a great deal of political clout. Any political party in India which aspires to rule must cultivate the Muslim vote. Thus many political parties vie with one another to make symbolic gestures to Indian Muslims (which hardly amount to anything substantial), like assurances to protect Muslim personal law, declaring the Prophet's Day as a gazetted holiday, which attracts the charge of minorityism or of placating Muslims. How far Muslims benefit from such symbolic gestures is a matter of debate. But the minuscule minority of Hindus in Pakistan do not enjoy even this symbolic status. No political party in Pakistan need placate them. While Muslims often become a cause for winning or losing elections for a party in India, no one needs to woo the Hindus in Pakistan. Zia-ul-Haq even reduced them to the status of secondary citizens during his 'Islamic regime'. The Christians in Pakistan, another tiny minority, faced a similar plight.

There is, however, another comparative dimension between the two minorities. At the time of partition, upper class Muslims as well as the educated elite migrated to Pakistan for greener pastures leaving behind the downtrodden and illiterate. It was the same story for Hindus in Pakistan. The rich, upper class elite among the Hindus migrated to India leaving behind mostly the scheduled caste Hindus. So much so, that according to one rough estimate, about 70 per cent of the Hindu population in Pakistan belong to the scheduled castes. In Karachi, when I enquired of a Hindu sweeper as to why he did not migrate to India at the time of partition, he replied, "*Sahab hum yahan bhi jhadoo lagate hain, wahan bhi jhadoo lagayengen*" (we do sweeping here, we would have done the same thing there in India). Though this cannot be said of Indian Muslims, by and large, the Muslims left behind after partition were extremely poor and illiterate. Though a tiny middle class, an educated elite and entrepreneur class has emerged among the Muslims in India, Indian Muslims are still a backward community, not enjoying many material privileges.

However, Muslims are well dispersed all over India and they have

a substantial population in several districts in various states and even constitute a majority in Kashmir. Hindus in Pakistan, on the other hand, are concentrated in one district. Again, according to the 1981 census, 1.22 million out of the 1.27 million Hindus live in Sindh. This amounts to 96 per cent of the entire Hindu population in Pakistan. What is more important is that 85 per cent of the total Hindus in Sindh are concentrated in the Hyderabad division alone. Thus, the best majority of Hindus in Pakistan is practically restricted to a single division.

The Muslims in India, though a very substantial minority and able to influence the fortunes of political parties, feel discriminated against in many ways. They do not hold jobs in government in proportion to their population and are practically non-existent in the private sector. The Hindus in Pakistan hardly exist even in the public sector, let alone in the private sector. The overwhelming number of Hindus in Pakistan belong to the scheduled castes and hence do menial jobs. Only some Sindhi Hindus are in business and can be said to be rich. Muslims in India, in view of their numbers, can put some political pressure to improve their lot and to obtain government jobs; Hindus in Pakistan, being a tiny minority, do not have even this option open to them.

Indian Muslims are victims of prejudice from a large section of the majority community and many of them are looked upon as Pakistani agents. "*Musalman jao Pakistan ya qabrastan*" (Muslims go to Pakistan or to the graveyard) is a common slogan and often riots break out on such issues. The plight of Hindus is no better in this respect in Pakistan. A Pakistani commentator, Haider Nizamani, writes in the *Frontier Post*: "In Pakistan rumours need little ratification to be recognised as facts. In this context, the case of Hindus is quite interesting. A random look at the news items appearing in our dailies would give a unique image of the Pakistan Hindus. They are perceived as the agents of India who are working constantly to destabilise the country."

Indian Muslims, accused of being Pakistani agents, are often harassed by the authorities at the time of war. In reply it is often said by those sympathetic to the Muslim cause that it is unfair to accuse them of being Pakistani informers as hardly any Muslim has ever been caught spying for Pakistan. The same argument has been advanced by Haider Nizamani in favour of Pakistani Hindus in his article when he says, "In fact, quite to the contrary, there has never been any important incident in

which a court of law has found a Hindu guilty of spying for India.”

In India, Muslims are ready targets of communal violence. Whenever any procession passes through a Muslim locality in any town, more often than not, it results in communal violence, often in the form of an attack on Muslims. The plight of Hindus in Pakistan is similar. Whenever any procession protesting against the killing of Muslims in India passes through a Hindu locality in the Hyderabad (Sindh) division, it results in attacks on the Hindus. Thus the Babri masjid controversy and protest against the desecration of the mosque in India resulted in an outburst of violence against Hindus in Pakistan. Their places of worship in Hyderabad city and its surrounding small towns were desecrated. In Hyderabad, Sindh, at least four mandirs were set on fire. One Hindu, a mochi (cobbler), was killed brutally. The huts of bagris (gypsies) are repeatedly devastated and reduced to ruins. In India too, generally the poorest among the Muslims become victims of violence and it is their huts which are found to be soft targets. Be it Meerut, Aligarh or Bhiwandi, it is the same story.

Haider Nizamani raises a fundamental question in his article. “Are Hindus of Pakistan responsible, in any way, for the desecration of the Babri Masjid? Can this attitude towards a tiny minority be justified by any code of human rights specially as envisaged in Islamic political ethics and laws? Do these attacks on Hindus and their places of worship bother the fanatics across the border?”

Many secular Hindus raise similar questions in respect of Indian Muslims. Can the Muslims in today’s India be punished for what some Muslims ruler did in the past? Can Muslims today be held responsible if some Muslim ruler during the medieval ages demolished any Hindu temple for religious, political or other reasons? Haider’s article in the Pakistani press shows that on both sides of the dividing line there exist conscientious people who defend minorities and condemn the unjust treatment meted out to them.

The behaviour of the police towards Hindus in Pakistan is on par with that of the Indian police with the Muslims. Haider Nizamani says, “Despite having full knowledge of the fact that most of the anti-India marches in Hyderabad and surroundings areas inevitably lead to attacks on Hindus, the police and other law enforcing agencies have proved ineffective in preventing violence. The police contingents usually fol-

low the demonstrators but they have remained silent by-standers when attacks were carried out. The gravity of the situation demands that the law enforcing agencies be prudent in controlling the elements who create inter-religious disharmony in the country." Is the story of the police in our country any different? Here too, the police play an equally partisan role in dealing with such situations.

The Hindus of Pakistan feel insecure as much as the Indian Muslims do. They also draw some emotional satisfaction by looking at India, in the same way as Indian Muslims, especially those in the north, have some kind of emotional feeling towards Pakistan. However, this does not at all mean that Pakistani Hindus are traitors to their country or Indian Muslims to theirs. It is in this sense that Haider Nizamani suggests that the Hindu's position in Pakistani society in general and that of Sindh in particular, demands an open debate to look at the controversial topic in a broader perspective, and that the oversimplified image of a Pakistani Hindu as a born traitor helps very little in understanding the true position of Hindus in Pakistan. Many Hindus too project an oversimplified image of Indian Muslims as traitors to India and loyal only to Pakistan.

The minority problem in both the countries needs to be looked at in a proper psychological, political, economic and social perspective and in all its complexities. Also, it has to be seen in a democratic, secular, humanistic and multi-cultural perspective. It is unfortunate that under Zia the minorities in Pakistan lost their equal political status and were reduced to second class citizens. The Muslims in India do enjoy equal political status, but still feel physically insecure and discriminated against. It is for the democratic and secular forces in both the countries to intervene effectively and make the minorities feel safe and secure and lead a dignified existence.

PART 2

Indian Muslims and the Problem of Communalism

Hindu-Muslim Relations in India since 1950

There are different views about Hindu-Muslim relations in India, and no view is above controversy. Hindus or Muslims cannot be treated as entirely homogeneous communities. Different traditions in both the communities play their own role in determining this relationship. There are orthodox and liberal traditions as well as theocratic traditions on the one hand, and Sufi and bhakti traditions, on the other. There are, besides religious conflicts, conflicts of interests too. On occasion, conflicts of interests sharpen religious conflict. Not only this, religion is often used to provide legitimacy to conflicts of interests and thus what appears to be a religious conflict may in fact be a cover-up for a conflict of interests. This is, of course, not to suggest that there has been no religious conflict between the two communities.

The fact that some Muslim dynasty or the other ruled over India for about eight centuries also colours this relationship. History is seen and interpreted from different ideological perspectives. The liberal and nationalist traditions read into history a common interest between Hindus and Muslims. Liberal scholars have tried to show how Muslim influence had a benign effect on Indian culture and how the impact of Islam generated a composite culture which is the inheritance of all Indians today. This influence, according to these scholars, was wide-ranging and no field – whether of religion, art and architecture, music, dance, painting, or poetry – was left out. At least in north India, the centre of Muslim rule, no sphere could escape this influence.

It is interesting to note that the Hindu-Muslim conflict was of much greater intensity in the north which came under greater influence of Islam. The reasons are not far to seek. Muslim invaders came from

northern mountain passes and conquered northern parts of India. Thus the struggle for power between Hindu rulers and Muslim invaders took place in this region, leaving bitter memories behind. No such power struggle took place in the south, since Muslims came there mostly as traders rather than as invaders. Even today, it is interesting to note, most of the communal violence takes place in this region. North India happens to be the centre of Hindu communalism and Muslim fundamentalism as much today as it was yesterday.

Again, it was in this region that the battle for the division of the country in the pre-1947 days was fought. The Muslim elite in this region was highly politically conscious and fought for its due share of power. When no understanding for sharing power could be reached, division of the country between Muslim majority areas in the north and north-east and Hindu majority areas in the rest of the country became inevitable. This division was accompanied by considerable bloodshed. No less than a million human beings were slaughtered. It was a grim tragedy.

The partition riots raged up to 1948. It was in this unfortunate year that idols of Ram and Sita — two highly venerated Hindu deities — were installed inside the Babri mosque. Subsequently, the mosque was locked in view of the law and order situation and even a person of the stature of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India — who described the installation of Hindu deities inside a mosque as a matter of shame for secular India — could not get it unlocked. The dispute has proved to be a major disaster for relationships between the two communities in contemporary India.

As we pointed out earlier, partition riots continued right up to 1948. In fact, some skirmishes kept occurring up to 1950. 1950 is a turning point in Hindu-Muslim relations, for the period from 1950 to 1960 proved to be a quieter period, and not many riots were reported during this decade. There are several reasons for this. After the formation of Pakistan, Muslims were reduced to a much smaller minority — no more than 40 million in India. Secondly, large numbers of Muslims were killed in the partition riots on the Indian side (as large numbers of Hindus were killed on the Pakistani side) and they were in a state of terror. In fact, they had lost all confidence and were quite unsure of their future in India. They recovered from this shock and sense of insecurity thanks to the reassurances of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

In this state of affairs, the Muslims could hardly assert themselves or compete with the Hindus politically or economically. It is only an assertion of their identity by the elites of the two communities that brings about a confrontation. The Muslims were too subdued in this period to provoke the Hindu ire. They thought it best to adopt a low-key posture. The other important reason was that the Muslim elite, both power elite and economic elite, had almost completely migrated to Pakistan and those left behind could hardly offer any serious economic competition, at least in the 'cow belt', i.e., in the bastion of Hindu orthodoxy in the north. Thus there was hardly any challenge for the Hindu middle classes from their Muslim counterparts and the decade from 1950 to 1960 was a smooth one.

The first major communal bombshell exploded in Jabalpur in 1961. One of the reasons for this riot was acute economic competition between two bidi manufacturers in the town — a Hindu and a Muslim. It started when the daughter of the Hindu bidi manufacturer fell in love with the son of the Muslim bidi manufacturer. The Hindi press, at the instance of the girl's father, described it as a Muslim boy attempting to rape a Hindu girl, and thus played an inflammatory role.

Many Muslims were killed in this riot and terrorized by the armed police. The Urdu press carried many stories of police atrocities. It must be said here that the Muslim leadership had played no significant role in provoking violence. A team of senior journalists from Bombay investigated the Jabalpur riot and mainly blamed the Hindi press for provocation. S.B.Kolpe, a senior journalist from Bombay who visited Jabalpur, wrote, "Most of the newspaper reports were identical, obviously emanating from the same source. On reaching Jabalpur ... I found that two or three strangers working jointly for several national dailies were responsible for these reports which had a damaging effect on the political life of a nation as a whole. Only one of the three knew enough English to write readable reports. The others copied these with minor changes." Kolpe further informs us, "The facts reported were collected from the local police who were not free from communal bias, and no reporter ever bothered to verify the "facts" doled out to him. Since I was known to most senior journalists in Jabalpur as an activist of the working journalists' trade union movement, I had no difficulty in mixing with the local fraternity."¹

The Jabalpur riot was so severe that Jawaharlal Nehru himself was shaken and he took the initiative in setting up the National Integration Council to promote emotional integration in the country and to bring about some measure of accommodation between Hindus and Muslims. However, worse was yet to come, as the Jabalpur riot was only the beginning of a new phase of communal confrontation.

The Muslim leadership was greatly perturbed by fresh outbursts of communal violence in post-partition India. They were far from aggressive in this phase. So far they had looked to Nehru for protection and security. However, with new forces emerging in the political scene Nehru appeared to be a helpless spectator. Some Muslim leaders like S.M. Faridi — a former socialist — and Syed Mahmood, who was close to Nehru and was a minister of state in the foreign ministry, felt disillusioned with the Nehruvian policy and formed the *Majlis-e-Mushawarat*, a consultative body of various Muslim groups and political parties.

The *Mushawarat*, headed by Faridi, was not a political party of Muslims but only a consultative body of all the Muslim representative groups. It was the first attempt by Muslims in post-independence India to come together and pool their energies and intellectual powers, not only to find a solution to the problems of Muslims but also to exert pressure on the political system for realizing their demands. The Urdu press, by and large, welcomed the move and published articles and editorials in support. But the move sent alarm signals to Hindu communalists and right-wingers. Though the Muslim masses had taken no initiative in the formation of Pakistan — it was the power and economic elite among Muslims who were responsible for it — all Muslims in India were seen as guilty by communal Hindus and any attempt on the part of Muslims to form a body with political implications was seen as an attempt to create another Pakistan.

The formation of *Majlis-e-Mushawarat* was seen in this light by the national press, especially the Hindi press, despite assertions to the contrary by the *Mushawarat* leaders. The *Mushawarat* started a debate on the plight of Muslims in post-independence India, but could hardly succeed in achieving anything. There was, of course, no question of its success in stopping communal riots. In that respect even saner and more mature leaders like Dr. Zakir Husain, who subsequently became Presi-

dent of India, could not achieve much. After the death of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, a towering Muslim leader who had fought against the idea of Pakistan and had seen through its harmful effects for Indian Muslims, Dr. Zakir Husain was the seniormost Muslim leader with high credentials. He was close to Nehru and enjoyed the respect of Muslims, although a small section of angry Muslims saw him and similar other Muslims holding power in the Congress ministry as mere showpieces.

However, Zakir Husain did what he could in the circumstances, to alleviate the plight of Muslims and bring some succour to them. He was a man of great maturity and vision and could keep Muslim militancy under control. He knew that a militant and confrontationist attitude would harm the Muslim cause by further communalizing a section of the Hindus. This is what is precisely happening today, but there is no mature Muslim leader of Zakir Husain's stature to restrain some of the more militant and aggressive Muslim leaders who act without any thought of the consequences.

After Jabalpur a chain of riots broke out in Ranchi, Jamshedpur, Aligarh and other towns. The immediate cause was Hindu refugees coming from the area that was then East Pakistan. Hundreds of Muslims were killed in these riots. In the steel factories in Jamshedpur and Bhilai some Muslim workers were thrown into steel furnaces and burnt alive. These riots continued up to 1965 when war with Pakistan broke out. Jawaharlal Nehru was alive when most of these riots took place. It was for this reason that in his last meeting with senior officers of the Indian Administrative Service, Nehru described communalism as the greatest internal enemy of India. Nehru felt helpless in preventing these riots. All the states where riots broke out were Congress-ruled and yet he could not persuade his own party chief ministers to curb communal violence. Majlis-e-Mushawarat could, at best, submit memoranda and issue statements. Dr. Zakir Husain's personal intervention also could not bring any relief. At the most, Muslim leaders could threaten not to vote for the Congress. But there too, Muslims had hardly any alternative. There was no strong secular opposition party which could replace the Congress in the states or at the Centre.

In 1967 an opportunity arose when some opposition parties could combine and provide a united front. The Congress was voted out of power in some states including Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state

of the cow belt where the Muslim population is around 15%. The Muslims voted against the Congress to express their protest against the Congress apathy towards their plight. But the Jana Sangh, a Hindu communal party, was part of this Samyukta Vidhayak Dal (United Front) government. This experiment was repeated in 1989 too, when the Janata Dal government led by V.P. Singh was supported both by the left as well as by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the reincarnation of the earlier Jana Sangh. But without its support the SVD government could not have been formed.

However, in 1969, the Congress was rejuvenated by Indira Gandhi. She nationalized the major banks with a stroke of her pen and won laurels from the people. She gave a slogan, '*garibi hatao*' (abolish poverty), which electrified the atmosphere in India, and became the unquestioned leader of the Indian masses. In order to woo the Muslim masses, she laid great emphasis on secularism. For her electoral arithmetic, Muslim and Harijan (now called Dalit) votes were of basic importance. Both Muslims and Dalits were totally opposed to the Jana Sangh, the Hindu communal body, and they readily rallied round Indira Gandhi. But this also could not give substantial relief to Muslims. A major communal holocaust broke out in Gujarat which was then ruled by that section of the Congress which was opposed to Indira Gandhi. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) had a strong base in Gujarat. The Jana Sangh was extremely worried by the Prime Minister's left-wing policies and her popularity among Muslims and Dalits.

They could counter Mrs. Gandhi only by engineering serious communal trouble in the country – which they did in Gujarat. The Gujarat riots exploded with tremendous force. Law and order being a state subject, Indira Gandhi was totally helpless. It was not just that Gujarat was ruled by the opposition Congress and any intervention by the Centre would have been easily construed as politically motivated. Indira Gandhi at that stage could not afford any adventurist action. But nevertheless the Muslims suffered in a big way in Gujarat. Our investigations show that more than a thousand persons perished in Ahmedabad, the premier city of Gujarat and its nerve-centre of industry and commerce.

Ghanshyam Shah, a reputed political scientist from Gujarat, described one of the scenes in the riot-torn city of Ahmedabad

which shows the mob-fury. "A gruesome episode in the afternoon (of September 20, 1969) brings out the depth of animosity against the Muslims. A young Muslim, enraged by the destruction of his property said he would take revenge. Upon this the crowd seized him, showered blows on him, and tried to force him to shout "Jai Jagannath". Staying firm, the youth refused even if that meant death. To this someone in the crowd responded that he may indeed be done away with. Wood from broken shops were collected, a pyre prepared in the middle of the road, petrol sprinkled on the pyre as well as on the youth, and he was set alight with ruthless efficiency. What is remarkable is that there was no resistance from any Hindu. The wails of the Muslim inhabitants of the area were drowned in the celebration of the incident by the Hindus."²

The Jana Sangh had created a strong anti-Muslim atmosphere in the country. A resolution was passed at its conference in Ranchi demanding 'Indianization' of Indian Muslims, thereby implying that the Muslims in India were alien and had not adopted Indian culture and did not respect the Hindu deities. Surprisingly, some national dailies wrote editorials in support of this demand and compared it with the demand for Indianization of the services during the British period — quite a false comparison. Also, the Hindus strongly resented the fact that Muslims were not prepared to accept any change in their personal law. When some people demanded a uniform civil code, the Muslims formed the Muslim personal law board to protect their *shariah* law according to which they could marry up to four women and could unilaterally divorce their wives.

The Muslim personal law board was formed in the late sixties and the government had to assure the Muslims that it had no intention of interfering in the Muslim personal law. This was construed by the Hindus as 'appeasement' of Muslims. To this day this remains a sore point and the BJP has begun to describe Nehruvian secularism as 'pseudo secularism' and describes its own version of secularism as 'positive secularism'.

Some more major riots took place around that time, the worst one being the Bhiwandi-Jalgaon riots of 1970 in which not less than four hundred persons died. However, the period until 1977 was a comparatively better one. The emergency declared by Indira Gandhi in 1975 continued up to 1977 when general elections were announced. During

the emergency both Hindu and Muslim communal parties were banned and there were hardly any major riots. However, in the 1977 elections the Congress was voted out of power and the Janata party, which again included the Jana Sangh and other centrist parties, came to power. The Muslims who had greatly suffered during the emergency due to excesses in enforcing family planning measures, enthusiastically voted for the Janata party. The Jana Sangh leaders, before merging with the Janata party, took an oath at Mahatma Gandhi's samadhi (memorial) that they would renounce communalism and adopt the Gandhian programme. The Muslims, tired of Congress rule, accepted the professions of the Jana Sangh leaders and voted massively for the Janata party, at least in the north, where they had suffered most. The prayer leader of the Jama masjid, Delhi, popularly known as the Shahi Imam, emerged as a strong Muslim leader who lent his support to the Janata party.

The emergence of the Shahi Imam as a leader was an unfortunate development for the Indian Muslims. Such leaders had neither the maturity nor the vision of earlier Muslim leaders like Maulana Azad or Dr. Zakir Husain, who had participated in the freedom struggle and had imbibed a secular and nationalist outlook. They not only knew thoroughly what the Muslim problems were but they were also capable of evolving a proper strategy to fight these problems. The Shahi Imam, on the other hand, had neither participated in the freedom struggle nor had any worthwhile knowledge of the complexities of the Muslims' problem, much less any experience of evolving proper strategies.

He adopted aggressive postures towards the Janata government and was soon alienated from its leaders. The Janata government also did not last long, since there was neither any ideological cohesion nor any unity of purpose among its constituents. The communal problem surfaced once again and major riots broke out in the north in places like Jamshedpur, Aligarh and Varanasi. The Muslims were once again at the receiving end. The Janata government at last fell under its own weight. The Shahi Imam too, showed political opportunism and in the ensuing elections in 1980 supported the Congress. The Muslims, alienated from the Janata government due to the outbreak of communal violence, once again supported the Congress party and Indira Gandhi was voted to power. However, she remained unsure of Muslim support and tried to woo the emerging Hindu middle castes.

There was a series of major riots, particularly in Moradabad in 1980 and in Biharsharif in 1981. It was at this time that another Muslim leader, Syed Shahabuddin, began to emerge on the political scene. He was brought into politics by the Jana Sangh leader, Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was the foreign minister during the Janata regime. Shahabuddin resigned from the Indian Foreign Service and joined the Janata party. Though well-informed, dynamic and shrewd, he was inexperienced in politics and was ambitious to emerge as the sole Muslim leader. He achieved prominence in the early eighties. He gave aggressive statements on the Biharsharif riots and also on the conversion of a few hundred Dalits to Islam in Tamil Nadu, popularly known as the Meenakshipuram conversions. This incident of conversion to Islam, was fully exploited by the communal Hindus led by the VHP, RSS and BJP to communalize the Hindu mind in India. The aggressive stance assumed by the new Muslim leadership had an adverse effect on the Hindu psyche.

It must be remembered that a minority – whether ethnic or religious – has to adopt proper strategies for its own safety and security. If it adopts an aggressive stance, even for its legitimate demands, it ends up by further antagonizing the majority community. Even legitimate demands must be couched in a well-thought-out manner. This is something which the new Muslim leadership could not properly appreciate. A proper strategy for minority demands becomes all the more necessary if the majority community, for historical reasons, is already hostile towards it. In the case of the Muslims there was one more reason: they were seen as responsible for the division of the country in 1947 – an allegation that is not entirely based on fact, but nevertheless continues to dominate the perception of the majority community.

The new Muslim leadership did not realize these intricacies and began to press their demands more aggressively. Apart from the factors affecting harmonious relationship between the Hindus and Muslims, some new factors were emerging on the political and economic scene. As pointed out earlier, the Muslims, immediately after partition in 1947, were considerably reduced in number in India (mainly due to migration) and, due to the riots at the time were too insecure to raise any demands or adopt a high profile in politics. The new generation of Muslims, despite repeated communal riots, did not feel any such con-

straint. Besides, by the early 1980s, their number had doubled (now they were eighty million as per the 1981 census) and they had gained in political significance. No political party aspiring to come to power could ignore their votes and hence the centrist parties sought to woo them and conceded their religious demands, such as preserving the Muslim personal law. The Muslims are thought to vote *en bloc* and any party securing their votes was certain to come to power. For the BJP, this was highly frustrating.

Further, by the eighties, a small section of Muslims in the north, specially in those areas which were traditional centres of Muslim artisans – like Meerut, Aligarh, Moradabad, Varanasi, Azamgarh – became prosperous by developing entrepreneurship on a small scale and this section of Muslims began to adopt a high profile style of politics which had an adverse effect on the minds of Hindus. This section of Muslims was led by the newly emergent leadership. It was this leadership which led two major movements, the Shah Bano movement and the Babri masjid movement, in an aggressive manner, which made the average Hindu hostile towards Muslims. The two movements are described briefly below.

An elderly Muslim lady, Shah Bano, had filed a case for maintenance against her husband, from whom she had separated under the secular law, i.e., the Criminal Procedure Code, section 125. She was awarded maintenance under this law by the Madhya Pradesh High Court. Her husband filed an appeal against this judgement in the Supreme Court claiming that the High Court judgement was in violation of the provisions of Muslim personal law, according to which a divorcee was entitled to maintenance only for a period of three months, (called the *iddah* period), whereas under section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (Cr.P.C.), maintenance to a divorcee is to be paid by the husband for life or until she remarries. The Supreme Court, however, upheld the lower court judgement, arguing that it was given under a common secular law, and that, as argued by the advocate of Shah Bano, it was in keeping with verse 2:241 of the Quran, that provision for divorced women must be made in kindness. The Supreme Court did not accept the plea by the advocate of the Muslim Personal Law Board that it was violative of the Muslim personal law.

The Muslim leaders protested against the Supreme Court judgement

saying that it was interference in the Muslim personal law and that the Supreme Court had no right to interpret the Quran. The liberal and progressive Muslims supported the judgements, arguing that it was a question of the rights of Muslim women and that the judgement, delivered under the common criminal law of the country, must be respected. Moreover, the liberals felt it was not violative of the Quranic spirit. However, the liberal Muslims were in a small minority. The majority was controlled by the traditional Muslim leadership. The protest movement against the Supreme Court judgement soon gathered momentum and acquired aggressive proportions. Huge numbers of Muslims came out on the streets to protest and to demand that either the Supreme Court judgement should be declared invalid or the law should be changed, exempting Muslims from the provisions of section 125 of the Cr.P.C.

This aggressive protest against the common criminal law of the country was strongly resented by the Hindus. Even those secular Hindus who normally had sympathy for the Muslims felt greatly upset at such aggressive protest. They made it an issue of women's rights. The left parties made it a question of strengthening secular forces in the country and opposed the Muslim orthodox view that a Muslim woman could not, on being divorced, claim maintenance beyond the *iddah* period. But the Muslim leadership stood its ground and put tremendous pressure on the Rajiv Gandhi government to change the law. At last, the government accepted the Muslim demand and enacted the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Law which exempted Muslims from the application of section 125 of the Cr. P.C.

Muslim leaders were jubilant that they had forced the government to change the law, thus protecting Muslim personal law. But they did not realize that this was done at a tremendous cost. The Hindus became more hostile towards Muslims, thus giving more legitimacy to the Hindu communalist parties and organizations. Much before the ink of the new law was dry, a new controversy arose. Under pressure from Hindu fundamentalists, the doors of the Babri masjid, closed for more than four decades, were thrown open for the Hindus to worship Lord Ram, whose idol was installed inside the mosque during the partition riots in 1948. Some knowledgeable sources even maintain that the Rajiv Gandhi government did a trade-off and acceded to the Muslim

fundamentalists' demand to enact the Muslim Women's Bill while conceding the Hindu fundamentalists' demand to open the Babri masjid. Whatever be the case, the fact remains that another Pandora's box was opened.

As pointed out earlier, the Hindu communalists had acquired legitimacy, thanks to the Shah Bano movement. They now sought to further consolidate their position by intensifying the Ramjanambhoomi movement. Briefly stated, the Ramjanambhoomi movement claimed that the spot where the Babri masjid stands today was the birthplace of Ram and that in the 4th century AD, a Hindu ruler, Vikramaditya, had constructed a temple commemorating Ram's birth. This temple was demolished by Babar, the Mughal ruler, when he conquered the province of Awadh and at his command a mosque was constructed there and named after him as Babri masjid.

Senior historians in India have effectively challenged this point of view and have tried to show that there is no proof that Ram was born at that spot and that any temple existed at the site of the Babri masjid. However, the historians could only have influence over a small section of liberal and progressive Hindus. Moreover, the question was no longer merely an historical one. It had acquired serious political proportions. The BJP reaped its political harvest in the 1989 elections by increasing its number of seats from two in the eighth Lok Sabha to eighty-eight in the ninth Lok Sabha. This was a windfall for it, by any account.

In this controversy, the Muslim leadership played no less an aggressive role. They organized many meetings, rallies and conferences. Syed Shahabuddin gave a call for boycotting the Republic Day celebrations on 26 January 1987. This again had an adverse impact on the Hindu mind. It was construed as a declaration of disloyalty towards the Indian republic. Of course, Syed Shahabuddin had to withdraw his boycott call under pressure from liberal and progressive Muslims, but the damage was done. During the course of this controversy, many communal riots took place in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat. The south was also deeply affected and riots broke out in some southern states like Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and also in Kerala, normally the leftist stronghold. In places like Bhagalpur in Bihar, the casualties were very high.

The tenth Lok Sabha elections in May 1991 were fought mainly on

the issue of the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid, and the more important and basic issues facing the people were pushed to the background. The BJP felt that it had a chance to come to power by playing up the Ramjanambhoomi controversy, and, if one goes by the statements of the BJP leaders, they perhaps felt this controversy would see them into power both at the Centre and in some of the northern states. Though they captured a majority of the seats in Uttar Pradesh, they could not make it at the Centre.

Thus, we see that competitive communalism proves most dangerous for the country and for the minority community. Even if minority communalism is defensive (though this is not always so, as shown by the Shah Bano controversy), it provides legitimacy for majority communalism which in turn strengthens minority communalism, and thus it becomes a vicious circle which is difficult to break. It is unfortunate that though the Indian state is secular, religion has come to acquire a prime place in Indian politics. Nothing could be a greater disaster for this multi-religious and multi-ethnic society. A modern polity cannot be based on medieval concepts and doctrines, even though religious faith – both in its individual and corporate expressions in the non-political sphere – has its own importance.

Muslim Politics — What Are The Real Issues?

Partly for religious reasons and partly due to historical reasons, Muslim politics in India tends to be centred around highly emotional issues. The first significant instance of massive Muslim participation in the freedom struggle was on the issue of the Khilafat movement, towards the end of the second decade of the twentieth century. This was perhaps the first instance of the Muslim masses participating in the political process. The articles written by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad urging Muslims to participate in the Khilafat movement in *Al-Hilal* and *Al-Balagh* were highly emotive, though of immense value for the freedom struggle. Maulana Muhammad Ali's *Comrade* in English and *Hamdard* in Urdu were no less emotive. The Khilafat movement aroused intense emotions among the Muslims throughout India. Thus one can say, without belittling the importance of the Khilafat movement, that the foundation of Muslim politics in India during the British period was laid on an emotional issue. Though Maulana Abul Kalam Azad changed the tone and content of his writings after the abolition of the Khilafat in Turkey, the tone and content of Muslim politics did not change, and remained highly emotive.

Another important dimension of Muslim politics in India is that it has been controlled either by feudal or by religious elements. There never emerged a strong bourgeoisie among Muslims in India. There was a commercial bourgeoisie along the west coast and to some extent among Tamil Muslims, but it was not only insignificant in number but also unable to decisively influence Muslim politics in India. It should also be noted that even the Pakistan movement was led by middle class elements and supported by feudal elements. The industrial bourgeoisie was

conspicuous by its absence. This was the reason why Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan, had to mobilize support for Pakistan on a highly emotive basis. Slogans like 'Islam in danger in India' had to be raised to arouse Muslim emotions.

If we want to understand the tone and content of Muslim politics in India today, we will have to see it in this historical light. There has always been a dearth of rational and pragmatic elements among the Muslim leadership. This was all the more so, in post-independence India. The elite of the Muslim society migrated to Pakistan for greener pastures and those left behind were marginal peasants in rural areas, and artisans, unorganized workers and lumpen elements in the urban centres. Few influential religious and secular leaders left behind had leadership qualities. The middle class among the Muslims who chose to remain behind was extremely weak. Today, more than forty-five years after independence, it is still comparatively weak. Only a strong educated and professional middle class would be able to provide rational and pragmatic leadership to the community.

Other developments in post-independence India kept the tone of Muslim politics over-emotional. The Nehruvian model failed to deliver the expected results and with Nehru's passing away, not only did an era end, but also the generation of sincerely committed politicians. Indira Gandhi, when she began to feel politically insecure in the early eighties, resorted, albeit subtly, to the communal card. Competitive communalism acquired a sharp edge and the decade saw the birth of problems like the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy.

Even Hindu politics acquired emotional overtones. Both the Muslim as well as Hindu leaders, engaged in a political competition, exploited religion for political ends, not only impairing communal harmony and peace but also greatly weakening secular and democratic forces in the country. The tenth Lok Sabha elections were fought with the primary focus on the mandir-masjid controversy. For a section of the Hindus and for the Muslim community, by and large, it became the principal issue of politics.

It is only when communal competitiveness is de-emphasized that we will be able to concentrate on the real issues. If the Muslim leadership can, for the time being, bring these substantive issues facing the Muslims into the limelight and begin to work for their resolution, the

communal temperature can certainly come down in the country. If the traditional leadership does not take up this challenge, a new leadership from amongst the educated Muslims will have to come forward and work for these substantive issues.

There is comparatively more poverty and illiteracy among Muslims. Illiteracy among Muslims – 70% according to one estimate – is higher than among other communities. Female illiteracy among Muslims is even higher than in other communities. The cause of illiteracy is poverty, and poverty and illiteracy in turn lead to slightly higher birth rates, which in turn becomes one of the powerful factors for spreading communalism among the majority community. The birth rate among the Muslims is not startlingly higher than that for other communities, as is made out, but only slightly higher, as demographic studies have shown. But even this slightly higher rate cannot be brought down without eradicating poverty and illiteracy.

The high-powered Gopal Singh commission, appointed by Indira Gandhi in 1981, has made a series of useful suggestions to alleviate poverty and illiteracy among the Muslims. There are forty-one districts in India with a concentration of minority population. These districts have been identified under the 15-point programme. The Gopal Singh commission has made a series of recommendations for these minority concentrated areas, and some suggestions for the promotion of education and eradication of illiteracy. It suggested that the education department in the states provide special Extension Officers for the target groups (minorities) at the block level, or at least at the district level; that ashram type schools be established in the areas inhabited by minorities; that special schools be opened by the government in predominantly Muslim localities; that special training schools be opened in the sphere of work in which they (minorities) have been traditionally occupied; that adult education and night schools be opened in regions having a concentration of minorities. The commission also recommended that polytechnics and other technical institutions should be opened in the areas predominantly inhabited by minorities. It proposed that special cells to give minorities information and guidance be created in the block districts with a sizeable concentration of minorities.

These recommendations go a long way in spreading education – general as well as technical – among Muslims. Some of these recom-

mendations are covered under the 15-point programme initiated by Indira Gandhi. While the Gopal Singh commission report is yet to be implemented, there is hardly any monitoring of proper implementation of the 15-point programme. The Muslim leaders, engrossed in playing emotional politics on the Shah Bano and Babri masjid issues, are just not bothered about these substantive issues. They have not mounted enough pressure on the government to implement the Gopal Singh commission report. The V.P. Singh government did try to set up review committees at the state and central levels to monitor implementation of the 15-point programme, but that was done just before the fall of the government. One does not know what happened to it thereafter.

The Muslim intelligentsia should realize that it is no use depending on the opportunist Muslim leadership which is not interested in the welfare of the Muslim community, and is only given to promotion of its own interests. The young Muslim intellectuals, professionals and others, should therefore come forward to spread the benefits of these suggestions and recommendations and demand implementation of the 15-point programme. Apart from taking advantage of these schemes, they should also launch drives to eradicate illiteracy from amongst the Muslims in their respective areas. They should learn from the campaigns launched in Kottayam district in Kerala and in certain areas of West Bengal to make them one hundred per cent literate. These were greatly inspiring campaigns. It should be remembered that in West Bengal a Muslim education officer had played a very vital role in eradicating illiteracy.

The Gopal Singh commission made a series of recommendations for the economic uplift of minorities, both in rural and urban areas. There are a sizeable number of artisans among Muslims in urban areas. The commission recommends that co-operative societies of weavers, and of artisans working in the hand printing textile industry sector should be organized on a large scale with adequate credit support, and that the state co-operative federations should procure all the goods produced by such co-operatives on a priority basis. The commission also stated that yarn banks should be set up by the state government, either through the state co-operative federation or corporations operating in this sector. The mills in the private sector as well as in the co-operative sector must produce a full quota of bank yarn and 80% of their produce should be

sold to these institutions at prices fixed by the committee to be set up by the government. Branches of commercial banks should be established for artisans and the flow of credit ensured for them from commercial co-operative banks. Also, the free flow of finance to the banks and the co-operative societies engaged in meeting the credit requirements of the artisans in urban areas should be ensured with the help of the National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD).

Thus we see that there are extremely useful suggestions for the economic uplift of Muslims in the Gopal Singh report. Some initiative must come from Muslim social activists to put pressure on the government to implement these schemes. This will create a great deal of confidence among the Muslim masses who feel insecure, and divert attention from highly emotive issues like the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy.

There is a dearth of social activism among the Muslims. Activists should join hands with those from other communities and adopt a strictly secular and progressive approach. This will increase mutual interaction and mutual confidence. There is also a need for initiatives for communal harmony from amongst the Muslims.

Some Muslim activists and scholars from South and South-east Asian countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand have taken the initiative to form the Asian Muslim Activists' Network (AMAN) with the intention of eradicating poverty, spreading literacy, working for women's rights and promoting inter-faith, inter-ethnic and inter-communal understanding and harmony. It is certainly a welcome sign. Let us hope that others from amongst the Muslims will follow the example of AMAN and set up more such secular and progressive groups.

Remaking of Muslim Identity in India – Fact or Myth?

Primordial identities have assumed a new significance in third world countries in general, and in south Asian countries in particular. This may seem quite surprising, but on deeper analysis does not turn out to be so. This paper seeks to look into the causes of the reassertion of Muslim identity on the part of Indian Muslims, especially since the early 1980s. It is the contention of this writer that this reassertion should be seen in both the Indian and international contexts. There are some factors which are common to all the castes and communities in India and there are some factors which are specific to each caste and communal group. Further, it must be borne in mind that this reassertion is neither a purely religious or ethnic phenomenon, as maintained by some, nor is it purely political and economic in nature, as maintained by others.

Many people think that politicians manipulate ethnic, communal and caste identities, and thus aggravate social tensions for gaining the votes of these groups, and that it is a comparatively modern phenomenon. While this is undoubtedly true, it cannot be said that there was no such manipulation in the past. In a sense, it is as old as tribal organization of human society itself. There are instances of such manipulations in our feudal past too. Power struggles among nobles in feudal courts were often waged on ethnic, communal and caste lines. Such identities were used by the elites for their mobilizatory powers during periods of struggle for political power or economic and other resources.

However, in the feudal past, it was the sword rather than the ballot which finally decided the struggles for power, and hence the use of such identities was rather limited in scope. The masses hardly came into the picture. Moreover, feudal loyalties also played a role, cutting across

caste, communal or ethnic groups. In a modern, capitalist, democratic framework there is much greater scope for manipulation of such identities. Today, in the third world countries, electoral battles are fought, more often than not, on these lines. However, when there is some issue of overwhelming importance, the identity issue may be swept aside. It happened in India in the 1977 elections, when anti-Emergency feelings were at their highest pitch and votes were cast in favour of those who opposed the Emergency and suffered, rather than on the basis of religion or caste.

In fact, it was the colonial politics of British India which introduced, for the first time, the future possibility of democratic rule in India and thus began, in a more systematic manner, manipulation of group identities. These identities were manipulated, not for winning elections — since there were no such elections then — but to bring about a division among the people preparing to unite for their anti-imperialist struggle. The British, needless to say, did register success and sowed the seeds of division which sprouted in the vivisection of India in 1947. However, it must be noted that the policy of *divide et impera* was not the sole cause of the partition of India, though it was undoubtedly one of the most important causes.

The first systematic division brought about between the Hindu and Muslim elites in late nineteenth century India was on the question of linguistic identity. The Persian language was replaced by English in the higher courts and by Urdu in the lower ones. Maharaja Kishan Prashad of Varanasi and many others began to demand that the court language be Hindi written in Devnagari, whereas Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and others insisted that it be Urdu written in the Persian script. This linguistic division unfortunately turned out to be a communal division too. Though the then ruling class and the social elite was, by and large, a composite one — Hindu and Muslim elites speaking the same language, i.e., Urdu, and being part of a more or less similar cultural milieu — cracks began to develop among them on communal lines. With a few exceptions, all those who supported the cause of Urdu were Muslims and all those who spoke for Hindi were Hindus.

It should also be borne in mind that it was not purely a question of cultural and linguistic identity; it was also a question of livelihood. The government and court jobs depended on the language used by the ad-

ministration and by the courts. After the dissolution of the Mughal empire, the social and political elites depended mainly on government jobs. This was particularly true of the Muslim elite. In northern India, the Muslim elite was solely dependent on the jobs provided by the Mughal empire. It was represented neither in industry nor in business. Finance had been its weak point. Even in the Mughal administration, the finance portfolio was generally held by the Hindus. The Muslim elite was, moreover, left behind in English education after the advent of British rule. It was Sir Syed who, as is well known, campaigned for modern education among the Muslim elite and induced them to opt for it, almost half a century after the Hindus, especially in Bengal, had taken to it. Thus the Muslim elite was much more dependent on those administrative posts where work was done in Urdu, in which it was more at home than in any other language. That was the language of the composite elite before the advent of the British in India in the last days of the Mughal empire. However, a section of the Hindu elite opposed Urdu as the language of court and administration and there emerged the first sharp cleavage among the two elites, both insisting on separate linguistic and religious identities.

As for the Hindu and Muslim masses, they were far more integrated, both culturally and linguistically, and their sense of a separate identity was far more diffused. Their religious identities were also not very sharply defined, especially in rural and semi-rural areas. Their names, modes of dressing, life-cycle rituals — as sociologists call it — were very similar. These facts have been well documented in many parts of India by anthropologists and other scholars. This is true to some extent even in contemporary India. There were, no doubt, some religious movements throughout medieval history in India for purifying Islam of all its native accretions. However, its social impact was limited. It was the *ulama* (theologians) who were mainly interested in these exercises. The socio-political elites were indifferent. Then these masses with diffused identities were hardly needed by them for their political action. The Faraizi movement of 19th century Bengal led by Dadu Miyan, was, however, different in nature. Despite being a primarily Islamic religious movement, it was aimed against the feudal lords who exploited the masses, both Hindus and Muslims, and hence both communities joined hands in attacking big landholders. This clearly shows that the exploited

masses can join hands in common action despite different religious beliefs.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, the compulsions of the socio-political elite changed. They needed the support of the masses of their respective communities to strengthen their bargaining powers. Thus the urban Muslim elite began the process of Islamizing their co-religionists. They now tried to give them not just Islamic names but also a sharp sense of Islamic identity. It did help them. These efforts were redoubled at the time of the partition movement. More political support was needed from the Muslim masses to induce in them a sharper sense of Muslim identity. The classical case is of the Meo Muslims of Rajasthan. These Muslims, traditionally, have been highly Hinduized. At one time they were converts to Islam from the Rajput community and they retained their Hindu past with tenacity. But Meos began to stress their Islamic identity during the cataclysmic period of the creation of Pakistan. Consequently, the whole state of Bharatpur, which has a sizeable population of Meo Muslims, was rocked by communal riots during these days.

It should be understood that accentuation of religious identity is not merely a religious phenomenon as is often thought, but more of a political – and not infrequently, an economic — phenomenon too. Accentuation of religious identity should be seen in the concrete political or economic context as well as in the social context. Low caste Hindus, when they acquire political or economic status, tend to adopt high caste rituals, or what sociologists call the process of sanskritization. Similarly, when low caste Muslims (like weavers, khatiks or qassabs) acquire economic status and migrate to more affluent urban areas, they adopt the customs and traditions of high status urban Muslims, give up their rural dialect and begin to speak Urdu (as far as north and central India is concerned). They give up their rural native (the *ulama* would like to term it as Hindu) traditions. To use sociological jargon, they migrate from a little tradition status to the great tradition status while moving from a low social status group to a higher one in the society. This can also be put in another way: they begin to take a scriptural view of religion rather than a folk view of religion as they used to do. It would therefore not be appropriate to describe it merely as religious fanaticism.

II

We would now like to discuss the contemporary Indian situation against this background. We would like to throw light on the sharpening sense of Islamic identity particularly in the 1980s. The first important factor in this respect is increasing awareness among different sections of Indian society about their social situation. This increased awareness has become possible on account of the broadening and deepening of democratic processes. The best example, in this respect, is that of the Dalit movement. The Dalits had, for centuries, borne the brunt of oppression by high caste Hindus without demur, and there was no question of any organized political resistance. Social inequalities were an accepted 'divine doctrine'.

However, all this changed with independence with its own 'scripture' in the form of an egalitarian constitution according equal social, legal and political status to all the citizens of India. But it took several years before a section of the Dalits, although a small one, became educated and obtained certain governmental and political positions through reservations. This began to happen in the mid-sixties. A Dalit movement then began to acquire shape and slowly gathered momentum. Today, though inequalities persist, the movement has acquired a respectable political dimension and is a force to be reckoned with. All political parties have to bargain with Dalit organizations and grudgingly concede some of their demands. A Dalit identity has taken shape and is being stressed, even aggressively in certain cases. The Mahars of Maharashtra, the most conscious section of Dalits, thanks to the efforts of Dr. Ambedkar, even embraced Buddhism and rejected Hinduism which had given them nothing but untouchability. They are now proud of their Buddhist identity.

The fate of Muslims after independence was not as bad as that of Dalits, at least in a social sense. Muslim low castes never became victims of untouchability in their own society, whatever the treatment of these Muslims at the hands of their upper caste brethren. Also, the communal holocaust of 1947 made them close their caste ranks and they tended to unify and develop a sense of solidarity. A large section of the high status urban elite migrated to Pakistan in search of greener pastures. A considerable number of those left behind were poor and educationally and economically backward. Their situation was dismal. But they too

acquired equal legal, social and political status with the enforcement of the Indian constitution. Like the Dalits, a section of the Muslims too, benefited from economic development and began to acquire higher social status. They too became aware of their political bargaining power and used it in exchange for some benefits, though these were more in the nature of emotional gratification.

As Dalits and Muslims became more aware of their bargaining strength and began to assert themselves politically, the upper caste Hindus felt uneasy at the prospect of the erosion of their monopoly over power and began to retaliate violently, more so against Muslims (to begin with) as theirs was an age-old history of communal conflict. Thus a new phase of communal violence began with the Jabalpur riot in 1961. The Jabalpur riot, like the Ahmedabad riot of 1960, was not an isolated event; it was meant to give a warning to the Muslims that they should not use the Indian political system to renegotiate their social status. The warning was severe and hard-hitting. Communal violence in post-independence India never declined, though there were comparatively quieter periods.

This not only created a greater sense of solidarity among Muslims, who otherwise are horizontally and vertically as stratified a community as any other, but also developed in them a sharper sense of religious identity. This development not only made Muslims feel more insecure, it considerably weakened among them the progressive and secular forces working for social change and reforms. The movement for reform in Muslim personal law was also considerably weakened. A progressive Muslim intellectual remarked during the discussion for social reforms among the Muslims in India after the Ahmedabad riot of 1969, "It is foolish to talk of interior decoration when the house itself is on fire."¹ The feeling of Islamic identity was now in the ascendant.

It was surely aided and abetted by the surging movement of Islamic reassertion throughout the Islamic world in the seventies, which itself began as a result of the oil revolution and the humiliating defeat of Egypt and Syria at the hands of Israel in the 1967 war. Thus the resurgence of Islam, it should be noted, was not a fortuitous religious frenzy; it was, on the contrary, a result of a long-drawn process of Western domination and the West's unqualified support to Israel. There were other factors as well which we do not propose to discuss here in this

paper. Suffice it to say that religious reassertion is not, and cannot be, a fortuitous development. It always must be seen in the socio-political and economic context. One is tempted to propose a hypothesis here: when a community is politically and economically in the ascendant, it tends to shed its religious identity, and when it is on the decline in these respects, it begins to reassert its religious identity. In a period of decline, this reassertion not only gives it a sense of superiority on an idealistic plane over its external foes, it also provides it with much needed unity and solidarity to fight for survival, and perhaps for re-ascendancy too, as happened in the case of Iran.

Muslims saw that the Arab factor proved to be a liability for them, as it led to a much greater assertion of Hindu identity and consequent insecurity for them. But, and this is a crucial aspect of the problem, there was no secular alternative for them and they could think of only a stronger assertion of religious identity. This increased assertion was reflected in all its intensity during the Shah Bano movement. The agitation, launched hesitatingly by the Muslim leadership unsure of popular response, soon achieved unprecedented proportions. So massive was the response that Maulana Abul Hasan Nadvi, the noted theologian and chairman of the Muslim Personal Law Board, compared it to the Khilafat agitation of the early twenties launched by Muslims under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Little did he know that it was communalizing the Hindu mind and that soon the Muslims would have to pay the price for it.

The central government led by Rajiv Gandhi then buckled under this pressure and enacted the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill. This angered most of the Hindus; even secular Hindus deeply resented this compromise with the secular laws of the country under pressure from Muslim fundamentalists. Rajiv Gandhi, in order to placate the Hindu fundamentalists, agreed to throw open the doors of the Babri masjid for the Hindus to worship. These doors had been locked under the previous court order; with the opening of these doors, a new problem, much more severe in intensity, burst upon the Indian communal scene and, in a way, contributed not insignificantly to bringing down the government of Rajiv Gandhi after three years.

The Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy communalized Indian politics to an extent no issue had done, since the partition

period. Initially, the Muslim leaders who formed the Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC), took quite an aggressive attitude on the issue. However, as usual, it was more than matched by the aggressive assertion of Hindu communalism led chiefly by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). The BJP fought the 1989 general elections chiefly on this issue and multiplied its seats in the Lok Sabha from two to eighty-eight, though anti-Congressism and weakness of the Janata Dal also played no mean role. Thus political developments and various socio-political movements, as well as competitive power politics have been playing a great role in the assertion of religious identity by both the principal communities of India.

The developments in the Islamic world, notably those of West Asia, do influence the process of Muslim identity formation in India; but, and this is worth stressing, not to the extent concrete political developments and pressures generated within India do. When important developments take place in the Islamic world, like that of the Islamic revolution in Iran, the urban Muslim elite or educated middle classes are more influenced than the poor rural and urban masses. Even an important development like that of the Iranian Islamic revolution, left them cold, by and large. These rural and urban masses are affected more by developments at home, as it is they who bear the main brunt if there is a greater degree of communalization. It is the Muslim masses who suffer most whenever any communal riot breaks out and their otherwise diffused identity acquires greater sharpness as a Muslim identity. We have already pointed out the case of the Meo Muslim identity acquiring a much greater degree of Islamicness during the partition period.

As it is only a few castes and religious communities that have monopolized power historically, the deepening of the process of democratization brings about greater assertion of religious identities in other communities, for it is the polarization around these religious identities which can ensure better participation in the political process. The assertion of religious identity in the process of democratization, or even modernization for that matter, should not be seen only as religious fanaticism or fundamentalism; it should also be seen as the best available way for these deprived communities in a backward society to realize a greater share in power, government jobs and economic resources. The

assertion of the Sikh identity, the Dalit identity and the Muslim identity should be seen, at one level, in this perspective. However, the majority community, in order to save its seemingly collapsing world of privileges, uses the religious idiom in political discourse with much greater assertion and thus the whole political discourse tends to get communalized and religious identity begins to play a politically crucial role, both for the majority and minority communities.

Thus, it would be seen that the struggle for *mandir* and *masjid* is nothing but a struggle for greater power between Hindus and Muslims. These religious places have become an integral part of the political discourse in contemporary India. The Hindu identity has finally come in conflict with the Muslim identity. Muslim identity is seen not only as hateful and alien, but as something to be dominated and ruled and made politically impotent. Greater assertion of Muslim identity in the political process is projected as appeasement of minorities. Here, there is a psychological and religious dimension which should not be lost sight of. Islam is seen as an alien religion which has neither sprung from the Hindu fold nor is capable of being assimilated into it. Sikhism and Buddhism, on the other hand, are seen as offshoots of Hinduism and well integrated into the Hindu ethos. Thus, assertion of the Sikh or Buddhist (Dalit) identities is not regarded with the same degree of hostility and anger, even though the Hindu identity has to yield to them.

The so-called mainstream upper caste Hindus talk of Indianizing Muslims and Muslims resist this by Islamizing themselves. This trend is becoming popular to some extent, even in the rural areas where Muslims are, as pointed out earlier, much more integrated with the local Hindu milieu and have a rather diffused identity. Also, as pointed out above, communal riots are fast spreading to rural areas — something which did not happen earlier — and rural Muslims are also feeling acutely insecure and are psychologically strengthening their defences by sharpening their Muslim identity. Thus, it would be seen that, despite the ever increasing aggressiveness in the assertion of the Hindu identity, the Muslim identity cannot be vanquished. Hindus will have to realize, sooner or later, that the best way to keep the Muslim identity in check is to seek accommodation with it in a spirit of co-operation and democratic pluralism — something that the Sufi and Bhakti saints did during the medieval ages.

The Muslims in India had taken a great deal of beating in the communal riots throughout the sixties and were in a highly depressed mood. The break-up of Pakistan in the early seventies gave them a further psychological jolt. Mentally it hit them hard, as it was a setback to Islamic solidarity. The Muslims of West Pakistan could not live in unity with the Muslims of East Pakistan. Language proved more decisive than religion as a cementing force. It was in this state of mental unease that there appeared on the political horizon of West Asia what has generally been called Islamic fundamentalism. It gave Indian Muslims the much needed sense of Islamic solidarity and proved once again that religion can prevail over language and other empirical factors. The break-up of Pakistan was a temporary setback to religious solidarity. Islam made them proud once again.

This also led to increased political weightage of Muslims in Indian politics, as the Arab factor became internationally more assertive. It was assumed that Hindus, and the Indian state dominated by them, would be more hesitant in perpetrating communal violence on Muslims for fear of adverse consequences in the Arab world. However, it soon became apparent that the assumption was untenable. The Arab connection became a liability in certain cases. The Moradabad riots of August 1980 (the violence broke out during the Idd prayer) were ascribed to Arab money (the 'foreign hand' theory propounded by Girilal Jain, the then Editor of *The Times of India* in his writings in the paper in August 1990). It was a political necessity for Hindu communalists. They feared the increased presence of Muslims in Indian politics due to the Arab connection, and began to give it a different turn to create a fear psychosis among the Hindus. Thus the forces of retaliation against Muslims were sought to be legitimized.

Technological inventions — television, video and audio cassettes, microphones and similar other equipments — are becoming handy for religious leaders too. All religious places have been equipped with microphones and loudspeakers and, if need be, audio-cassettes are also used for reaching a wider audience. This is happening in all religious communities. However, propaganda was mounted that Muslims were doing it with much greater religious zeal and this was taken to be a sign of increased Islamic fundamentalism and communal aggressiveness. Also, the opening of new madrasas and other religious centres with the

help of money brought from Arab countries was cited as an example of increasing religious fanaticism among the Muslims. Thus an Arab factor was discovered in the making of the Muslim identity in India.

It was during this period that the famous incident of conversion of a few Harijan families occurred in Meenakshipuram in Tamil Nadu. Of course, there were local factors that induced these Dalit families to embrace Islam — caste oppression and humiliation, as brought out by subsequent field inquiries — but the press ascribed it once again to the petro-dollar. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad used this to arouse Hindu sentiments against Muslims and presented it before them as positive proof of the role of Islamic fundamentalism in India — “soon they will convert most of the Dalits to Islam and create an Islamic state if the Hindus do not unite to fight back.” Indira Gandhi also used this, very subtly of course, for winning over Hindu votes. Her Muslim vote-bank had been considerably weakened and she was looking for an alternative.

Indian Muslims In A Contemporary Multi-religious Society

India is a multi-religious society and it has been so all through its known history. Pluralism has been a strength of Indian society rather than a weakness. India has always prided itself on being a pluralistic society. It is also a fact that Hinduism has been a non-doctrinaire, non-formalistic, umbrella religion. Even communal Hindus keep on emphasizing its non-doctrinaire nature. We will say more about this in the course of the paper. Hinduism absorbed various Indian local cults, including animalistic ones, over a period of time. Even protest movements which sprung from its fold, like Jainism and Buddhism, remained part of the Hindu fold. These protestant religions were more doctrinaire than their mother religion, Hinduism.

There are some other reasons why no sharp conflict developed between Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism though their history has not been completely free of struggles. Conflict did arise between these religions when certain rulers embraced these protestant religions. However, Hinduism soon established its supremacy and having triumphed, accommodated these religions, thus putting an end to the conflict eventually. Buddha and Mahavir were accepted as rishis (seers).

However, as far as Islam was concerned, the situation was different. Firstly, Islam was a non-native religion which originated in Arabia. Secondly, as far as north India was concerned, it came along with the Muslim conquerors, though the Sufi saints also accompanied them. So it was seen as a religion of aggressors. Thirdly, and this is also important, Islam was highly doctrinaire in nature unlike Hinduism which was a non-doctrinaire religion. In the south, it must also be noted, Islam did not enter as a conquerors' religion. It came through the Malabar coast as

a religion of traders and thus spread in that region peacefully.

As far as contemporary India is concerned, these are not merely distant historical facts; they are repeatedly invoked by communalists in the present conflict between Hindus and Muslims. The current controversy surrounding the Babri masjid-Ramjanambhoomi issue, which has caused a lot of bloodshed, is proof, if any proof is needed, that the past is still relevant to the present conflict between these two principal communities. The past is glorified by both the communities and both try to establish supremacy over the other and come into sharp conflict with each other. No one tries to understand past history dispassionately, except a few committed historians. History is sought to be interpreted through ideological blinkers. History, in fact, has become the most powerful weapon in the hands of communalists today. The November 1989 parliamentary elections were practically fought on the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid issue. History's potential should therefore not be underrated, as far as conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India is concerned.

II

Some light must be thrown on the conflict which developed between these communities during the freedom struggle. Muslims, like any other community, were divided in their approach towards the British rulers. Sir Syed and others belonging to the Muslim elite wanted to buy peace with the British rulers so that they could concentrate on education and thus consolidate their position in the elite British civil and other services. The masses led by the *ulama* were impatient with the British rulers and wanted to throw them out, by joining hands with the Hindus if necessary. Thus, when the Indian National Congress was formed in 1885, Sir Syed urged the Muslims to keep away from it while the *ulama*, led by Maulana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, called upon them to join the Congress and fight shoulder to shoulder with their Hindu brethren to drive out the British from the country.

It is interesting to note that this remained the pattern almost throughout the freedom struggle. The *ulama*, who formed an organization called the Jamiat al-Ulama, always stood by the Congress and Indian nationalism, while the Muslim elite, led by Jinnah and others, developed a separatist trend in Indian politics which culminated in the formation of Pakistan. The Hindu and Muslim elites could not agree on

the division of power among themselves and thus decided to separate. This separatism cost those Muslims who stayed back in India dearly, as they were held equally guilty in the average Hindu mind for the division of their motherland. The *ulama* had rightly argued that partition was in the interest neither of Islam nor of the Muslims, for Islam in the sub-continent would be weakened by division and those Muslims who remained behind would not only suffer but remain weak. And this is precisely what happened. An outstanding Muslim leader, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, had repeatedly warned Indian Muslims of the repercussions of partition, and he was proved right.

The *ulama* also felt that there was nothing in Islam which went against composite nationalism. They cited the example of the Holy Prophet, who, on migration to Madina, entered into an alliance with the Jews and pagans and formed a composite society. This *muahidah* (agreement) was adhered to by the Prophet until the Jews betrayed it. Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, a noted leader of the Jamiat al-Ulama, Ulama, argued that *qaum* (nation) is a territorial concept and *millat* or *ummah* (religious community of Muslims) is a religious concept. One should not confuse one with the other. He also argued that Muslims could share territory as well as nationality with non-Muslims, and that there was nothing unIslamic about it. Maulana Madani also cited Quranic verses to show that Kafirs and Muslims in the Quran belong to the same territorial area.

These *ulama* also argued that the Congress had assured Muslims that they would be free to practise Islam in free India and that no change would be made in any Islamic law unless the Muslims themselves consented to it. The *shariah* law itself makes a distinction between the *harbi* (warmongering) Kafirs and non-*harbi* Kafirs. Muslims can fight only with the *harbi* Kafirs but should live in peace with the non-*harbi* ones. Since the Congress had assured Muslims of non-interference in their religion, it was the duty of the Muslims to live in peace with it and with those people whom it represented.

However, the real fight was not about religion, but about a share in power between the Hindu and Muslim elite. Since no formula satisfactory to either side could be found, India was divided, with the partition leaving its own bitter legacy behind. Jinnah was highly westernized and was hardly bothered about theological positions. His only concern

was the Muslim share in power in independent India. The educated Muslim middle classes, who were also concerned with their share in power, followed Jinnah rather than the Muslim theologians. The artisans, the weavers and the other weaker sections of the community were rather sceptical about the intentions of the Muslim League which had an upper class urban character.

III

However, we are more concerned here with contemporary India and its pluralist social and political structure. Even today, Muslims constitute a significant section of Indian society. According to the census of 1981, Muslims in India constitute 11.8% of the population. In about twenty districts they constitute a majority, including the state of Kashmir, which itself is an arena of violent conflict today. Before partition, Muslims made up more than 25 per cent of the population. Thus, even after partition Muslims are a principal minority today.

The Indian National Congress was fully aware of the pluralistic character of Indian society at the time of its formation, and hence it adopted secularism as a sheet anchor of its political policy. Right from the beginning, it had held out an assurance to the Muslims that their religious sensibilities would be respected. This assurance was accepted by a large section of Muslims even at that time. The Muslims in India after partition, naturally accepted it in all good faith, as this alone could guarantee their full participation in the political processes in independent India. For Jawaharlal Nehru, who headed the government of India after partition, secularism was a matter of creed. He was personally agnostic and passionately committed to the concept of a secular polity. In his mid-twenties he came under the influence of the views of Bertrand Russell and Marxism, and became a severe critic of organized institutionalized religion.¹

Nehru, who deeply influenced the evolution of a secular polity in India, was of the opinion that "it was the prime responsibility of the Hindus to make the large number of Muslims in India feel at home and not see themselves as second-class citizens existing on sufferance."² He evolved a criterion for the success of secularism. The test of success, Nehru felt, is not what the majority community thinks but how the minority community feels.³ However, this was only Nehru's idealistic way of thinking. There were a great many problems in practising it.

Nehru's personal commitment to secularism was not shared by all his party colleagues, much less by the administration and the law enforcing agencies. Thus, we see that although Nehru stood firmly for secularism, a series of major communal riots took place in the early sixties, beginning with the major communal holocaust in Jabalpur in 1962.⁴

It is also interesting to throw some light on the concept of secularism in a backward and religiously pluralistic society like that of India. There is, of course, a small section which takes it literally in the western sense of the term, which implies total indifference towards religion, at least in public matters. According to this concept, the state should have nothing to do with religion, neither of the majority nor of the minority. However desirable this notion may be, functionally, it is difficult to practise for an Indian state. Even during Nehru's time, the Indian state, though it came nearest to secularism, could not strictly enforce this concept.

Sociologically speaking, the Indian way of life is less individualistic and more communitarian. It is this communitarian way of life which creates serious problems for Indian secularism and religious pluralism. Every Indian citizen, though she or he enjoys constitutional rights as an individual, both socially as well as politically behaves as a member of some caste or community. No major social or political decision can be taken by individuals as individuals, such decisions are taken by members of some caste, community or collectivity. It is no wonder then that politicians aspiring for votes have to make appeals on the basis of these castes and communities. It is very difficult for any politician, however committed to the concept of secularism, to ignore this elementary fact of life. Each political party has, therefore, to evolve its own strategy in this regard.

These political parties, and especially those which aspire to form the government either at the state or at the central level, have to appeal to the Muslims as a community, inasmuch as they also have to appeal to certain Hindu castes, especially the scheduled castes and tribes commonly known as Dalits. However, the Hindu communal parties who aspire to get the Hindu votes (which invariably means the upper caste Hindus), denounce such appeals to Muslims as their appeasement. The parties aspiring for Muslim votes have to concede some religious demands of the Muslims, like non-interference in their personal law. According to the Muslim personal law as applicable to India, any

Muslim can take up to four wives and can divorce his wife at his will without reference to any court of law. Muslims defend this as their *shariah* law and resent any change or regulation of the law. Every ruling party extends an assurance to Muslims not to interfere in the *shariah* law which is considered divine in origin.

The Hindu communalists resent this non-interference in Muslim personal law most, and demand scrapping it and replacing it with a common civil code. They also denounce this non-interference in *shariah* law, as appeasement of Muslims. Muslims, on the other hand, argue that the Indian constitution has guaranteed freedom of religion in article 25 (1): "subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion."⁵

Muslims argue that the *shariah* law is part of their religion and religious identity and hence cannot be allowed to be tampered with. It should also be noted that it is not only the Hindu communalists who demand abolition of Muslim personal law but also the secularists and rationalists. They too argue, though from a different point of view, that there should be no place for different personal laws in a secular and democratic India. Only a common civil law should govern all Indian citizens. Apart from the merit of this demand, what is of interest to us here is that Muslims refuse to agree to any change and would vote collectively against any government which interferes in or tampers with the Muslim personal law.

This can be best illustrated by the Shah Bano movement, which began with the deliverance of a judgement by the Supreme Court in respect to maintenance of a Muslim divorcee.⁶ The Muslims considered this judgement to be a gross interference in the Muslim personal law and began to agitate against it. It soon developed into a massive movement and lakhs of Muslims poured out onto the streets to protest against the judgement.⁷ It became embarrassing for the government and it agreed to enact a law exempting the Muslims from application of the Criminal Procedure Code (section 125), under which a divorcee was entitled to get maintenance until she remarried or died. Thus, the government of India enacted a law called The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986.⁸ With the enactment of this bill, the ferment among Muslims died down.

However, the government had now to face the wrath of the Hindus. In a religiously pluralistic society, any concession given to one religious community evokes protest from the other religious community. Here, not only the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), but also the progressive and secular elements condemned the enactment of the above law. The government could not afford to alienate the majority community either. It quietly connived at opening the doors of the Babri masjid at Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, which the Hindus claimed to be the birthplace of Lord Ram, and which they believed the Muslim king Babar had converted into a mosque. With the opening of the doors of the Babri masjid a new, fierce controversy started between the Hindus and Muslims.⁹

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) on the one hand, and the Muslim leaders – particularly the Shahi Iman and Syed Shahabuddin – on the other, started an aggressive campaign on this question. The VHP demanded that they be allowed to construct a temple in commemoration of Lord Ram at the site of the Babri masjid, thus avenging the ‘insult’ heaped on Hindus by a Muslim invader. The Muslim leaders, on the other hand, launched a movement to save the mosque. A huge rally was held jointly by the Muslims in Delhi in March 1987. This rally further inflamed the sentiments of the majority community and there prevailed in those days a high degree of communal tension in the whole of north, central and western India. As a consequence of this, serious riots between Hindus and Muslims broke out in the Delhi-Meerut area on 18 May 1987, in which more than 500 people lost their lives.¹⁰ Initially, the Muslims were aggressive in Meerut, but after a few hours the Hindu mobs took over under the protection of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC).¹¹ The PAC fired at innocent civilians and carted away many Muslim youths from Hashimpura locality in a truck, killed them and threw their bodies into a nearby canal.

Amnesty International normally does not take up investigations of communal violence in India as it is thought to be a matter between religious communities and not a matter of violation of rights of the people at the hands of the state. But in the case of the Meerut riots, Amnesty, for the first time, took up the case of the killing of innocent civilians at the hands of the state organ. It said in its report that “there was strong evidence that north Indian provincial police had deliberately killed dozens of unarmed civilians and caused dozens more to ‘disappear’

in the state of Uttar Pradesh earlier this year." It further said, "The PAC is alleged to have disposed of some of the bodies of those killed by throwing them into rivers and canals. Other bodies are said to have been burned. At least eighty bodies have been recovered altogether. Amnesty International says it has the names of 29 victims known to have been killed and of another 32 listed as 'disappeared'. All were Muslims."¹²

We have quoted from Amnesty International to show how serious the rioting was and how the state organs were involved in killing innocent civilians. This shows the depth of feeling among Hindus on the question of Ramjanambhoomi. Our interviews with those detained by the police in Meerut showed that the police had emotionally identified themselves with the 'Hindu cause'. They kicked the detainees inside the jail and said "take your Babri masjid". The sentiments on both sides were running very high and relations between the two communities were at their lowest ebb.

In a way, this has been the result of the manipulations of religious communities by political parties in a religiously pluralistic society. It must be noted that the democratic polity is essentially a competitive polity and in a backward, plural society this competition takes place often on religious lines. With the deepening of the democratic processes, every religious community has become quite conscious of its voting power and its importance to the political system and tries to use it to the maximum advantage. Needless to say, both the communities compete with each other in asserting their importance, naturally leading to competitive aggressiveness. This competitive aggressiveness is displayed through religious symbols like the Shah Bano issue or the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy. The symbols by themselves are not as important as the pent-up feelings on the more secular issues behind them.

The Muslim aggressiveness on the Shah Bano issue was quite understandable. They had suffered greatly in many major communal riots which began with Moradabad in 1980 as if in a new phase of communal violence. A series of riots took place in Biharsharif (1981), Meerut and Baroda (1983), Neli (1983),¹³ Bombay-Bhiwandi (1984),¹⁴ Ahmedabad (1985-86), Meerut (1987) and several other places. In these riots it was mainly the Muslims who suffered due to the partial

behaviour of the police. In addition, due to aggressive propaganda by the Hindu communal elements they felt that their identity was threatened and that they must assert it equally aggressively, to pressurize the government. Also, on the whole, their economic situation was far from enviable.

"It is possible to debate causes of the economic decline of the Muslims," says Mushirul Hasan, "but there is no denying that they have been at the lowest rung of the ladder in terms of the basic categories of socio-economic indicators of development."¹⁵ In modern industry and trade, except for isolated instances, they have not owned large-scale industry or businesses and are generally found lacking in high entrepreneurial traits. There is not a single Muslim house among the fifty largest industrial groups in the country, while at the lower end of the scale, most Muslims are poor and backward.¹⁶ And according to *Muslim India*, there are only four units owned by Muslim industrialists, in a group of 2,832 industrial houses owned by large corporate units, each with sales of Rs. 50 million and above.¹⁷

Vir Sanghvi points out that the benefits of various government schemes, aimed at improving the lot of the weaker sections, have not accrued to Muslims. Of the houses allotted by state governments to lower and middle income groups, only 2.86 per cent went to them. Of the licences issued for fair price shops, only 6.9 per cent were awarded to Muslims. Finally, Muslims account for only 0.25 per cent of the tangible benefits extended to artisans by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission.¹⁸

The co-operative sectors have fared no better. Of the loans advanced by financial institutions only 3 per cent of the amounts between Rs. 50,000 and Rs.1,00,000 went to Muslims. Of those between Rs.1,00,000 and Rs.2,00,000, less than 2 per cent was received by Muslims. And of those between Rs. 2,00,000 and Rs. 10,00,000, the figure was under 1 per cent.¹⁹ As for the private sector, the situation is still worse. The Muslim employment in the higher echelons is less than 2 per cent, and almost absent in some industries.²⁰

At the lower rungs of the ladder the situation is no better. In a survey of 18 top private sector industries conducted by the Institute of Islamic Studies, Bombay, it was found that on the shop-floor level there were no more than 4 per cent Muslims although in Bombay their population is nearly 15 per cent.

Thus we see that the Muslims' economic situation is quite dismal on the whole. Wherever they have made some progress locally on a small scale, like in Benaras, Azamgarh, Meerut, Moradabad, Bhiwandi, Malegaon, Hyderabad, they face the constant threat of communal violence. It has been observed by this writer that communal violence has been taking place where Muslims have been successful to some extent in competing either politically or economically; in the centres named above, Muslims have a substantial presence to offer economic competition.²¹

Thus it can be seen that Muslims have been feeling suffocated for a number of years and occasionally their suffocation comes out through an aggressive religious movement like the Shah Bano movement or the Babri masjid movement. These movements should not therefore be seen in isolation from the wider context of the Muslim situation in India.

However, this does not mean that religious assertion is solely due to the material situation of Muslims in the country. There are a number of other factors that are also responsible for this assertion. We may refer to the political assertion of Islam in Iran and the rise of Islamic movements in other parts of the Islamic world, generally referred to as Islamic fundamentalism (although it is not a very precise term as far as Islam is concerned). A section of the Muslim leadership in India has acquired a vested interest in an aggressive assertion of Islam and Islamic identity. Also, Muslim society had been divided along caste lines (even-) though there is no concept of untouchability among these castes, there is no rigidity as with the Hindu caste system, and caste bonds among Indian Muslims are dissolving unlike in Hindusim in which they are becoming more rigid). In the past and now lower castes like Ansaris and Qureshis have acquired a measure of economic affluence in middle-sized cities and towns and they need in greater measure their Islamic identity and religious assertion for social legitimation vis-a-vis Muslims of traditionally high status.²² In addition, there is a large percentage of Muslim artisans in urban areas. The artisan class as such is generally more formally religious than other classes. Also, their oppressive and exploitative conditions, and their increasing anonymity in big growing cities, make them even more religiously oriented. This religiosity of lower middle class Muslims is exploited by the political leadership.

It would be interesting to throw some light on the increasing reli-

gious militancy among Hindus also. The upper caste Hindus are in a much better economic position. The middle trading castes among them have used their traditional entrepreneurial skill to become big industrialists who virtually control the Indian economy today. The top caste (Brahmins) control key government posts and dominate the cultural and educational scene. Thus it is the upper caste Hindus who have taken maximum benefit of modernization and economic change in the country. On the face of it, they should have been religiously more sober and socially and politically more confident. But what we witness, especially in the last decade since the early eighties, is an attempt on their part to use religious militancy to subdue other minorities, especially the Muslims and low caste Hindus, particularly the Dalits. Thus a situation of outright confrontation between Hindus and Muslims has developed and often results in an outburst of communal violence. Hindu militancy has found its expression in the Ramjanambhoomi issue. Thus a senior *Times of India* staffer says, "The debate (on Ramjanambhoomi) so far has been marked by an astounding level of hysteria. Rank communalists, trumped-up scholars and pure philistines have joined hands to prove that Hindus have every right to demolish the Babri Masjid which stands where a temple to Ram once stood in Ayodhya, his birth-place, and indeed that the laying of the foundation stone of the temple in the town on November 9 is not only an announcement by the Hindus that they will not tolerate discrimination but constitutes a revolutionary act which will rejuvenate the Indian nation."²³

Further on he says, "...the VHP campaign has drawn on the most base, vile and coarse elements of Hindu society, and represents the ugliest face of the semi-literate middle class Hindu in search of an identity. How else can one explain the preponderance of ash-covered sadhus in the decisions (going back to the Kumbh Mela this year) pertaining to the Ram temple, in particular *Shilanyas*?... How is one to understand the large presence at the Ayodhya ceremony of Bajrang Dal volunteers, some of them dressed (if that is the word) like monkeys and unable to rise above the arboreal level of consciousness."²⁴

No wonder then that this confrontational posture resulted in a series of communal riots in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other states in October-November 1989 when throughout north, central and western India consecrated brick processions were taken out by the VHP in collabora-

tion with the BJP and the RSS. The worst kind of violence broke out at Bhagalpur, where 1,000 persons, among whom an overwhelming majority were Muslims, perished. The communal violence at Bhagalpur was reminiscent of the partition riots in 1947. One wonders how low human beings can sink in religious bigotry and communal animosity.²⁵

The BJP exploited this issue to the maximum and increased its strength in the Lok Sabha in the November 1989 elections from two to eighty-eight. In a multi-religious society in a backward country, religious confrontation between two communities can assume very dangerous proportions. Democratic competition, in a socially and economically backward society, can often degenerate, as the Indian case shows, to competitive communal militancy resulting in manslaughter. In Pakistan too, ethnic pluralism has resulted in a similar situation. Perhaps it is a degree worse.

During the short period when the Janata Dal was in power at the Centre, communal confrontations did not abate. More than twelve major riots took place in various parts of India during the first half of 1990.²⁶ Not only does the confrontation between the two communities continue on the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid issue, the Kashmir question has also cropped up. The Kashmir question owes its genesis, at least partly, to communal confrontation outside the Kashmir valley. It has seriously eroded the faith of the Kashmiri people in Indian secularism. The people of Kashmir had decided to throw their lot with India when their region was attacked by Pakistani militia in 1947 in the belief that India was secular and democratic, and that their *Kashmiriyat* and *Islamiyat* (their Kashmiri and Islamic identity) would be quite safe.

It should be remembered that in a society characterized by religious pluralism, peace and harmony can be ensured only within the framework of democratic secularism. It is only within this framework that respect for pluralism is possible. D.E. Smith defines the secular state as "a state which guarantees individual and corporate freedom of religion, deals with the individual as a citizen irrespective of his religion, is not constitutionally connected to a particular religion nor does it seek either to promote or interfere with religion."²⁷

The Indian constitution responds well to the definition of a secular state, or perhaps D.E. Smith has defined the secular state keeping the Indian constitution in view. But what is unfortunate is that successive

Indian governments have, in their eagerness to win or retain political power, tampered with this secular spirit of the Indian constitution. Whatever the political compulsions, such tampering with secular values will weaken the unity of the people of India and the unity of the country. Secularism must be strengthened to preserve Indian pluralism and pluralism must be strengthened to consolidate secularism.

PART 3

The Ramjanambhoomi Issue and Communal Violence

Historical Background to the Babri Masjid – Ramjanambhoomi Controversy

The Babri masjid-Ramjanambhoomi controversy is one of the major controversies which has been exploited politically in post-independence India. It was, undoubtedly, the biggest controversy after the Shah Bano case, and attracted maximum media attention in our country in the mid-and late eighties. In a way — and this will be elaborated later — both controversies were linked. Had the controversial Muslim Women's Bill not been passed in early 1986, the Ramjanambhoomi controversy would not have arisen.

What was worse was the cynical exploitation of the issue for electoral gains, not only by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Shiv Sena and other communal outfits but also by the most important secular party of India, the Congress, which had the proud record of fighting for India's freedom. These are the hazards of parliamentary elections. Every party competes with the other parties to capture the popular imagination so as to encash it as votes. It can be said without any fear of contradiction that the rise and spread of Hindu and Muslim fundamentalism and communalism since the early eighties was due not to religion or religious issues, but primarily for party or group politics. Religion was, at best, used as an instrument. Both the controversies, the Shah Bano and the Babri masjid–Ramjanambhoomi issues, must be seen against this political background.

II

The Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy is not of recent origin. It originated, thanks to the British policy of 'divide and rule', in the nineteenth century — to be more precise, it originated around 1855, before the 1857 war of independence. Before we deal with this aspect it

would be appropriate if we throw some light on the existence or otherwise of Ramjanamsthan on the site of the Babri masjid today. To answer the question whether the Ramjanamsthan was where the mosque is today, depends on ancient history and the availability of records to that effect.

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

The first and most important question is the location of Ayodhya. Did Ayodhya exist when Ram was supposedly born? When was Lord Ram born? We get entangled in myths. Sukumar Sen in his *Origin and Development of Rama Legend* says that the events of the Ramayana in the *Treta Yuga* are said to have taken place nine lakh years ago. Dr. Shukla holds that the time is calculated on the basis of the Ikshvakus' genealogy as given in the Puranas. If so, Ram ought to have lived about four thousand years ago (i.e., between 2350 and 1950 BC).¹ If Ram lived four thousand years ago, did Ayodhya exist then? How could this be established? The best evidence seems to be provided by archaeological excavations.

The evidence provided by archaeological excavations is not very encouraging as far as the existence of Ayodhya around that period is concerned. The Department of Ancient Indian History, Culture and Archaeology at the Benaras Hindu University, under Professor A.K. Narain, assisted by T.N.Roy and Dr. Puroshottam Singh, conducted excavations at Ayodhya. According to the results, it would seem reasonable to ascribe the first occupation of the janambhoomi area to *circa* seventh century BC.²

A noted scholar, Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji, has maintained

that “the Ramayana is basically a literary creation by some single poet who has been named Valmiki. There is evidently no historical core below the surface. No scholar of Indian history now thinks that Rama, the hero of Ramayana was a historical person who can be relegated to a particular period of time.”³ The eminent historians of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, have also reached a similar conclusion. In a pamphlet brought out on the controversy, they write: (i) There is no archaeological evidence to show that at this early time the region around present day Ayodhya was inhabited. The earliest possible date for settlements at the site are of about the eighth century BC. The archaeological remains indicate a fairly simple material life, more primitive than what is described in the Valmiki Ramayana. (ii) In the Ramayana, there are frequent references to places and buildings on a large scale in an urban setting. Such descriptions of an urban complex are not sustained by the archeological evidence of the eighth century BC. (iii) There is also a controversy over the location of Ayodhya. Early Buddhist texts refer to Shravasti and Saketa, not Ayodhya, as the major cities of Kosala. There are a few references to an Ayodhya, but this is said to be located on the Ganges, not on the river Sarayu, which is the site of present-day Ayodhya. (iv) In the fifth century AD, the town of Saketa was renamed Ayodhya by the Gupta king, Skanda Gupta, who moved his residence there. Thus what may have been the fictional Ayodhya of the epic poem was identified with Saketa quite late. This does not necessarily suggest that the Gupta king was a *bhakta* of Ram. In bestowing the name of Ayodhya on Saketa he was trying to gain prestige for himself by drawing on the tradition of the Suryavamsi kings, a lineage to which Ram is said to have belonged.⁴

Thus, it is clear that nobody could be certain about the historicity of Ram, the existence of Ayodhya in 4000 BC, the period in which Lord Ram is supposed to have lived according to the legend and also about the location of Ayodhya or the janamsthan in Ayodhya. How did the disputes about the janamsthan arise? It seems to have been of later origin. It would not be wrong to suggest that it actually arose during the British period when ‘coloured’ history began to be written. Had Babar demolished the Ramjanamsthan temple, it would have found mention either in *Tuzk-i-Babri* (The Memoirs of Babar) or in some other contemporary source. In fact, Babar had no reason not to mention the demo-

lition of the Ramjanamsthan temple. If he had ordered it for religious merit he should have felt proud to mention it, as he did not hesitate to mention that he had ordered the mutilation of nude Jain idols in Urwah Valley, near Gwalior, since he considered them to be obscene. Of course, his order did not extend to those idols which were not nude. When he could boast of mutilating these nude Jain idols why should he not have mentioned the demolition of the Ramjanamsthan temple? Secondly, even Babar's contemporary sources do not mention anything about it. Tulsidas, who wrote *Ramcharitmanas* in Hindi, and who was a great *bhakta* of Ram did not mention such an event, though he lived just a quarter of a century after Babar. If Babar or any of his court officials had demolished the Ram temple, it could not have gone unnoticed by his Hindu contemporaries.

Ram Gopal Pande's *Ramjanambhoomi ka Romanchkari Itihas* mentions that during Babar's rule Hindus attacked the Babri masjid four times; during Humayun's reign ten times; during Akbar's twenty times; during Aurangzeb's three times; during the British period thirty-one times; and during the reign of the Nawab of Oudh eight times, to recover the site of the Ram temple. However, the author does not mention any reliable contemporary sources to corroborate his claim. Even *Ain-e-Akbari* is silent on this issue. So such a claim cannot be taken seriously.

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

The first major clash between Hindus and Muslims on the issue of the Babri masjid took place in 1855. It has been reported in Mirza Jan's *Hadigah al-Shuhade* which was published in 1956. Though his account may be coloured, it chronicles this major clash between the two communities. According to him, the Hindus captured Masjid Fidai Khan and demolished it, took over the mosque inside the fort and also razed to the ground the Hanumangarih mosque.⁷ The Muslims, disturbed by the demolitions of these mosques, waged war against the Hindus under the leadership of Shah Ghulam Hussain and made the Babri masjid their base.

According to the writer of *Hadigah al-Shuhade* the Hindu bairagis had the tacit support of the British who used them to intensify the hatred between Hindus and Muslims. The bairagis, on seeing the British forces, attacked the Muslims in the Babri masjid but the Muslims held their ground and killed a large number of bairagis. Then a large number of bairagis attacked the Babri mosque and killed a large number of Muslims who were resisting from inside.⁸ After this massacre of Muslims the bairagis entered the mosque and performed *havan*, blew the conch and offered *mohan bhog*. They felt that Lord Hanuman had cleared Ayodhya of the *mlecchas* (i.e., unholy Muslims). They also dug the Muslims' graves and put an idol there.⁹

Thus, this appears to be the first systematic confrontation between Hindus and Muslims in Ayodhya which seems to have taken place at the instance of the British rulers who succeeded in driving a wedge between the two communities. It did not end there. The Muslims again rose under the leadership of Amir Ali Amethwi to recover the Hanumangarih mosque. The Nawab of Oudh, Wajid Ali Shah, was reluctant to help recover the mosque as he knew that the political fall-out of such a venture would go against him. The British were looking for excuses to unseat him. He therefore wisely kept out of the controversy. Nevertheless, some Muslims, feeling humiliated, could not contain themselves and set out to reconquer the mosque. It proved to be a very costly expedition in terms of Muslim lives. But the Muslims succeeded in acquiring possession of Babri masjid, throwing out the bairagis who had occupied it. Then they began the due process of law by filing suits. In 1858, the Muslims complained to the district court about the construction of a clay chabutra near the pulpit of the mosque and puja being

performed there.¹⁰ In 1860, the Babri masjid was properly registered. We also find in the complaint filed in 1860 that a chabutra had been constructed near the mosque and that the mahant of Hanumangarih wanted to construct a house nearby, which was disallowed.

The historicity of Ramjanamsthan seems to be so weak that its proponents resort to faith rather than facts. Thus Professor Lal says, "In religion, it is matter of faith and of proof... So by faith and faith alone Christians embrace Jesus Christ to be the son of god, by faith alone Muslims believe Muhammad to be the prophet of Allah, *and by faith and faith alone Hindus believe Ramjanambhoomi in Ayodhya to be the birth place of Lord Rama*. Beliefs of all religions have to be shown equal deference" (emphasis added).¹¹

The other argument by Professor Lal is that since all Muslim conquerors and rulers broke temples and built mosques on their sites – as it was their article of faith – Babar must have demolished the Ramjanambhoomi temple also and constructed a mosque in its place. Both are fragile arguments, to say the least. Yes, in matters of religion faith is integral, but not in matters of history. If history becomes a matter of faith, myths and not facts would rule over it. Prof. Lal does not understand the difference between the fact that Muhammad was born and faith that he was the Prophet. It is prophethood which is a matter of faith, not Muhammad's birth. Muhammad's birth is merely a matter of fact. Here, faith cannot prove that a person called Muhammad was born in Mecca in AD 870. Similarly, it would be certainly a matter of faith that Lord Ram is an avatar of Vishnu but no degree of faith can ever establish that he was born in Ayodhya at a place designated as such by some Hindus. It is historical facts alone which would determine that. And in this case, facts are certainly lacking. Since even archaeological excavations could not establish the existence of Ayodhya, as pointed out before, faith alone cannot fill that void.

The second argument is equally weak. That was the argument which some British historians and officials employed for their own reasons. It is at best bad history. Even if it is true that every Muslim ruler was a zealot and indulged in demolishing temples belonging to Hindus, it would not prove that Babar demolished the Ramjanamsthan mandir and constructed a mosque, unless it is established that there was a temple at the site dedicated to Lord Ram's birth and it was precisely at the site

where the Babri masjid was built. There is no such historical indication, let alone proof. As shown above, there was no such controversy between Ramjanamsthan mandir and Babri masjid before the 1850s, i.e., before the British began to consolidate their power in India. If history were to be replaced by faith in order to claim the Babri masjid, it may have disastrous consequences for Indian history. We shudder to think of that. Whether the Hindus gain and Muslims lose out, or vice versa, history should not be trifled with. History should have nothing to do with one's 'Hinduness' or 'Muslimness'.

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

However, Jawaharlal Nehru later intervened and the premises were locked to stop Hindus from worshipping there, though the idols could not be removed in view of the sensitivity of the issue and fear of disturbances. K K Nayar resisted all attempts to remove the idols. Nehru was furious and wanted to undo the wrong. He wrote to Govind Ballabh Pant to have the idols removed, but Nayar did not yield. He later resigned and became a member of the Jana Sangh. It speaks volumes about his political proclivity. Neither the Congress party nor the government could do anything in the matter.

Akshay Brahmachari, the secretary of the Faizabad District Congress, had rightly pointed out in a memorandum then submitted to Lal Bahadur Shastri in 1950, "I do not view this question as one of saving the mosque or Muslims, I view (it) as saving the great ideals of the Congress and Mahatma for which we have been struggling all these days. If we do not resist these reactionary ideas with all the forces at our command, the ideals of the Congress will become extinct and reactionary forces will sweep the country."¹⁴

The premises remained locked until it was thrown open to the Hindus in February 1986. If locking the mosque amounted to murder of justice and the ideals of secularism, its unlocking was greater injustice and outright slaughter of secular ideals. It is a long story. Unfortunately, the judiciary has not been above board in dispensing justice. The former Supreme Court judge, Justice V R Krishna Iyer, strongly condemned the role of the judiciary in dealing with this dispute. "The judiciary will be described as the villain of the piece," said he. "This judiciary has let us down in preventing this madness from building up," said Soli Sorabjee, a senior advocate of the Supreme Court. Both were speaking at a seminar about the Babri masjid—Ramjanambhoomi issue in Delhi in November 1990. Justice Iyer further pointed out that since 1961 the courts have simply been passing interim orders over the case. It was a pity, he said, that the High Court and the Supreme Court do not have the guts to face the issue. However, he pointed out that it was not the judiciary alone that was to blame but also the Government. The latter, he said, was responsible for allowing the tension to mount. Its throwing up its hand in despair is a confession of guilt, he added.¹⁵

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

The VHP, after it tasted popularity, wanted to retain it even though the conversion controversy died down in due course of time. It raised issue after issue, controversy after controversy, for its public existence. One of these controversies related to the Babri masjid. So far, the controversy had been confined to the four walls of the courts in Faizabad and Allahabad. The VHP, however, brought it to the roads from 1983 onwards. However, even then it remained low-key. The controversy slowly began to gather momentum thanks to the role of the media. It acquired disturbing proportions during and after the Shah Bano controversy which started after the Supreme Court judgement delivered on 23 April 1985.¹⁷

The Supreme Court judgement in the Shah Bano case raised a storm of protest among the conservative Muslims. There were huge demonstrations by the Muslims throughout India as the judgement was perceived as interference by the judiciary in their personal law. The Muslim leaders seized this opportunity to arouse Muslim sentiments for their own political ends. It was, I would say, the biggest event in post-independence India which created such ferment among Indians. Muslims were made to believe that their Muslim identity was in great danger if the Supreme Court judgement was not nullified. The Rajiv Gandhi government felt threatened by the unprecedented agitation and agreed to enact The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill. The same was enacted by Parliament in May 1986.

It must be noted that the Shah Bano agitation had an adverse effect on the Hindu mind. Let alone the members of the Hindu communal organizations, even other Hindus, including those belonging to the secular parties, strongly felt that the introduction of the Muslim Women's Bill in Parliament in February 1986 was deeply offensive to the values of secular India. Even the members of Parliament belonging to the Congress felt strongly about it, and they had to be restrained from voicing their opinion on the controversial bill on 10 April 1986 and linking Muslim fundamentalism with it.¹⁸

As Rajiv Gandhi had sensed the intensity of Muslim anger against the Supreme Court judgement, he had also gauged the degree of resentment over the issue among the Hindus. Therefore, on the advice of some of his colleagues (Arun Nehru's name is mentioned in this connection), he decided to have the doors of the Babri masjid opened to

Hindus before introducing the controversial Muslim Women's Bill in Parliament. The bill was introduced in Parliament on 25 February 1986 and the doors of the Babri masjid were thrown open to the Hindus on 1 February 1986 on the orders of the Faizabad District Court. The judgement was delivered by the District Judge, Faizabad, K M Pandey, on 1 February 1986 on Civil Appeal No.6/1986. The appellant was Umesh Chand Pandey and the judgement said, "The appeal is allowed. The respondents (the state government and others) are directed to open the locks of the gate O and P forthwith."¹⁹

The locks were opened the same day and cameras were ready to televise the whole operation. That itself showed that the whole thing was pre-planned. This was done, one can easily infer from the timing of the court order, to please the militant Hindus who were very angry at the impending introduction of the Muslim Women's Bill in Parliament. Thus, on both sides of the divide, the politics of manipulation triumphed over politics based on principles and values. In the process, politics was communalized, doing immense harm to secular ideals. Such manipulations encouraged aggressive assertion of their religious identity by fundamentalists of both communities. These fundamentalists became very bold. The Hindu fundamentalists led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra became very strident in voicing their views on the issue.

For quite some time, the Babri Masjid Action Committee also remained aggressive and contributed to the communalization of the situation. Syed Shahabuddin, convener of the Committee, was alleged to have given a call for boycott of Republic day in 1987 – he later denied this. He said in a press statement that he had "given no call to the Muslim community not to observe the Republic Day celebrations." He explained that the call was given by the All India Babri Masjid Conference, which was jointly convened by three organizations — the Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat and the Babri Masjid Action Committee of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi.²⁰ Whatever it may be, the call aroused strong passions and had to be withdrawn on 23 January.²¹ Besides, such an adventure further communalized the situation, Also, the rally held on the Boat Club lawns in Delhi by the Babri Masjid Action Committee attracted media attention as it was attended by lakhs of Muslims and some provocative speeches were made. This rally, in no small measure,

resulted in communal violence in Meerut from 18 to 23 May 1987.²²

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

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

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

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

III

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

It is, therefore, essential to arrange a round-table dialogue between the religious and secular leaders of the two communities. The efforts of Sushil Muni are welcome in this direction. But it is only a first step. The dialogue should not start with preconceived ideas or positions. It should be with an open mind and heart. Various alternatives – like converting the complex into a national monument, or co-existence of the masjid and mandir, or shifting of the Babri masjid or constructing the Ramjanamsthan at some other site – could be considered. All these solutions should be debated and some consensus evolved. This is the only sane

course. It should no longer be politicized. We must now call a halt to communal madness and earnestly prepare ourselves to face the real issues that are posing a serious challenge to our development.

Socio-political Background of the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid Controversy

The Babri masjid-Ramjanambhoomi controversy is very much alive and will remain so for some time. It is not a mandir-masjid controversy; it is above all a political controversy and involves much deeper questions of identity and power. To be more precise, the Babri masjid and the Ramjanambhoomi temple are powerful symbols, much more than historical artifacts or places of worship. This controversy cannot be resolved only by proving through historical evidence the existence of either a masjid or a temple. It would take a lot more than mere historical evidence to resolve it. Not that it can never be resolved or that no conclusive historical evidence can be presented. It can be resolved only if wider questions – questions which are not of a historical, but of a political and psychological nature – can be resolved. Rather than being resolved, it is possible that it might be relegated to the background when issues of a more urgent nature come to the fore.

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

It has been seen that even purely theological controversies and metaphysical doctrines acquire a much sharper edge, when they are used

by groups of theologians for fighting their own battles for power and influence. Any religious controversy, argued on its own grounds remains confined to a few specialists and does not acquire social and political dimensions. It may create intellectual ripples but does not influence socio-political processes and does not warm the hearts of common people, let alone generate powerful emotions among them.

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

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

In fact, the upper caste Hindus celebrated Indian independence as their unchallenged domination. Democracy, they learnt through short-term experience, could be manipulated to perpetuate their caste hegemony. Also, the Muslim minority did not remain a dominant force after the partition. It lost legitimacy for a share in power in India by demanding and accepting partition. Muslims were thus expected to

concede legitimacy to the Hindu hegemony. However, both these expectations did not work out as expected. Manipulability of democracy had its limits and secularism, whatever its connotation in the Indian context, did acquire a dynamism of its own; and both democracy and secularism became powerful tools of the Indian polity. Soon, the upper caste hegemony came under serious challenge from the lower castes on the one hand, and from the minorities, on the other. The minorities as well as the low caste Hindus used democracy and secularism as their main tools to realize the goal of an egalitarian society. This began to make serious inroads into upper caste hegemony.

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

However, it should be borne in mind that whenever low caste Hindus and minorities assert themselves politically and challenge the status quo, caste and communal riots begin to erupt with great force. It is through religion that the upper caste Hindus seek to legitimize their domination. Also, in this struggle for power and hegemony, both sides use religion and thus reinforce each other's communalism. Minority communalism, even if defensive, reinforces majority communalism and gives it even more legitimacy in the eyes of the Hindu community. Thus communalism, whether of the majority or the minority, whether aggressive or defensive, is a category by itself and has its own dynamism. The religious aggressiveness shown by the Muslims during the Shah Bano movement had its direct repercussions on the Hindu mind and fuelled Hindu communalism. Not only that, it gave the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy much sought after legitimacy in the eyes of the average Hindu.

In the Indian context, casteism and communalism play a com-

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

This political turnabout on the part of Mrs. Gandhi in the early eighties gave communalism a new legitimacy. Whereas the traditional upper caste Hindus – the Brahmin-Kshatriya-Bania combination – were primarily urban based, the newly emerging middle castes were primarily rural. It is these upcoming castes which needed caste and communal politics to catapult themselves into power. It is this caste dynamics which imparts a sharper edge to modern-day communalism and tempts politicians to make use of it with varying degrees of aggressiveness, depending on their situation.

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

In a democratic polity and a multi-religious, multi-ethnic society, the question of identity assumes great importance – both psychologically and politically. Every caste and community guards its identity. Ethnic and religious identity can play a reactionary role, or a progressive and creative one, depending on how and by whom it is used. Politicians

often use it, in a most chauvinistic manner, to mobilize support for themselves and treat these castes and communities as their vote-banks. This is condemnable, as it leads to a confrontation between various castes and communities. The politics of confrontation leads to inter-caste and inter-communal violence. A democratic polity should be based on dialogue. It is dialogue which represents a true democratic spirit. But the politicians bring about confrontation between different communities to grab power in a democracy. This is a contradiction in terms, but such contradictions abound in Indian democracy.

The feelings of identity become stronger with the passage of time in a developing country like India. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that democratic consciousness brings 'identity consciousness' with it. Also, identity consciousness in one community increases with identity consciousness in another community. The minority exhibits identity consciousness more eagerly than the majority community as it is always fearful of being submerged in the majority community's identity.

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

The reason for this is not far to seek. As pointed out at the outset, the Hindus saw independence not only as a liberation from the British Raj but from a thousand years of Muslim rule. Muslims were seen as alien rulers who never assimilated with the Indian cultural ethos. This is, of course, an oversimplification of a complex reality. Most of the Muslims were converts from low caste Hindus and naturally entered Islam with their pre-Islamic cultural paraphernalia. The change of faith did not radically alter their pattern of life and outlook, except in a few cases. They remained closely associated with their pre-Islamic milieu. Only those converted Muslims who aspired for upward mobility in

Muslim society tried to distance themselves from the local Hindu milieu and come closer to upper class urban Muslim society. Such Muslims were few and they too found it very hard to find a place among upper class Muslims.

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

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

We are not really concerned here about the historical truth regarding the Babri masjid and Ramjanambhoomi (we have discussed that in another article). Here, we are more concerned about the socio-political background of this controversy. In order to understand this controversy in all its complexity, we have to understand the socio-political developments in India. In a pluralist society like India such controversies are inevitable. It is in essence not so much a historical controversy as a socio-political one. Also, it is less religious and more political. It is, in fact, derived from the competitive assertion of two identities.

The Muslim identity in contemporary India was at its most aggressive during the Shah Bano controversy. This assertion of the Muslim identity during the Shah Bano controversy was also the result of years of insecurity that the Muslims suffered in India, specially since the early eighties when Indira Gandhi began to rely more on Hindu votes. There was a series of major riots in which hundreds of Muslims were killed and

their properties burnt and looted. It was this suffocation which expressed itself through the Shah Bano movement. The Muslim leadership, both religious as well as political, also exploited this controversy for its own ends. Many religious demagogues rose to eminence in the Muslim esteem, using this controversy. Some of them sought to outdo their political rivals.

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

Thus, during this phase there was an increasing assertion of identities by both Hindus and Muslims. It was a dangerous situation of confrontation. It strained the pluralist fabric of Indian society. The Hindu aggressiveness also reached such limits that many saw in it a rise of Hindu fascism. It was also a serious bid on the part of the BJP to capture political power at the Centre. However, the character of Indian diversity is such that no religious party, whatever its religious label, can come to power at the Centre. But the BJP did add to its strength in Parliament in the 1989 elections and also managed to come to power in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, by exploiting this controversy.

As pointed out elsewhere in this article, caste and communal problems have become intertwined in Indian politics. Caste conflict is often sought to be deflected into communal conflict. It has happened repeatedly in many places in India. The caste riots in Gujarat in February 1985 were converted mysteriously into communal riots which lasted for more than one year and took a very high toll of human lives. Caste is posing a great dilemma for the modern Hindu society. It has become both its strength as well as its weakness. The mainstream Hindu culture is defined by the high caste Hindus and is considered to be its

main strength. The glory of the past is also ascribed to this high caste culture. The low caste Hindu culture finds its place at best as folk culture. It has nothing to do with classical Hindu culture.

The modern democratic society has its own logic of numbers, for as the numbers increase, so do the chances of winning political power. However, the caste system becomes the greatest hurdle in the way of unity among Hindus. The conversion of a few Dalit families to Islam in Meenakshipuram in Tamil Nadu, shook the upper caste Hindus precisely because it was seen as adding to the numbers of Muslims. The Meenakshipuram conversions came as a political challenge to the upper caste Hindus, and the VHP assumed a political reincarnation and began re-converting converted Hindus to Islam back to Hinduism. The VHP also took out the ekatmata.yatra in 1985 to preach Hindu unity. The yatra, needless to say, became an active vehicle for spreading communalism. It is clear here that a purely caste problem was converted into a communal problem. The VHP hand could also be seen in many riots in the Hindi belt during that period. It played a very active role in the Meerut riot of 1983.

It was therefore not very surprising that the implementation of the Mandal commission report by the V.P. Singh government was also converted into a communal question by L.K.Advani, the then President of the BJP. He announced his rath yatra which in fact became *rakt yatra* (journey of blood), as many major riots took place in different parts of India when it was being undertaken, though not exactly on its route. Perhaps, enough care was taken to see that riots did not take place on the route of the Toyota truck converted into a legendary rath, to avoid the charge of inciting communal violence. But it could hardly deceive anyone. All politically conscious people knew the real cause of those major communal conflagrations which broke out in various parts of the country in October 1990.

Why was the rath yatra announced after the decision to implement the Mandal commission report in August 1990? Again, it was an attempt to turn a caste conflict into a communal conflict. The BJP, for its own electoral gain, was aggressively projecting the image of Hindu unity which is a sort of contradictory term, mainly because of caste division. However, if the BJP has to capture power at the Centre it must create some sort of Hindu unity so that Hindus, like Muslims, Sikhs and Chris-

tians, can unite in the interest of the Hindu Rashtra and vote it to power. The BJP thought it had succeeded in creating some sort of Hindu unity by aggressively propagating the construction of the Ramjanambhoomi temple at the site of the Babri mosque and it was further trying to consolidate this unity for its own political benefit.

However, V.P.Singh threw a spanner in the works by announcing the implementation of the Mandal commission report on 5 August 1990, and thus brought to nought all the efforts to create Hindu unity, however fragile. The BJP then became desperate and wanted, once again, to induce a sense of Hindu unity by attracting backward class Hindus to the BJP fold. This seems to be the real purpose for taking out the rath yatra from all parts of India. It was clear that Hindu communalists were trying to achieve Hindu unity in a negative way — by pitting them against Muslims or other minorities. The Dalits would not fall into this trap easily, but it was easier to attract middle caste Hindus who were seeking ways and means of achieving upward social mobility.

It also shows that upper caste Hindus try to bring about Hindu unity not only for their own purpose, but also on their own terms. These upper caste Hindus do not desire caste distinctions to disappear, as it would mean an end to their privileges. Thus, to create a sense of Hindu unity for their own political purpose they would need an issue which can arouse the emotions of almost all the Hindus, whether they belong to the upper, middle or lower castes. The Ramjanambhoomi issue certainly provided them with such an opportunity and they tried to exploit it.

The VHP and the BJP had decided to begin construction of the Ramjanambhoomi temple in Ayodhya on 30 October 1990. The fact that among those assembled for karseva in Ayodhya on 30 October there were a large number of backward class Hindus, shows that Ram has great religious appeal. There is also no doubt that all those who gathered in Ayodhya were actively helping the karsevaks to defy the ban and enter Ayodhya. Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, had decided to take the bull by its horns and had thrown the strictest possible security around Faizabad and Ayodhya so that karsevaks could not enter these towns to begin construction of the Ramjanambhoomi temple. However, the policemen, themselves devotees of Ram, thought it their religious duty to help the karsevaks enter Ayodhya through alternate routes.

It is difficult to say exactly how many devotees entered the town, as there were varying estimates by onlookers. It can be assumed that there were at least 20,000 persons inside. This speaks volumes about enforcement of security measures by state agencies when religious passions are aroused. The chief minister had boasted that security measures would be so tight that even a bird would not be able to wing its way through, and yet more than 20,000 persons found their way into Ayodhya. Some of the karsevaks even managed to enter the Babri masjid enclosure and climbed over the dome and chipped it with hammers to show the symbolic demolition of the mosque. All this was extensively covered by the press.

Here a few words about the role of the press would be in order. The English press was somewhat restrained, but the Hindi press certainly abdicated its role of objective reporting. Many of these reporters went to Ayodhya, not as reporters, but as devotees of Ram. Their reporting was highly biased and clearly depicted their religious fervour rather than their journalistic objectivity. For example, one Hindi daily from Lucknow, *Swatantra Chetna*, headlined the happenings as "*Aurangazeb ke atyacharon ko bhi piche chod diya sarkar ne*" (the government has left even Aurangazeb behind in oppression) in its publication on 3 November 1990. The use of Aurangzeb's name itself evokes great hostility in the Hindu mind and the Mulayam Singh government was described as a shade worse by the paper.

Another paper, *Swatantra Bharat* from Lucknow, in its edition of 3 November 1990 gave a headline "*Nihatte kar sevakon ko bhun dala*" (unarmed kar sevaks killed by firing). It gave an estimate of a hundred dead and thousands injured in firing on 2 November 1990. In the report it said between fifty and one hundred were feared dead, but in the headlines the figure was one hundred. It is really difficult to get an authentic figure of those dead in firing on 2 November in Ayodhya. The government claimed no more than eleven dead but certainly the figure must have been higher. Some sources put it at twenty to twenty-two. But the Hindi papers no doubt highly exaggerated the figure.

One Hindi paper, *Dainik Aaj* from Lucknow, in its publication of 24 October went to the extent of saying that "*Mirzapur jail mein Ram-bhakton ko ghode ki leed khilayee ja rahi hai*" (In Mirzapur jail the devotees of Ram are being fed horse droppings). It was a highly provocative head-

line for the Hindu readers but this is how the Hindi press was reporting the events in those days. It can thus be said that a section of the print media played a substantial role in communalizing the situation. No wonder then that on 30 October the Hindus displayed fireworks to celebrate the karsevaks' symbolic attack on the Babri masjid.

Here, I would also like to draw the reader's attention to the fact that it is not Ramjanambhoomi which has really communalized the Hindus or Babri masjid which has communalized the Muslims. Ramjanambhoomi and Babri masjid are mere religious symbols for the two major communities. What has communalized them is their socio-economic and political situations. The Hindus feel that the minorities are becoming more and more assertive and that the Hindus are not united, whereas the minorities are quite homogeneous and monolithic. Therefore, they believe that it is time for the Hindus to unite and hit back. The Muslims and Sikhs, on the other hand, feel that the Hindus monopolize political and economic power and that they have been completely left out. This feeling is particularly strong among the Muslims. The conscious middle class (which is slowly emerging among Muslims) feels that Muslims are not getting justice at the hands of Hindus and therefore, must assert themselves. It is also putting more pressure on the ruling parties to grant them certain concessions – this, in turn, is projected by the BJP as 'appeasement of Muslims' 'minorityism' and so on, to increase its appeal amongst Hindus.

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

However, one should not try to simplify the issue. There are elements in the minority communities who are communal and use the

sense of grievance among their communities to play games of power politics. Such elements should be exposed and condemned. On the whole, minority communalism may be defensive, but in certain phases it does tend to be aggressive and intensifies communalism in the majority community. This is what is behind the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy also. Some Muslim politicians not only overreacted to this controversy but tried to be aggressive on the question and thus created a strong reaction among the Hindus.

We should also realize in this phase that state organs have been greatly communalized and in such a situation, the state finds it difficult to curb communal violence even if it desires to do so. Mulayam Singh Yadav's helplessness in curbing communal violence in Uttar Pradesh in October and November 1990 is indicative of this. One must draw the right lessons from this. The excessive use of religion in politics can be highly dangerous both for the state and for civil society.

Ramjanambhoomi, Karseva and Communal Violence

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

Thus, it will be seen that not only our secular values but also our human values are at stake. The lopsidedness of our values can be judged from the fact that we do not hesitate to kill and maim thousands of people just for the sake of a mosque and a temple. Historical and intellectual controversies are sought to be settled not through debate and historical evidence but by killing and intimidating people. No nation can survive if a section of its population follows such methods against other sections and if the intimidating section happens to be the majority religious group. The Bharatiya Janata Party has always raised the slogan of 'akhand Bharat' but is not prepared to see the result of its actions on the Ramjanambhoomi temple. It has pushed it too far, so far as to push the country to the precipice of disintegration.

Before we survey some of the communal riots which occurred after 30 October 1990, i.e., after the karseva programme, we would like to say a few words about the communal situation and its possible causes, because these riots which took place cannot be understood in the right

perspective if we do not understand the dynamics of our society today. Most of these riots took place during or after the rath yatra taken out by the BJP president, L K Advani, covering almost 11,000 km. It is also worth noting that the rath yatra was announced after V P Singh, the then Prime Minister, announced the implementation of the controversial Mandal commission report. This is significant. It is really doubtful if L K Advani would have announced his rath yatra had V P Singh not announced the implementation of the Mandal report.

Why was it so? The answer is not difficult to find. The BJP tried to win a few seats in the 1989 elections using the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy. It multiplied its strength from two seats to eighty-eight in Parliament. The percentage of votes obtained by the BJP in the election was not, however, impressive. It did not receive more than 11.4% votes, a bare 3% more than what it had in the 1985 elections. But it could get an impressive number of seats as the contests were straight fights between the Congress and the united opposition. Their electoral success went to the heads of the BJP leaders. For the first time they saw the chance of capturing power at the Centre in the name of Hindutva. And they could increase the appeal of Hindutva and translate it in terms of votes only if they could achieve Hindu unity.

In a caste-ridden society it is no easy task to achieve unity. The very dynamics of caste hierarchy leads to fragmentation of society. The BJP had by now realized that it could only come to power from a Hindu platform which could be effective only if Hindus could be united on some emotional issue. It is precisely for this reason that they had chosen the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy to bring about at least a temporary unity among the Hindus. In the entire Hindi belt, Ram is greatly revered by all Hindus, whatever their caste. In the shila puja programmes before the 1989 elections, the Dalits had shown as much enthusiasm as upper caste Hindus in rural areas and small and middle-sized towns. The BJP thought it was very close to uniting Hindus for political purposes. It was now determined to forge this unity among Hindus, arouse emotions in the name of Hindutva and establish a Hindu Rashtra at the centre.

Whatever the merits or demerits of the Mandal commission report, the announcement of its implementation came as a bombshell for the BJP. The backward caste Hindus would now be veering towards the

Janata Dal, and the BJP's dream of political unity of the Hindus and its chances of coming to power at the Centre as the champion of Hindu Rashtra, were seen to be shattered. It had to do something to retrieve this situation. The BJP thus thought of the rath yatra as an ingenious device to forge unity among the Hindus and to incite their passions in the name of Ram. Medieval Hindu images were sought to be reinforced. Hundreds of Bajrang dal volunteers carrying trishuls, offered a bowl of blood as a befitting gift to the political deity, just as devotees offer sacrificial blood to the goddesses Kali and Durga. The BJP leaders kept claiming that no riots took place on the route of the yatra. It is technically true, but this truth has its own irony.

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

About these riots, one more point should be made. In a multi-religious society, it is highly necessary for secular rulers to maintain a delicate balance between different religious communities, and religious sensibilities have to be respected. Both V P Singh and Mulayam Singh Yadav could not maintain this delicate balance. V P Singh openly began courting Muslims. He came very close to the Shahi Imam who at best is a demagogue. He consulted him in all matters pertaining to Muslims. At the Imam's instance, he appointed some people who were seen as communal Muslims, as members of the Rajya Sabha. The appointment of Ubaidullah Azmir was highly controversial. On 15 August, from the ramparts of the Red Fort, V P Singh announced the Prophet's birthday as a gazetted holiday. The time and occasion chosen were not very appropriate. In a communally surcharged atmosphere,

it was seen as yet another measure to placate Muslims, to create vote-banks among them. Very provocative pamphlets were distributed against it by the VHP and it became one of the issues in the Madras riot of 2 September 1990.

Mulayam Singh Yadav was even more aggressive in his pro-Muslim attitude. He threw all caution to the winds and delivered speeches in his rallies during September and October 1990, which were seen as quite provocative and blatantly pro-Muslim by the Hindus. These speeches in fact became counter-productive and further communalized the Hindu mind. He was seen as anti-Hindu. He also took very stringent measures to protect the Babri mosque and he did all this in the full glare of publicity. It appeared as if he was vying with V.P. Singh to win over the Muslim votes. Yadav, as a chief minister, should not have given the impression of being partisan towards one community, even if that community was at the receiving end of communal violence. A chief minister should appear quite impartial, neutral and as strictly controlling the law and order situation. It would not be wrong to say that Yadav's secularism proved to be more harmful to the Muslims, for, within a few days they paid a very heavy price for it.

What was worse, unlike V P Singh, he could not remain steadfast in his position. When the V P Singh government fell, he chose to throw his weight behind Chandra Shekhar and lost whatever goodwill he had earned among the Muslims, who saw him as a traitor to the cause. Soon, a series of riots occurred in Aligarh, Agra, Khurja, Bulandshahar, in which the Muslims suffered badly. The Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and the police played an anti-Muslim role and Yadav remained a helpless spectator. One is left wondering why Mulayam Singh Yadav employed the PAC to quell riots when he knew its true character so well. The PAC had massacred Muslims earlier in Gonda, during his chief ministership. Then too, he could not take any worthwhile action. Thus Mulayam Singh's record too is hardly different from that of any other previous chief minister in this regard.

II

A fresh wave of communal violence started in different parts of India after the karseva began on 30 October. A number of persons were killed in the first wave of violence in Gujarat immediately after 30 October 1990. According to the newspaper reports on October 30 and 31, at

least thirty-four persons were killed in Gujarat. Hindus and Muslims clashed in Juhapura, Vasna, Shahipur, Khanpur, Paldi and Satellite Road in Ahmedabad. Juhapura was affected by large-scale looting, arson and stabbing. Two persons were killed in the police firing itself. But according to Gujarat's Chief Secretary Khan, in all twenty-four persons were killed. Seven towns in Gujarat — Godhra, Baroda, Bharuch, Jamjodhpur, Padra, Halol and Ahmedabad — were put under curfew. In Ahmedabad, the army had to be called in.

The first major riot broke out in Bijnor in Uttar Pradesh on 30 October and violence continued unabated for three days. Unofficial sources put the death toll at more than 200, while official sources admitted few deaths. Personal interviews with some eyewitnesses indicated that the casualties were heavy and unofficial claims were much nearer the truth. Economic losses were also very heavy. Looting and burning of shops and other properties was quite extensive. The town was still under curfew ten days after the outbreak of violence. Rajiv Gandhi, who visited Bijnor on 10 November, was visibly moved by the pathetic tales of suffering narrated by the victims.

Next, Delhi was affected. Muslims and Sikhs took out a peace march on 15 November from Gurdwara Sisganj to the Idgah in old Delhi. Delhi was tense on account of exaggerated news reports about the karseva in Ayodhya on 30 October, and even the peace march turned into bloody rioting. It is alleged that some youths were leading the peace march and they raised slogans which were not very sober. The Hindus termed them as provocative. When the peace march terminated at the old Idgah, it was turned into a public meeting. Muslims and Sikhs spoke. When a Sikh leader rose to speak, there was heavy brickbating from the vicinity. The newspapers described it as a "virtual breakdown of law and order." The Delhi police and ten companies of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) failed in the task of preventing another flare-up. In the end, the police had to fire several rounds to send the rioters packing.

The Hindus had resorted to brickbating in retaliation to the slogans and speeches, and this began, according to eyewitnesses, soon after the three BJP leaders and Members of Parliament from the capital, Madan Lal Khurana, V K Malhotra and Kalka Dass, left the troubled area after a visit. The Commissioner of Police, Vijay Karan, however, denied any

connection between the visit and the rioting. By the evening, six persons were killed, including Sub-inspector Bhim Singh of the CRPF, who had sustained a head injury. It is said that the trouble began when a Muslim resident of Qasabpura went to buy some provisions in a shop near Basti Harphool Singh. Some youngsters who had assembled there, warned the shopkeeper not to sell anything to the man as he belonged to another community. An altercation ensued and the man was very badly beaten up. Shortly, heavy brickbating followed between the residents of Qasabpura and Basti Harphool Singh.

The residents of Qasabpura angrily alleged that the police had openly sided with the Hindus during the skirmishes. The Express News Service reported that while policemen patrolled Basti Harphool Singh with ease, there was hardly a constable who risked going inside Qasabpura, thus lending credence to the allegation. The Delhi Communist Party of India also held the police responsible for letting the situation get out of hand. Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar, who visited the area, blamed Pakistani infiltrators for the riots.

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

On 1 November, five persons were also killed in Hyderabad and the neighbouring Ranga Reddy district in Andhra Pradesh. There were seven stabbings during a three-hour relaxation of curfew and three of

the stab victims succumbed to injuries. Hyderabad was under curfew from 29 October. Over eleven persons were killed in communal violence and more than five hundred persons were arrested in connection with specific offences and as a preventive measure, in Hyderabad. Later, the figure of those arrested mounted to one thousand.

III

The country was once again rocked by communal violence from 7 December 1990 onwards, during the second phase of karseva in Ayodhya. Violence broke out in Aligarh, among other towns, on 7 December. The apparent cause was an attack on some PAC jawans by some Muslims who were returning home after Friday prayers. The PAC jawans were stoned by these angry Muslims who were told that some PAC men had raped a Muslim widow in the town earlier. Also, on 7 December, the Gomti Express was stopped by a Hindu mob a few furlongs from Aligarh station, Muslims pulled out and several of them killed. Official sources put the number of passengers killed at four, but Muslim sources claim that no less than eleven persons were butchered. It is surprising that the station master allowed the train to proceed from the station though he was warned of the mob assembled just a short distance away. There was no adequate police protection either. This incident sent shock waves through Aligarh city. On the first day itself, the toll was fifteen, as different areas exploded with violence. An indefinite curfew was imposed and the army staged flag marches. On 6 December violence had broken out in Sari Sultani, Pakki Sarai and some other places which were placed under curfew. On 7 December curfew had to be extended to two additional thana areas following the Gomti Express incident.

The situation in Aligarh was highly explosive for quite some time. The incident outside the Kotwali when two PAC jawans were stoned, was only a trigger. According to Ajay Singh, Tariq Hasan and Syed Zuber Ahmad, "Preparations for it had started since the first week of November, when illegal arms started flowing into the town. Inflammatory pamphlets and video cassettes added fuel to the communal cauldron, as did the speeches of Uma Bharti, BJP MP, during her stormy tour of Agra division. Many people expected riots to take place on December 6, the day the second round of karseva was to take place in Ayodhya."¹

8 December was the worst day of violence in Aligarh. It was, perhaps, the blackest day in the history of the town. That night, even the district administration was unable to salvage the bodies of the victims. The death toll, according to reliable sources, crossed fifty. The most shocking incident took place at the Jogiwarra locality near the Sasni Gate police chowki, where ten members of a family were burned alive. Their hutments were surrounded on all sides by members of the other community. What was still worse was that rumours gripped the town that a number of Hindu patients were deliberately killed by Muslim doctors at the Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College. The local Hindi dailies also mischievously published this news, giving it further credibility. The local Hindi press assumed the role of agent provocateur.

According to Ashok Chauhan, General Secretary of the district Congress Committee, and Promod Kumar, an industrialist, who constituted a fact-finding committee to look into the incident, "Not only was this news item totally false but it symbolized the threat which irresponsible journalism can cause to the country's unity." Many of these dailies were publishing more rumours without so much as a preliminary inquiry. Other propaganda machinery was working at furious speed. Smita Gupta of *The Independent*, Bombay, writes, "...there was a virtual explosion of Hindu propaganda material. Uma Bharti's inflammatory audio-cassettes blared from every paan shop. Dr. J.K. Jain's equally objectionable video cassette was beamed directly into homes through a dish antenna. Pamphlets and bills were pushed into houses and kites with provocative messages were released over Muslim sections of the city. The Muslims, in turn, printed equally provocative handbills, but were no match for the massive Hindu machinery."

Such rumours and propaganda did maximum damage. The riots spread like jungle fire in new localities across the railway line and new settlements on the outskirts – Hamdardnagar, Jamalpur and Badam Nagar – and eventually to rural areas and other districts. All evidence shows that not only did the district magistrate and the superintendent of police totally fail to control the situation, but that the PAC went on a killing spree, and seemed to specialize in killing Muslims. The force has a strong anti-Muslim bias which has been repeatedly proved in a number of communal riots in Uttar Pradesh, whether it is Moradabad, Meerut, Benaras or Aligarh. It has become much more aggressive with

the VHP directly inciting it. According to Vidya Subramaniam and Aditi Phadnis of *The Independent*, "The Vishwa Hindu Parishad, in a virtual call for rebellion, has despatched copies of video-cassettes on the Ayodhya violence to commandants of all Provincial Armed Constabulary battalions posted in Uttar Pradesh. The cassettes made by BJP MP J K Jain, are accompanied by a personalised appeal to the commandants to protect jawans from attacks by "Muslim infiltrations." The highly inflammatory appeal is based on a news item published on December 9 in *Panchajanya*, a BJP-RSS publication. It warns that these "infiltrators", who have crossed into India in thousands from Afghanistan, are planning "bloody civil war" in the country with the help of their Muslim relatives here."

One can very well understand the effect of such incendiary propaganda on the PAC which already has a strong anti-Muslim bias. What is totally surprising is the government's complete silence in the face of such blatant provocation. Action was not taken against J K Jain for making and distributing such video cassettes uncensored, or against the VHP leaders for sending these cassettes along with equally provocative letters to the commandants of the PAC battalions. Such instances of blatant provocation did not occur even during the 1947 riots. The letter stated that the main target of these "infiltrators" was the PAC. It informed the commandants that the "infiltrators" were camping in the homes of their Muslim relatives and their gameplan was to build an "electric chamber" in every home which would blow up the minute the PAC jawans entered it.²

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

It is difficult to estimate the number of persons killed in these

Aligarh riots. Official estimates are around eighty-five. However, the AMU Students' Union claimed five hundred dead. They claimed that over a hundred Muslims had been killed when the Gomti Express was forcibly stopped on 8 December. However, this seems to be an exaggerated claim. Generally it is believed that not more than eleven persons were killed in that incident.

Undoubtedly, the immediate cause of provocation was the mandir-masjid controversy and the politics of competitive communalism in the country today. But there is a socio-economic angle too, to the Aligarh riots. Aligarh is the centre for lock manufacturing. This industry provides employment for around a lakh of people in Aligarh. There are both household units as well as large-scale units. The former are owned mostly by the Muslims whereas the latter are controlled by the Hindus. Some studies have shown, according to a group of AMU teachers,³ that the large-scale industrialists used to provoke communal riots to damage the small-scale industrialists financially. It is evident that communal violence had always hit the small-scale units financially and caused them heavy losses, as almost all small-scale industries had to be closed for two months after the situation in the city became communally surcharged. Even if the large-scale industrialists do not directly provoke riots, they may help the parties involved and small-scale units would inevitably suffer.

Kanpur was once considered a communally free and peaceful area. It never had any large scale communal flare-ups like other towns like Meerut and Moradabad. However, a major communal flare-up occurred in Kanpur too, and it became a victim of communal violence on 10 December in the tense atmosphere of Uttar Pradesh. There were some small incidents since 6 December, the day of the second phase of karseva. Some well-meaning people and Muslim leaders had warned the district administration of this, but their pleas were ignored. Muslims also observed hartal in protest against the negligent attitude of the administration but it did not stir the authorities. The daily newspapers like *Dainik Jagran* and *Dainik Aaj* also published provocative material, adding to the tension.

One incident on 10 December sparked off the violence. A few Muslim hawkers selling clothes on Babbar Road were attacked and their clothes burnt. They came to their locality and complained about it,

with the result that Muslims came out of their houses and went around their area shouting slogans and protesting; some of them also looted and burnt Hindu shops. In the evening the Hindus retaliated by burning chappal shops belonging to the Muslims. One mosque was also damaged. At night, firing took place and more shops began to be looted. Curfew was imposed by the administration on 11 December, mostly in the Muslim areas.

On the same day, according to advocate Nasim Siddiqui, ex-MLA, the PAC entered Muslim localities and cut off telephone lines and water connections. Most of the Muslim houses went without water. The PAC also began to make arbitrary arrests. Real trouble began on the morning of 12 December. Shots were heard in the early hours of the morning and by 11 A.M. the Muslim-PAC confrontation began. Beconganj, Chamanganj, Kanghi Mahal and Colonelganj were chiefly affected. By 11.30, a large mob of Muslims in these localities came out of their houses and raised slogans of Allah-o-Akbar and began confronting the PAC and the police. The authorities found the situation beyond their control and appealed to the Muslims to go back to their houses, convincing them that their demands would be fulfilled. Their demands included: withdrawal of the PAC which was indulging in arbitrary arrests, and restoration of water, electric and telephone connections. The army was brought in and staged a flag march. This was welcomed by the Muslims, indicating that the army is considered impartial by them.

On the first day of violence in Kanpur, about six persons were killed, according to hospital sources. However, by 12 December, i.e., the third day of violence, the death toll had risen to thirteen. In the Chamanganj area of Kanpur, four people were killed when the police opened fire, according to Director General of Police, Mathur. Also, two more persons were killed in Chamanganj and Anwarganj localities in stabbing incidents. The total deaths mounted to twenty by 14 December according to official sources. This includes killing of three children — two brothers and one sister aged between nine and twelve in Chamanganj — and their mother, who died later in hospital. In all, six hundred persons were arrested, according to the district administration. There were not many incidents of large magnitude after 15 December in Kanpur.

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

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

It should be remembered that Agra has been one of the most peaceful areas and it did not experience communal violence even in 1947. According to one senior citizen of the city, Professor Ram Gopal Chauhan, former head of the Hindi Department of Agra College, these riots were imposed artificially. Professor Chauhan laid the blame on the VHP. The Professor said, "They should not have taken the *asthi kalash* (urn containing ashes of those killed in Ayodhya on 2 November) through the sensitive areas, raised provocative slogans and deviated from the route prescribed by the administration."

According to Ajay Singh, Janata Dal MP from Agra, the riot was one-sided and targeted poor Muslims: he expressed his opinion strongly against Mulayam Singh's failure to arrest Uma Bharati, the BJP MP who was visiting every kasba of Uttar Pradesh, spewing poison against Muslims.

The majority of the twenty-two persons killed in Agra were poor Muslims, at least eight of whom were killed by the PAC on 16 December while they were doing their daily chores in their homes. According to eyewitnesses, the PAC jawans climbed onto rooftops in the congested Muslim localities of Dholikhar, Tila Ajmeri Khan and Ghati Mamu Bhanja in the Mantola police station area, aimed at and shot people inside their houses. It is also alleged that the PAC men climbed atop the houses of the former Congress MP, Nihal Singh Jain, and the sitting BJP MLA, Hardwar Dube.

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

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

It is said that betting on communal riots is highly profitable. While betting on other things like rains remains quite uncertain, there is little uncertainty about riots, as these can be easily instigated. This shows what selfish interests and ideological perversions can do to fellow human beings.

The Press Council of India and the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid Issue — A Comment

The karseva on 30 October and 2 November 1990 attracted nationwide attention. In fact, this controversy became a premier political controversy during 1989-90, thanks to the propaganda of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and their determination to exploit it to the hilt for their own political ends. The language media, especially the Hindi press, showed an almost religious zeal in reporting the event. This zeal got further intensified on the karseva days, i.e., on 30 October and 2 November, so much so that the Press Council of India also had to take note of such overzealous reporting.

The Council set up a five-member committee to hear complaints and prepare a report. This committee produced two sets of reports: a majority report and a minority report. The majority report was produced by N.K. Trikha, N.R. Chandran and Satish Kurana, whereas the minority report was signed by K. Vikram Rao and P. Raman. It must be said that both the reports agreed on the essentials, but there was a difference of emphasis. The minority report was harsher in its judgement on reporting in the Hindi press. The majority report put it more mildly, but was harsher on the Uttar Pradesh government for its curbs on the press. The minority report, while not approving of these curbs by the government, also tried to understand the extraordinary situation under which they were applied.

Based on these reports the Press Council passed a resolution in its meeting held at Thiruvananthapuram on 21-22 January 1991, censuring four Hindi dailies, *Aaj*, *Dainik Jagran*, *Swatantra Chetna* and *Swatantra Bharat*. The Council felt that these papers had shown "gross

irresponsibility and impropriety, offending the canons of journalistic ethics, in covering the events relating to the *Mandir-Masjid* issue on and around October 30, 1990." The Press Council simultaneously expressed "concern over the authorities taking recourse to punitive and preventive action in excess of the demands of the situation." The Council also "deplored the action of the authorities of the Government of U.P. in invoking provisions of the non-existent Press (Objectionable matters) Act, 1951, and misapplying provisions of the Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867, in suppressing freedom of the Press."

In fact, complaints about the misbehaviour of the press had been received from various states, but the Press Council limited the inquiry to the two states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, "as constituted the main theatres of action in the matter" according to the Press Council. In its first round the committee held public hearings at Agra on 21 November 1990, at Lucknow on 22-23 November, at Varanasi on 24 November and at Faizabad on 25 November. It also separately heard the Chief Minister, the Chief Secretary, the Home Secretary and the Information Secretary of Uttar Pradesh at Lucknow on 26 November. The members visited Ayodhya on 25 November, and went round the various spots related to the incidents of 30 October and 2 November, including the disputed shrine, shilanas site, Maniram Chavni and the Sarayu bridge. In the second round the committee held public meetings at Ranchi on 3-4 December, and in Patna on 6 December, where it also heard the Bihar Chief Minister, the Chief Secretary and other top officials.

The chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mulayam Singh Yadav, named three Hindi dailies — *Aaj*, *Dainik Jagran* and *Swatantra Bharat* — for inciting communal passions and the Bihar chief minister complained against one paper, *Aaj*, for its slanted reporting. The director of Information and Public Relations, Uttar Pradesh, however, named an additional paper, *Swatantra Chetna* of Gorakhpur and Lucknow.

The majority report pointed out that *Aaj*, Kanpur, gave very provocative headlines about the events in its issue of 3 November 1990. The *Aaj* headline read *Nihatta Ram Bhakton ko Gher kar Ghanton Firing — 200 Maray. Kartik ke San par Per Khoon sa Nahayee Ayodhya, Jallianwala Bagh Kaand Bouna Pada*. (Hours of firing on the unarmed worshippers of Ram after rounding them up — 200 die, Ayodhya bathed in

blood on kartik-day bath, Jallianwala Bagh episode becomes petty against this). This paper's edition of 24 October carried an item under the headlines, *Mirzapur Jail mein Ram Bhakton ko Ghoday kee Leed Khilayee Jaa rahi hai* (The worshippers of Ram are being fed horse dung in Mirzapur jail).

The Agra edition published an evening bulletin with the headlines, *Ayodhya mein Firing, Sainkado Hatahat, Sarkar dwara Mritak Sankhya Panch Batayee* (Firing in Ayodhya, hundreds injured, denial by government, gives out the figure of dead as five). The Lucknow edition of 2 November carried a headline, *Sau se Adhik Lashen Sarayu mein Fainkee Gayen* (More than 100 bodies thrown into river Sarayu). The same edition announced in the same issue that armed karsevaks would now be pressed into movement. A special report carrying a list of missing persons, released by the VHP, was published with the headlines, *Yadi Balidan Nahin Hua, To Kahan Gaye Ye 307 kar sevak*, on 1 November. (If there were no sacrifices then where did these 307 karsevaks go?). The paper's Bareilly edition carried headlines which were more objectionable, *Hathiaron se Lais ho kar hi Ayodhya Ayen, VP, Mulayam ko Kutton se Nuchwayen, Advani Mughaltay mein Na Rahen ki Musalman Kamzor ya Buzdil Hein* (Come to Ayodhya only after being armed, VP should have Mulayam torn by dogs, Advani should have no illusion that Muslims are either weak or cowards). *Dainik Jagran* also published some such items in its Bareilly edition.

The Council report said that the Ranchi edition of *Aaj* dated 26 October carried a screaming headline, *Ayodhya mein Ram Mandir Toda gaya* (Ram temple broken in Ayodhya). The report also pointed out that the news under the headline did not mention this fact. It only said that the canopy standing over the shilanyas site and an idol put in the pit had been removed. The Patna edition of the paper reported that the VHP General Secretary Ashok Singhal was hit by a bullet on 30 October, and carried a poem which called the then Prime Minister a progeny of Jai Chand and likened him to Ravan.

It is interesting to note that different editions of the same paper ran widely varying accounts of the same event. For example, different editions of *Aaj* gave different figures of casualties:

Varanasi 100 dead

Ranchi 400-500 dead and injured

Agra 100 killed
 Kanpur 200 killed
 Bareilly 500 killed.

Commenting on this, the resolution of the Press Council stated that “spreading panic and confusion in an already tense and polarised situation was dangerous to a fault in adding fuel to the fire.”

According to the Press Council report, *Dainik Jagran*, Lucknow, published in its special bulletin on the afternoon of 2 November that one hundred karsevaks had died on the spot in indiscriminate police firing on Rambhaktas. The figure was reduced to thirty-two in the regular morning edition of 3 November. On 18 November it carried an item set in double columns with the heading, *Shri Ram Kranti Brigade Agle Maah tak Mulayam ke Haath Pair Kaat daigi* (Shri Ram Kranti brigade will cut off the hands and feet of Mulayam by the next month). The item, what is worse, was based on an anonymous letter which also said that a thousand police and army personnel who were Rambhaktas were leaving their jobs and would support the brigade’s activities. The same paper, in its issue of 15 November wrote in a report spread over four columns that Chief Minister Mulayam Singh was very angry that not enough bullets had been fired on the unarmed Rambhakta karsevaks at Ayodhya during the preceding few days. A sub-heading said that the police was not in favour of firing at the unarmed karsevaks.

This paper also published from its Faizabad Bureau a report spread across all eight columns which said *Har gaon ko Ayodhya Maan kar Sangarsh karen* (Consider every village Ayodhya and fight it out). Another headline said *Ram Mandir ke liye Das Lakh ka Kadakoo Dasta Banega* (Ten lakh strong militant forces shall be raised for the Ram temple).

The Swatantra Bharat, Lucknow, reported the incident of 2 November with these headlines: *Nihatte Kar Sevakon ko Bhoon Dala: 100 tak ke Marne kee Aashanka: 25 Lashen Baramad: Hazaron Ghayal* (Unarmed karsevaks massacred; up to one hundred killed, 25 bodies found, thousands wounded). In the body of the story, the paper wrote that anywhere between 50 and 100 persons were feared dead. It gave other figures from different sources: State’s Home Secretary – 14, news agencies – 15, BBC correspondent who had returned from the spot – between 30 and 50.

The Council report commented: "Though the paper was fair in giving figures from several sources including the official, it gravely erred or thought it affordable to be callous in putting the figure of one hundred in bold headlines. In order to avoid sensationalism particularly when the atmosphere is emotionally surcharged, it is always advisable to say "at least 50 killed" instead of saying "upto 100 killed.""

Among all these papers, *Swatantra Chetna* of Gorakhpur perhaps takes the cake. According to the report, this paper had originally published a figure of 15 dead on 2 November in a special bulletin that afternoon, but at the last moment "1" was inserted by hand to make it 115. The item remained credited to the news agency "Univarta" even after this change. It was not only irresponsible but also unethical. This paper also carried a news item under the heading *Gorakh Nath Mandir ke Gate par Kabza, Sadhuon mein Dahshat, Mandir ke Pramukh Dwar par Virodhi Jhande Phahraya Gaye* (Gate of Gorakh Nath Temple seized, terror among sadhus, opponents' flags unfurled at the main gate).

This news was contradicted by the temple sources. The Council report commented on this news item: "It may be noted that this shrine is headed by Mahant Avidyanath, M.P., who is the Chairman of the Ramjanambhoomi Mukti Yagna Samiti. Therefore, such news had very serious implications from the communal and political view point. It should not have been published without confirmation at least from the temple authorities. But no such care seems to have been taken by the paper."

Besides these papers, there were some other papers whose role was also not beyond reproach. These papers which were criticized either by the authorities or by some members of the public, were *Gandiv* (Varanasi), *Janavarta* (Varanasi), *Awas-i-Mulk* (Varanasi), *Amar Ujala* and *Tanzeem* (Patna).

After taking stock of the role of these papers the report goes on to recommend "that the Council may express deep displeasure and serious concern at the above mentioned role of a section of the press in two states, particularly of the multi-edition papers of UP which command wide-spread circulation, thereby influencing the opinion of a large section of people in the state. They may be reprimanded for this. The Council may also issue an appeal to all newspapers and newspersons to strictly and faithfully adhere to and carry on the noble traditions of the

Indian Press to maintain the highest standards of free, fair and objective journalism, particularly during the periods of national crisis and communal and social strife.”

The sub-committee report, however, acknowledged some positive role played by these papers condemned above. These papers informed the people of the developing situation and forewarned the authorities about what was in the offing. *Aaj*, for example, was the first to report that the canopy at the shilanyas site had been surreptitiously removed, thereby hurting the feelings of, and causing unrest among, the protagonists of the movement. *Dainik Jagran* and other papers reported movement towards Ayodhya of a large number of karsevaks when the state government had declared that all means of transport had been choked and all passages to them blocked, and alerted the authorities about the possible trouble on 2 November by reporting an interview with Ashok Singhal.

As pointed out earlier, the minority report was more critical of the role of these dailies named above. It said that “some editors and journalists seem to have totally failed to maintain their integrity as responsible media persons. They obliterated the borderline between their personal affiliations and the right to know of the society as a whole. Representatives of several social and cultural organisations in the course of their evidence pointed out that the editors of some dailies had deliberately tried to paint a picture where every Indian is a Hindu, and every Hindu a Rambhakt. They even preferred the word “Ram bhakt” to Kar sevaks.”

The minority report draws attention to what it called “editorial activism”, where the newspapers behaved as if they were part of the Ramjanambhoomi campaign. Some of them even helped karsevaks to find their way to Ayodhya by using press passes. The report pointed out that “an editor was alleged to have used his press facilities to smuggle Ashok Singhal (however, the editor denied it). Some cited the case of an editor of a Lucknow Hindi daily coming out of the Ayodhya complex on 30 October shouting ecstatically ‘kar seva begun’. One senior editor was allegedly directing the kar sevaks.”

Apart from this, some editors participated in the VHP rallies and made provocative speeches. Some were arrested for inflammatory speeches at the VHP rallies. Some correspondents were alleged to have

acted as VHP messengers. The minority report then commented, “we do not want to pass a judgement on these charges. But even if there is an iota of truth in these allegations, it calls for serious concern for all.”

In view of all this, one has to seriously debate the possibilities and limitations of the role of the print media. Freedom of the press is absolutely essential for the functioning of a political democracy, but then this freedom is likely to be misused by the print media in times of crisis, especially if the crisis pertains to the religious faith of people – either editors or reporters. The limitations of the media in such a crisis situation can be seen from the Press Council report.

Can the freedom of the press then be absolute and untrammelled? Looking at what happened during the Ayodhya crisis one can hardly say yes to this question. One may not deliberately violate press freedom, but emotional involvement in a crisis situation can certainly blind a person to the other side of the truth. It is a fact that on the Ramjanambhoomi question the feelings of a large section of Hindus in the north were running very high and some media persons did belong to this section. In fact, they did identify themselves with Rambhaktas and karsevaks. Perhaps they could not help what they wrote. It appeared natural to them. Perhaps their genuine feeling was that the authorities were not permitting the Hindus to fulfil their religious duties. They perceived the authorities as highly repressive.

But whatever the genuine feelings of media persons, they also have to see the other side and the larger cause of the country or society. If their feelings blind them to this reality, some reasonable curbs on reporting will have to be placed by the authorities and hence the concept of absolute freedom becomes difficult to sustain, especially in a multi-religious society. Each religious group has not only its own interests but its own perceptions of social realities. These perceptions do get reflected in reporting. But this one-sided perception of the truth, however genuine for the perceiver, may be seriously objected to by the other group and thus may lead to conflict and tension. So, as long as truth, or the perception of it, is relative, freedom of the press will also remain relative and not absolute.

There are two ways of restraining this absolute freedom. Either the press should accept a code of conduct evolved by an agency like the Press Council, or the authorities should impose some legal curbs. More

often, a mixture of both works. But there are limitations. The code of conduct is often violated, either under emotional stress and over-zealousness or on account of some powerful interests involved. The authorities too, often transcend all limits in imposing curbs so as to make the concept of freedom of the press almost meaningless. We would need ideal media persons and ideal authorities to overcome these limitations.

The Excesses Committed by the Authorities

The Press Council sub-committee not only looked into violations of norms of reporting by the newspapers, but also went into allegations of excesses committed by the authorities in putting curbs on newspapers and newsmen.

The report has come down heavily on the authorities too. According to the sub-committee report the complaints and allegations against the authorities were of two types: one, the government creating obstacles in coverage of events, its officers not being available or not being communicative, and curfew passes being denied or not being honoured by the police, and deliberate disinformation being spread by the authorities.

Two, precensorship being imposed, newspapers being prevented from being published, printed copies seized or not being allowed to be transported or distributed, journalists being arrested, hawkers beaten up and maltreated.

Most of the newsmen complained to the committee that access to the news sources was blocked by the authorities and that they believed it was not the intention of the authorities to allow unhindered reporting. On the most crucial dates of 30 October and 2 November, newsmen were prevented from reaching the spots of action. Whatever was published regarding the incidents of these days was the result of their enterprise and actions which they undertook at great personal risk.

About the obstacles created by the authorities, the report made the following observation: "We have already made an observation about the utter failure of newspapers in exercising discretion and restraint in presenting facts and figures in respect of the happenings of October 30 and November 2 at Ayodhya. This failure cannot be condoned. But it also needs to be examined as to what extent were the authorities responsible for this and whether they made any conscious effort required of them on

such grave occasions to inform the Press and the people voluntarily, quickly and adequately, and in time to catch editions.”

The Press Council inquiry concluded on the basis of evidence available that no proper arrangements were made by the authorities in that direction and not even a press camp was set up by them in Faizabad. The result of all this was that rumours had a field day on 30 October in the absence of any official briefing. No officer made himself available to the press at Ayodhya at the time of these happenings to say what exactly happened. The authorities either kept quiet or adopted a totally negative attitude towards the press. They did not allow the presspersons to see the extent of damage to the shrine. Even the press conference scheduled at 4 P.M. on that day by the Commissioner of Faizabad was cancelled suddenly.

The authorities came down heavily on newspapers and seized their copies. The special bulletins of Lucknow papers were quickly seized and the Home Department asked district magistrates all over the state to see that such news did not reach the public. What was worse was that no clear instructions or guidelines were given to them as to how this was to be done. The Press Council report felt that “Some of the methods resorted to by several district administrations were not adopted even during the Emergency when Fundamental Rights had been suspended and censorship clamped by a specific notification.”

Both in Uttar Pradesh and in Bihar, police officers went to newspaper offices on the evening on 2 November and the night of 2-3 November, and asked journalists on duty to show them the negatives and the plates of the matter being prepared for publication. If the journalists refused, plates were seized and even destroyed. Bundles of mofussil editions which were already printed were either not allowed to leave or were seized inside or outside newspaper offices by force. At Allahabad, the police forcibly stopped printing of the paper in a press. A similar complaint was made at Varanasi.

However, the minority report took a somewhat lenient view of the action by the authorities. According to this report, an attempt was made to “verify this point over and again at all sittings. District officials at all places took the stand that they never tried to interfere with the free functioning of the newspapers or to terrorise the staff. But most of them admitted that the local police had gone to some newspaper offices

to find out what was being put out for the next day. After careful examination, we have come to the conclusion that on the crucial night measures were not intended to terrorise the staff into submission or as a punitive measure but to find out what was being printed. The *Jagran* representative at Agra said that when they told the police that both versions of casualties were being printed, they left."

About creating obstacles for the newspersons, the minority report took a slightly different view. It said, "After hearing from all sides, we cannot support the contention that the authorities had deliberately tried to deny opportunities to the press to cover the Ayodhya incidents or created hurdles in the way of the normal functioning of the correspondents But there have been some hurdles in their movement, partly due to the unusual atmosphere of confrontation and partly due to the lapses on the part of authorities" (emphasis in the original).

In our opinion neither the press nor the authorities can be completely exonerated of their responsibilities. There is no doubt that it was an extraordinary situation but it was an extraordinary challenge too, both for the authorities and for the press. It was much more so for the press. If it has to guard its freedom, it also has to act with a great sense of responsibility. There cannot be freedom without responsibility. They are two sides of a coin. Whatever the religious feelings of editors and reporters, the reporting should have been objective and restrained. A paper has to discharge not religious obligations, but wider social obligations, most important among which is maintenance of peace. A section of the press certainly failed in that.

It should, however, be admitted that another section of the national press behaved with restraint and a sense of responsibility. Among them are not only English papers but also Hindi papers like the *Navbharat Times*. This should be appreciated. We should also be proud of the fact that there are agencies like the Press Council which try to maintain the highest standards of journalism and upbraid those guilty of violation of these norms. The report prepared and the resolution passed by the Press Council is sufficient proof of this. We can be justly proud of our norms, if not of their practice. We do not live in an ideal society and hence cannot expect these norms to be followed to the fullest extent. But the fact that we are conscious of these norms and keep on measuring our behaviour against them is itself significant.

The 1991 Lok Sabha Elections and Communalization of Politics

The 1991 Lok Sabha elections were unusual in more ways than one. Firstly, they were held within two years of the previous elections in November 1989. Secondly, the elections were precipitated not merely by the withdrawal of support to the Chandra Shekhar government by the Congress, but by the withdrawal of support to the V.P. Singh government by the Bharatiya Janata Party on the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy in October 1990. As a matter of fact, the elections should have taken place somewhere in December 1990 itself, after the withdrawal of the BJP's support to the V.P. Singh government, but the Congress was not prepared to face elections and hence decided to prop up the minority government led by Chandra Shekhar.

I am emphasizing this, because a democratically elected government fell, not on a major national issue, but on a sectarian religious issue and the BJP saw in this unfortunate controversy a unique chance to come to power. The natural corollary to this unfortunate controversy was unparalleled communalization of the Indian polity in the post-independence period. This communalization nearly shook the very foundation of Indian secularism. We would also like to emphasize here that this was not merely a political phenomenon; we must try to understand its social, economic, religious and cultural dimensions. It should also make us aware of the fact that in countries like India, despite our resolve to secularize society and polity, religion will continue to play a major role. Religious appeal cannot be trifled with.

Also, the mandir-masjid controversy should be seen not only in its immediate context of implementation of the Mandal commission report in August 1990, but also in the earlier context beginning from the early

eighties. As such, the danger of communalization of the Indian polity has always been present in Indian society, but it assumed more serious proportions when the Congress leaders themselves began to play the communal card for their survival. Indira Gandhi's confidence to come to power on her own or her party's merit had been shaken after the Emergency. Muslims and Dalits, her traditional supporters, had been alienated from her leadership. She began to search for support elsewhere and she found it in the politically emerging Hindu middle castes. First, she used the Meenakshipuram conversions in 1981 and the political storm raised by it to win Hindu support. She also cleverly manipulated the Punjab problem and fully exploited the concern generated among the average Hindus by the militancy shown by Bhindranwale. The Blue Star operation contributed in its own way to further communalizing the Indian polity. Rajiv Gandhi also began his regime with a communal holocaust under his very nose in Delhi, in which hundreds of Sikhs perished. He gave in to Muslim fundamentalists by changing the law on Muslim women and tried to please Hindu fundamentalists by allowing shilanyas ceremony in Ayodhya.

It is necessary to mention this background of events in order to understand the developments leading to a blatant use of communalism by the BJP in the 1991 elections. When the Congress party resorted to the Hindu card to hold on to political power, the BJP felt threatened on its own ground. Until then the Congress had depended on the Muslim and Dalit support and the BJP on some middle caste Hindus like the Banias, in the urban areas. While the Congress used to talk about secularism and protection to minorities and Dalits, the then Jana Sangh and its subsequent incarnation, the BJP, carried on propaganda for the Hindu interests and there was, in a way, a division of votes between these parties. However, this apple-cart was upset when Indira Gandhi and later Rajiv Gandhi began to encroach upon the traditional BJP votes. This competition for the Hindu vote resulted in competitive communalism between the two major parties.

Whereas for the Congress, a traditionally secular party, there was a limit to which it could resort to the communal card, there was no such limit for the BJP as it was professedly a Hindu party and never shied away from using Hindu interests as it had its political base among the Hindus only. Thus pitted against the Congress on the same grounds,

the BJP had to spread propaganda to woo Hindu castes for its political survival and to increase its strength. Thus, it would be no exaggeration to say that it was the use of the Hindu card by the Congress that compelled the BJP to resort to a more blatant form of communalism and to cast its political net much wider. Also, it tasted more power in the 1989 elections by increasing its strength in the Lok Sabha from two to eighty-eight with the support of the Janata Dal. This was a tremendous boost for the party. But its dream seemed to be shattering with the implementation of the Mandal commission report in August 1990.

The BJP, in response to the challenges posed by the Congress, had used the Ramjanambhoomi controversy as a powerful religious symbol to create a sense of unity among the divergent Hindu castes and it had succeeded in this venture to some extent. Many of those believing in Hindutva often complain that whereas minorities like the Muslims, Sikhs and Christians are united, the Hindus are not. Hinduism was thus sought to be 'semitised'. But this was a most frustrating exercise as the caste hierarchy, apart from the diverse and open nature of Hindu theology, was the most powerful obstacle on the way to unity. The BJP used Ram as a symbol to rally all the castes under its banner. It resorted to a variety of devices for the political use of Ram: it drew up a plan to construct the Ram mandir where the Babri mosque stood; then it gave a call for donation of bricks from all five lakh villages of India; then it drew up plans to take out these donated bricks in the form of processions from villages, towns and cities and it also planned, with the help of the VHP, to mobilise lakhs of karsevaks on an auspicious day fixed by the Dharm Sammelan in Hardwar.

Thus it would be seen that all possible means were employed by the BJP to strengthen and consolidate its Hindu constituency. But it thought all this was suddenly brought to nought by the implementation of the Mandal commission report by V.P. Singh, as this move created a permanent rift in Hindu society. The report was seen as a major obstacle to Hindu unity. The backward castes and Dalits would now never unite with the upper caste Hindus and Hinduism could not be 'semitised'. The BJP's gameplan for further increasing its strength in the Lok Sabha, if not for capturing actual power at the Centre, was thus foiled as it could not have made any headway without the support of the backward castes. It was then that L.K. Advani, then President of the BJP, an-

nounced a rath yatra in the third week of August 1990. Thus it would be seen that the rath yatra was announced after and not before the decision to implement the Mandal Commission Report which took place in the first week of August.

The rath, mounted on a Toyota truck, carried the BJP party symbol most prominently and made the BJP's political intentions unmistakably clear. Many other parties strongly objected to such gross exploitation of religion for political purposes, but L.K. Advani quietly ignored such objections and protests. He repeatedly claimed that the rath yatra was undertaken to strengthen national unity and that it was wrong to say that it caused communal bloodshed. He claimed that not a single riot took place on its route and that he had, in all his speeches, pleaded for caution and moderation. These claims can hardly stand scrutiny. Firstly, no religious figure, however revered it may be, can claim to symbolize national unity, specially in a multi-religious nation like India. If a religious symbol of one religious community is used, other religious communities would resent it. It is one thing to show respect and reverence for a religious figure and quite another to claim it to be a symbol of national unity. If a national symbol is to bring about national unity, it must be a secular symbol, irrespective of whether it evokes powerful emotions or not. In India it is true that a sacred, as opposed to a secular, object would evoke much more powerful sentiments, but national unity is more important than militant religious sentiments of one religious community.

Secondly, it is far from true that the rath yatra did not cause communal bloodshed. It would only be indulging in technicalities to claim that no riot took place along the route of the yatra. The yatra evoked very militant religious sentiments among the Hindus and there was a show of unprecedented aggressiveness by the cadres of the BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal and the Shiv Sena in different places, and communal violence broke out in a number of places in Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. After the arrest of Advani in Bihar on 23 October, all hell broke loose in Jaipur, Jodhpur, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Hyderabad and several other places in which hundreds of innocent people perished and properties worth crores of rupees were destroyed or looted. In Jaipur alone, which otherwise had a unique record of communal peace, more than 130 persons died in the last week

of October 1990. When the yatra began from Dwarka in Gujarat, a bowl of blood was offered to Advani, his head smeared with blood and hundreds of trishuls and swords loaded on the rath. Minorities could only hold their breath. How can such a rath evoking powerful Hindu symbolism and inducing unprecedented religious aggressiveness claim to be a journey for national unity? It was a yatra for national disintegration.

II

We have traced the background to the 1991 elections so that we can grasp the real significance of the events that occurred later. Though the Congress, the Janata Dal and the BJP itself published manifestoes raising important issues like poverty, unemployment, price rise and economic development, the Ramjanambhoomi issue was looming large on India's political horizon. The BJP was bent upon exploiting it for its electoral success. It launched a propaganda blitz on these lines. Even the Bombay High Court judgement that unseated a Shiv Sena MLA for having used religious appeal for soliciting votes, hardly sobered down the BJP and the Sena. Other strategies were drawn up and posters showing Ram mandir and using slogans for Ramjanambhoomi were now printed in the name of the VHP, claiming that it was a separate and non-political organization. However, this could hardly deceive anyone. The message was loud and clear. Also, the BJP was flush with funds during this election. Its propaganda blitz left even the Congress far behind. Apart from the VHP's contributions, it was far easier for the BJP to mobilize funds this time – the bourgeoisie as well the petty bourgeoisie poured money into the BJP election kitty not only because of devotion to Ram but also because of the perception that it was bound to emerge much stronger in the election, or even capture power at the Centre. The BJP leadership also exuded confidence.

There was one more reason for exploiting the Ramjanambhoomi issue during this election. The BJP can hardly compete with other political parties as far as secular issues are concerned. It is too far to the right for its economic programme to appeal to the masses. Moreover, it is always under pressure from traders not to advocate radical economic policies and even if it does so, as a tactical move, the left parties, the Janata Dal and the Congress can do so more convincingly. Also, it can never carry conviction with the Muslims, other minorities and Dalits even if it makes a mild attempt to woo them. Thus the only alternative

left for the party is to exploit the religious sentiments of Hindus. Until recently, the main problem was that it was very difficult for it to forge unity among different conflicting sections of Hindu society, there being no unifying dogma or theology. The Ramjanambhoomi controversy, however, came as a political gift from the Congress (when the government allowed the opening of the lock of the masjid in 1986). It was this controversy which enabled the BJP to penetrate rural areas. It no longer remained the party of Banias in urban areas. It kept intensifying this controversy to strike roots in the hearts and minds of Hindus. It saw in this controversy a historical chance for coming to power.

It is really ironical that the leaders of the Jana Sangh and the BJP often used to condemn Muslims for being fanatics and for mixing religion with politics. There was truth in this, especially in pre-independent India when the Muslim League, under the leadership of Jinnah, used religion with a vengeance to win a 'homeland for Muslims'. Jinnah aroused strong and militant sentiments among Indian Muslims, particularly in the north, and thus won their hearts and minds; whereas the Muslim League had performed very poorly in the 1937 elections it performed handsomely in the fall of 1945 when elections were held to the Constituent Assembly. The Muslim League would perhaps never have carved out a political niche for itself had it not exploited religion to the hilt. Thus, this shows that communal parties can win only on their grounds and they tend to perform very poorly when they try to fight on 'alien' grounds. The Muslim League lost heavily when it fought elections in alliance with the Congress in 1937. Similarly, the BJP's performance was extremely poor when it tried to adopt Gandhian socialism and integral humanism. It soon had to give up that pretence. In fact, it registered great success in terms of seats, and also in terms of percentage of votes cast to some extent, in 1989 and 1991, only after it adopted a militant form of Hinduism.

In post-independence India the Muslims as a minority soon realized the value of secularism and gave up, in their own interest, the communal form of politics though there were some exceptions to this rule. They voted, by and large, for secular parties, chiefly the Congress. And whenever there was an anti-Congress wave in the country, they voted, along with others, for other parties like the Janata Party in 1977 and the Janata Dal in 1989 and again in the tenth Lok Sabha elections. But in

the tenth Lok Sabha elections the pattern of Muslim voting was more complex. We will throw some light on this a little later. Thus we see that the Muslims did not show much religious militancy in the post-independence period except during the Shah Bano agitation. The Muslim leadership, it must be noted, did great damage to the Muslim cause by exhibiting religious militancy during that phase, inasmuch as it further strengthened Hindu communalism. Also, on the Babri masjid issue, a section of the Muslim leadership manifested a rigid position and gave a call for marching to Ayodhya and offering Friday prayer there and the then President of the Babri Masjid Action Committee, Syed Shahabuddin, urged Muslims to boycott government functions on Republic Day. This too was wrong morally, strategically and politically; it was also exploited by the BJP leaders. Except in these instances, Muslims have not shown organized religious militancy in post-independence India. Yet they come in for strong criticism for mixing religion with politics and manifesting religious fanaticism. Such propaganda has great political value for the BJP as it could convince Hindus that they have no other way but to retaliate in the same manner.

III

The BJP, apart from the Ramjanambhoomi controversy, used two other means to gain political legitimacy among the middle and upper caste Hindus: the non-organized nature of Hinduism and the concept of pseudo-secularism. Both these paid rich dividend to the BJP in terms of votes, especially in the urban areas. It is necessary to examine both these concepts. It is maintained, not only by the BJP but by many other well-meaning Hindus, that semitic religions like Christianity and Islam are not only highly organized religions, but are closed theologically, and encourage dogmatism and fanaticism. Hinduism, on the other hand, is neither an organized religion nor does it encourage dogmatism, much less fanaticism.

However, such sweeping statements do not make much social sense. Religion cannot be seen in isolation from society. Fanaticism and liberalism are social rather than religious phenomena. It is social conditions which raise or lower the degree of fanaticism and not religion *per se*. A religious community tends to be liberal, progressive and non-dogmatic, if materially it is prospering, making economic gains, is confident of itself and has a sense of security. However, it tends to be into-

lerant, dogmatic and even fanatical if it is losing its privilege or is threatened with a loss of the privilege it is enjoying (though it may be in control of the commanding heights of the economy) and develops a sense of insecurity. Such dogmatism and fanaticism are also experienced in a political sense during a revolutionary period.

The Muslim community in India has passed through various phases of liberalism and fanaticism, depending on the socio-political conditions. The Hindus too, have been no exception to this rule. Fanaticism and militancy among a section of Hindus, especially among upper castes in urban areas on the Ramjanambhoomi–Babri masjid controversy, can be understood only if seen in the above perspective. Though it is the upper caste Hindus who command economic and political power and are in key government jobs, they are perceiving threats to their privileges from Dalits and backward castes on the one hand, and Muslims, Sikhs and other minorities, on the other. These upper caste Hindus, therefore, have begun to feel that their liberalism is proving to be their weakness, and Muslims, Sikhs and Christians are highly ‘organized’ and ‘militant’ and hence able to exert pressure on the political system.

They, therefore, feel that since Hinduism is non-organized and non-dogmatic, they are at a disadvantage and that, in order to exert pressure on the system they too should become organized, dogmatic and militant. This is why the BJP stand on these lines has appealed to these upper caste Hindus. Thus it was not Ram, but threats to their own privileges which made them so militant. It is self-interest which mobilized sadhus and religious leaders of various Hindu sects on such a gigantic scale never seen before in the modern history of Hinduism. In fact, in a number of constituencies in Uttar Pradesh, the sadhus, who never used to involve themselves in politics, campaigned for the BJP candidates. We thus witnessed unprecedented use of religion for political purposes by these upper caste Hindus. The Shiv Sena and the VHP even distributed trishuls in Bombay and elsewhere during the election campaign to create more religious fervour.

The BJP aggressively carried on propaganda about what it called the ‘pseudo-secularism’ of the Congress, Janata Dal and the Communist parties. It maintained that these ‘pseudo-secularists’ were following the policy of appeasement of minorities in order to exploit them as their vote-banks. This propaganda had great appeal for middle class Hindus

in urban areas. The media also gave publicity to these views. It is unfortunate that in the major dailies, Advani's interviews and statements about pseudo-secularism appeared often during the election campaign, but no serious articles analyzing the hollowness of Advani's pseudo-secularism appeared. By dubbing Nehru's ideals as 'pseudo-secular', Advani intended to send strong political signals to Muslims and other minorities that they must live in this country on terms dictated by the Hindus. According to Advani, Nehru's 'pseudo-secularism' did not protect the Hindu interests. It only took care of minority interests. India could be a genuinely secular country only if it opted to be a Hindu *Rashtra* and only Hindus could be genuinely secular; all others were either communal or pseudo-secularists. The BJP, apparently, did not even see the obvious contradiction in terms like 'Hindu secularism', 'Muslim secularism'. Secularism must be understood on its own terms, it cannot be hooked to any religion or religious community in order to be genuine. There can, of course, be a debate on whether secularism in a purely Western sense or as defined in dictionaries, can apply to India or not and whether it has to be creatively applied keeping in view the conditions in our country. Thus one may hold that the Nehruvian concept of secularism was too Western to apply to the Indian situation, but to describe it as 'pseudo-secularism' is not only an injustice to Nehru, but shows ignorance of the true idea of secularism and its philosophy. In fact, it is Advani's secularism which eminently qualifies to be pseudo-secularism. Much more so as he equates it with Hinduism.

The claim regarding appeasement of minorities would also be found to be hollow on closer examination. All that Advani is able to cite, to prove appeasement of Muslims, is that Muslims are allowed to practise their personal law under which a man can have four wives. The Hindus, on the other hand, have to be content with one wife alone. In the modern world, with women becoming more conscious of their rights, even bigamy, let alone polygamy, is becoming problematic to practise. A number of surveys have also established that it is much less prevalent among Muslims than among Hindus, though among Hindus it is done illegally. Among Muslims it is about 4 to 4.5 per cent, whereas among Hindus and Jains it is 5 to 7 per cent. Moreover, among Muslims, the male-female ratio is more adverse than among the Hindus — for every 1000 Muslim males there are no more than 925 females in India.

Muslim personal law has been permitted not so much for the appeasement of Muslims as to respect their religious sensibility and sense of security. The world over, minorities are allowed certain measures — though they may be socially outdated — in order to give them a sense of security and religious identity. Many changes are overdue, but they must be brought about through persuasion rather than in a coercive way. The former course can be politically less problematic for a democratic society. Social changes can hardly be imposed from above. An attempt should be made, through sustained educational campaigns, to bring them about from within.

As for Muslims being vote-banks for a party, each political party tries to create its own vote-banks. If the Congress, or lately the Janata Dal, tried to treat Muslims as a vote-bank, the BJP tried hard to create, among upper caste Hindus, its own vote-bank. This is a sort of political tactic each party has to follow, in order to win elections. If the Congress used personal law, and the Janata Dal, the Babri masjid issue to win Muslim votes, the BJP used all possible tactics and strategies — the Ramjanambhoomi issue, appeasement of Muslims, pseudo-secularism — to entice upper caste urban Hindus and it succeeded considerably in this attempt.

Some parties may have treated Muslims as vote-banks, or the Muslim leadership may also have traded with this or that party to sell Muslim votes, but the Muslim masses have voted quite intelligently — both in keeping with their interests and the country's interests as a whole — as have other communities. If they voted for the Congress, others were also voting for the Congress in the country. If others voted for the Janata Party or the Janata Dal during anti-Congress waves, Muslims also voted for the Janata Party and the Janata Dal respectively in 1977 and 1989 when anti-Congress waves prevailed. Some Muslim leaders like the Shahi Imam do try to sell Muslim votes to this or that party — this must be strongly condemned. Even the BJP leader, Atal Behari Vajpayee tried to woo the Shahi Imam in 1977 to campaign for the Janata Party. But it should be borne in mind that the Muslim masses vote according to their own perception of the situation and not because the Shahi Imam tells them to vote for a particular party.

In the 1991 elections the Imam had appealed to the Muslims to vote for the Janata Dal. This appeal was quite superfluous, since the Muslims, in general, were already determined to vote for the Janata Dal. But

this determination was also qualified. Their main intention was to defeat the BJP, even if they had to vote for the Congress or any other secular party. The election results do not bear out that they blindly voted for the Janata Dal. In certain constituencies like Rampur in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP won because their votes were divided among the Janata Dal, the Samajwadi Janata Party (SJP) and the Congress. In Rampur, Muslim voters constituted 47% of the electorate and because of the division of votes among the three parties, the BJP candidate won. This also happened in the Domariaganj constituency in Uttar Pradesh from where Mohsina Kidwai, a senior Congress leader, and Seema Mustafa of the SJP were contesting. In this constituency, though the Muslim votes were about 35%, they were divided, and the BJP won. In Balrampur too, the BJP won, because the Muslim votes, though considerable, were divided among the SJP, the Congress and the Janata Dal.

It would be interesting to examine the Assam election results. In Assam, Muslims make up 26% of voters and they wield considerable clout. In the previous Assembly elections they had voted mostly for the Muslim Front, and it had won 30 seats. However, this time they practically ignored the Muslim Front and voted for the Congress which won a large number of seats and gained a majority. In West Bengal, the Muslims voted by and large for the Left Front. Even in those constituencies where the Left Front was pitted against the Congress Muslim candidates, the Muslims ignored the Congress and voted for the Left Front.

In Bihar, the Muslims voted massively for the Janata Dal and its allies, as a result of which the Congress had to face an ignominious defeat. In this state even political greenhorns who contested on the Janata Dal ticket won against senior Congress leaders. In Darbhanga, Ali Ashraf Fatimi, a political novice, defeated Prof. Nagendra Jha, a senior Congress member by a margin of 1,47,000 votes. In Kishanganj, Syed Shahabuddin won with 80,000 votes, defeating M.J. Akbar of the Congress who had won from Kishanganj in the last elections.

All this shows that it is wrong to say that Muslims are a vote-bank for a particular party as alleged by the BJP in its election propaganda. This also indicates that Muslims do not vote on orders from leaders like the Shahi Imam who trade in their votes. Also, the massive victory of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh shows that the ruling party should not completely identify itself with any minority or any other religious community. The

militant advocacy of 'secularism' by Mulayam Singh Yadav did more harm to the cause of secularism and the cause of minorities. It produced a strong reaction in the Hindu minds. Of course, there are other factors which are no less important, for the defeat of the SJP and the Congress, but militant advocacy of secularism and using secularism for partisan ends rather than as a political philosophy can become counter-productive. Both the SJP and the Congress, which supported the Mulayam Singh Yadav government, were wiped out in the Lok Sabha elections and obtained a limited number of seats in the Assembly elections.

Another important lesson to be drawn from this election is that it is extremely dangerous for the unity and integrity of the country to play communal politics to its extreme, as the BJP did, with a view to capture power at any cost. Although it could not capture power at the Centre despite such unabashed use of communalism, it has done great disservice to the cause of communal peace in the country. It has sown the seeds of communal hatred and created religious bigotry among a sizeable section of Hindus, which would be very harmful for the future of the country. A multi-religious society can stay together only if there is tolerance and respect for others' religious beliefs, and politics is completely separated from religion. The BJP, in this election, not only threw caution to the winds, it deliberately, with an intention to capture power, weakened religious tolerance and raised the communal temperature in the country.

Communal Riots Before, During and After the Tenth Lok Sabha Elections

Communalism and communal violence seemed to be the focal point of the tenth Lok Sabha elections. The ninth Lok Sabha elections in November 1989 had also witnessed an upsurge of communalism. In fact, that election was the beginning of the communalization of electoral processes. Its nadir was reached during the tenth Lok Sabha elections. Never before had any religious issue like the Ramianambhoomi become almost the sole issue for an election. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a right-wing communal party, was determined to win the elections, or at least a substantial number of seats, at any cost, including the balkanization of India, though all the while swearing by *akhand Bharat* (United India).

During the ninth Lok Sabha elections bricks were taken in a procession to Ayodhya from villages across the country, resulting in communal clashes. It should be remembered that it was not Ram mandir which was the BJP's obsession; its real obsession was Hindu votes. Undoubtedly the BJP multiplied its seats in the Lok Sabha during both these elections. It had fought the ninth Lok Sabha elections in collaboration with the Janata Dal and it could be said that it procured many seats on account of non-division of the opposition votes, but that was not the case during the tenth Lok Sabha elections. The BJP was opposed by the Janata Dal and the Congress and yet it won more seats than it did during the ninth elections. The BJP boasted that one can win elections even without the Muslim votes. However, the tenth Lok Sabha elections were fought in a situation of total communal polarization in which Muslim votes were divided among the Janata Dal, the

Samajwadi Janata Party (SJP, mainly in Uttar Pradesh) and the Congress. The BJP took advantage of this division of Muslim votes, especially in Uttar Pradesh where the communal polarization was complete and caste Hindus by and large voted for the BJP.

For this communal polarization the country had to pay a very heavy price. Its secular foundations were shaken and it will take a long time to heal the wounds between the two communities. A country like India cannot remain united without goodwill between various religious, cultural and linguistic communities. The BJP was prepared to lose the country in order to win an election. The communal propaganda naturally resulted in riots even in those places where people of all religions had lived in peace and tranquillity during the days of partition. Persons like Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara attacked secularism and indulged in purely communal propaganda. The fact that the Janata Dal tried to court the Shahi Imam and cajoled him into issuing an appeal to the Muslims to vote for that party, had an adverse effect on the minds of Hindu voters. Muslims should beware of such communal appeals and should not only ignore but condemn them. The traders and brokers of Muslim votes do immense harm to them.

This paper will throw some light on major communal riots from March 1991 when the election campaign began (though formally elections were announced much later) to June-July 1991 when election results were declared and a new government formed.

Orissa witnessed a major flare-up in March during the Ram Navami procession. It had been one of the peaceful states in the country and had witnessed no major communal violence since the Rourkela riots in 1964. According to Manmohan Chaudhary, a Gandhian thinker from Cuttack, Orissa, "...the cadres of the VHP, RSS and BJP had been trying to stir up emotions by their highly exaggerated propaganda about happenings in Ayodhya and on the Ram temple issue."¹

The trouble began with the Ram Navami procession on 24 March at Bhadrak in Balasore district. Bhadrak is a town with a total population of 1,20,000, of which the 70,000 Muslims form a major chunk. Harekrushna Mehtab and Muhammad Hanif were renowned Congress leaders from Bhadrak. (There was some tension here in the pre-partition days.) There was some tension in a nearby village before the March

riots, in which one person was killed, but this does not seem to be connected with the riots in Bhadrak. In Bhadrak the economy is controlled by the Marwaris and Oriya Hindus. The Muslims own small retail shops with a limited clientele and hence are no competitors to the Marwaris in the economic field. Many Muslims run mini-bus services in town and so do some Hindus, but there is no competition among them. The Marwaris, on the other hand, employ mostly Muslim labourers and there has been a long-standing dispute between the owners and the employees on revision of wages. It is suspected that some of these Muslim employees took advantage of the communal flare-up to take revenge on their employers.

Earlier, the Muslims had been voters of the Congress but in 1989 more than sixty per cent were reported to have voted for the Janata Dal and it was not to be very different during the tenth Lok Sabha elections. The BJP was trying hard to gain a foothold in Orissa, having its eye on the Hindu votes, and had its supporters and financiers in the Marwaris. It was indulging in exaggerated propaganda to mobilize the Hindus of the state. They therefore decided to take out Ram Navami processions in many places in the state. Moreover, it could easily be connected with the Ramjanambhoomi controversy. They took out a procession in Bhadrak too, and what is surprising is that the police permitted it to pass through a Muslim locality. As usual, abusive slogans were raised and the Muslims protested. Soon brickbating was resorted to. The police force accompanying the procession was very small.

A police officer was injured when Muslims attacked the procession. Thus tension spread and rioting broke out in the town. Around 4.30 p.m. Muslim shops in Naya Bazaar were looted and burnt. The Muslim miscreants retaliated by looting and burning Marwari shops in Chandan Bazaar area. Those who did this seemed to be well organized. Gas cutters were employed to break open the doors and chests. The police arrived at the scene no less than seven hours later. They enforced curfew which continued for about a week. There were many theories about police inaction. One reason was that the District Magistrate and with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the police wanted to dis- were new to the area. It is also said that the local police was in complicity with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the police wanted to discredit the Janata Dal government because of Biju Patnaik's intemperate

outbursts against the government officials. It is difficult to establish the truth. The trouble subsequently spread to other areas like Soro, 32 km. north of Bhadrak. The BJP had given a call for bandh in the state and processions were taken out. At Soro there was an altercation between Hindus and Muslims and trouble broke out. The Muslims looted Marwari shops and burned them. The number of homes and shops involved ran into hundreds. While a small number of Hindus suffered huge losses, a large number of Muslims lost all they owned. The number of deaths in Bhadrak was seventeen, of which four were Hindus; in Soro, some sixteen persons died, of whom two were Hindus. It seems not many Hindus and Muslims — “ordinary” people — were involved in these riots though both sides seem to have been prepared. It is also true that many Hindus and Muslims helped their neighbours belonging to the other community and in many cases saved them from death.

There was one more factor which communalized the Hindu mind. The Muslims in Bhadrak lionized Saddam Hussein during the Gulf war. His portraits were put up in a number of places. Every Muslim family was exhorted to send one person to fight in the Iraqi army. Monetary contributions were also collected. It seems as if the same elements were instigating Muslim communalism.

Another major riot took place in Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh. Saharanpur was also by and large free from the communal virus, though it has a large Muslim population and it is in this district that the internationally known theological seminary, Darul Ulum, Deoband, is located. Saharanpur has a population of around five lakhs, of which 35% are Muslims and 45% are upper caste Hindus of whom around one-third are refugees from Punjab who migrated to Saharanpur during the partition riots. The remaining 20% comprise backward caste Hindus, mainly Harijans. The Muslims are primarily artisans, employed both as skilled and unskilled workers. The Banias and the Punjabis control the business sector. The Banias also hold white-collar jobs and are professionals like doctors, lawyers, architects, engineers. The other upper caste Hindus hold government jobs, or work in the education sector and similar other activities. The lower castes work mainly as manual labour of various kinds. Overall, the Banias constitute a powerful community exercising control over business as well as various professions. It is interesting to note here that in Saharanpur the competition for business

is mainly between the Banias and Punjabi Hindus, leading to hostility between them. This is one of the reasons why Saharanpur remained quiet even when there was so much communal bloodshed in nearby Meerut district.

Political power is in the hands of locals. The local Hindus and Muslims still treat the Punjabis as 'outsiders' and this fact is reflected in their identity as Punjabis and not as Hindus. The differences in language and cultural practices prevent intermixing. Also, the locals view the Punjabis as a community with communal leanings. Many times, the local Hindus acted as buffers, preventing communal violence between Muslims and Punjabis. Punjabis generally deal in consumer goods like clothes, cosmetics, shoes and electronic goods whereas the Banias deal in food grains, fertilizers and so on. The Punjabis have the "get-rich-quick" image and marriages between them and local Hindus are unheard of.

For all these reasons, the Punjabis have aligned themselves with the rising BJP. This has helped them obtain not only some political clout but also the much desired Hindu identity, thus bringing them closer to local upper caste fundamentalist Hindus. During the karseva movement, the karsevaks comprised 90% Punjabis and 10% local caste Hindus. The Muslims from this district were in the forefront of the political struggle during the independence movement. They either supported the Congress (the Jamiat-ul Ulama's headquarters were at Deoband Seminary, an organization which was an ally of the Congress and opposed to Pakistan) or the left parties. The Muslim League never had much influence even after the formation of the Lok Dal and Janata Dal. The communal parties always remained marginal. In 1969 the Jana Sangh won an Assembly seat, and in 1974 the Muslim League rose to some prominence.

Communal violence in Saharanpur had been a rare phenomenon. In 1924 there was a major riot, but after that there have only been some stray incidents, like in 1967 and 1985, which were localized phenomena. Even 1947 passed it by. The town did not stir during major communal holocausts in other parts of the country during 1984, 1987 and in October 1990 when Uttar Pradesh was aflame due to the events in Ayodhya. Saharanpur remained calm in May 1987 too, when survivors from brutal police firing in Maliyana migrated in large numbers to this

city. This is not to deny, however, that at times low-key tensions did arise. Thus the riots of March 1991 in Saharanpur were unexpected.

Like Bhadrak, in Saharanpur too, the events began with the Ram Navami celebration on 24 March. It was also the month of Ramzan. The Ram Navami procession was to pass from Jama Masjid at about 6 p.m. before the evening prayer started. However, deliberately or otherwise, the procession came near Jama Masjid when the evening prayer had started and hence was stopped; consequently, there was a confrontation between the police and the processionists on this. Though the processionists withdrew, they started a campaign against the district administration, demanding the right of Hindus to complete the procession through the traditional route. The BJP and its supporting organizations like the VHP, RSS and Bajrang Dal were vocal in their attacks at street corner meetings. The Muslim communalists too began to gain ground and started preparations, and both groups were well prepared for what was to come later.

On 26 March, the district magistrate gave permission to complete the procession on an assurance from the BJP that no riots would take place. It is said that he relied on newspaper reports that the area was free of tension. However, the transfer of the superintendent of police, on 23 March, was rather inexplicable as he had a good record of preventing disturbances. Maybe the reason was that he was a Sikh and anti-BJP. Whatever the reason, it was a loss to the city and a prelude to communal disturbances. It left the local police without a capable leader. The new superintendent was totally unaware of the local situation and could not rise to the occasion.

The procession that was taken out on 27 March, ostensibly to complete the incomplete procession of 24 March, was nothing but a show of communal strength. Provocative communal slogans rather than religious ones were raised. A large section of processionists were lumpen elements and activists of the Bajrang Dal, VHP and the RSS. The sloganeering soon degenerated into abuses and slandering of Muslims as the procession neared the Jama masjid. A handful of Janata Dal members and other citizens had gathered at the Jama masjid to welcome the processionists and also to prevent any flare-up. But a section of the processionists soon broke off from the main procession, squatted on the steps of the Jama masjid and began shouting vulgar slogans. All efforts to

remove them failed. The small police force was totally ineffectual. A stone landed from somewhere and heavy stone-throwing started. When the mob violence got out of hand, police resorted to firing in which seven persons died on the spot.

Rumours spread fast that the Jama masjid was attacked and the Muslim youth in Lohani Sarai, a mohalla less than a kilometre away, went on a rampage. They burnt and looted shops. Curfew was clamped in the city that night and continued for eighteen days. According to unofficial reports, about forty people died, although the official claim was only fifteen deaths. Many people were still missing at the time of investigation in April 1991. Apart from the firing, many people died of asphyxiation when trapped inside the shops that were burnt. Stray incidents continued to take place during curfew too, in localities where members of one or the other community dominated. Localities where both Hindus and Muslims lived close by were incident-free. What was tragic was that most of the deaths were of strangers caught by members of the other community. The police were certainly not free from communal bias. During the curfew the poor also faced harassment at the hands of the police when they came out for their daily provisions.

The number of Hindus and Muslims affected in the Saharanpur riots was roughly equal, though all the cases could not be thoroughly investigated. In all, 140 big shops were burnt, most of which belonged to the Hindus. Thus Hindus seem to have borne the main brunt of financial losses in Sharanpur. Our investigators felt that the administration should not have permitted the Ram Navami procession to continue on a mere assurance from the BJP that it would be incident-free: the police failed, due to its inadequacy, to control the situation; the stoppage of the procession before the Jama masjid was deliberate and uncalled for; raising of vulgar and abusive slogans showed lack of control of the BJP, the VHP and Bajrang Dal cadres; the lumpens and anti-social elements were quite active in the disturbances; the BJP selected the occasion of Ram Navami to draw mileage for their election campaign for the tenth Lok Sabha elections which were due then. It is also significant that the BJP leader, Atal Behari Vajpayee, addressed a meeting in Saharanpur on 24 March, which was thinly attended. As against this, the Janata Dal meeting some time before the BJP meeting was well attended mainly by the Muslims and the Dalits. It might have upset the BJP

which then resorted to boosting up its image by instigating violence on communal lines.

Kanpur fell victim to communal violence thrice within one year. The first outbreak in April 1990 in this industrial city was a sequel to a clash between two mafia dons trying to establish their foothold in politics by communalizing the incident. The riot that broke out in December 1990 was an outburst of the minority community's anger with the police, specially the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC). A few cases of Hindus killing Muslims and vice versa, were reported, but the majority of the twenty-four victims fell to police bullets. The uncontrollable violence that engulfed the city on 19 May, in the thick of the election campaign, seemed to have been carefully planned and politically motivated. According to Yogesh Vajpeyi writing on 19 May 1991 in *The Times of India*, it started with the aggressive BJP stormtroopers taking out an election procession in Muslim-dominated Lakkarmandi area and hurling abuses at the community. A few Muslim youths retaliated with a vengeance. As a result, four persons were killed on the first night.

The next morning, the city seemed to be quiet but highly tense. The disturbances began in the evening again due to the BJP protest meeting in Navin Market, which faces the parade area, heavily populated by Muslims. The rioting spread like wildfire throughout the city and continued unabated until the army was called in to control the situation on 21 May. Communal passions were at an all-time high. A Hindu shopkeeper was dragged out of a police jeep and lynched. A young Muslim bride was kidnapped and brutally murdered. With the exception of three persons killed in the police firing, all the deaths were due to stabbing, close range shooting or burning. The police could not attribute any of the killings to personal motives.

According to Yogesh Vajpeyi, nobody disputes that the riots were triggered off by the BJP stormtroopers' brashness. Senior BJP leaders conceded that they had no control over the young blood, meaning the new recruits to the Ram Kaaj (Ram's cause) drawn from the lumpen lot, seeking social legitimacy in the name of religion. Kanpur has today become the centre of communal carnage. It is the same city which had produced luminaries and freedom fighters like Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi (who sacrificed his life while fighting against communal frenzy in the 1931 riots) and Maulana Hasrat Mohani, a renowned poet and freedom

fighter. It was due to their profound influence that Kanpur remained quiet during the partition riots. Now it is almost totally polarized along communal lines due to the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy and the BJP's aggressive election campaign.

According to journalist Anjali Puri, "The communal temperature has been rising steadily in the city, once known for its secular outlook, since the late eighties. It was the scene of vicious riots in April and December last year, and saw euphoric celebrations complete with Diwali lights and the blowing of conch shells, when Karsevaks stormed the Babri masjid in Ayodhya last October. The last riots, in December, were linked to the Ayodhya issue. It was against this background that the election campaign was conducted, and inevitably, it was polarised along communal lines, with Hindus and Muslims taking sharp pro-BJP and anti-BJP positions respectively."²

Another town in Uttar Pradesh, Sikandarabad, situated in the Bulandshahar district, fell victim to communal-cum-poll violence on 20 May 1991. The violence was so intense that the district magistrate, B.K.Singh Yadav, opined that, "it is not going to be peaceful any more." B.K.Yadav also said, "I told members of the warring communities that they must sit down and sort out their problems, as the administration can check violence temporarily, but it cannot prevent it. So they must not allow it to happen again, otherwise the menace of communalism will destroy peace permanently."

Like many other towns, Sikandarabad was considered to be a safe haven in western Uttar Pradesh. It fell to communalists for the first time since independence on 20 May. According to Syed Zubair Ahmed, the violence was sparked off by a poll clash between activists of two parties. Three persons, including a polling officer, were killed, forty-nine shops and nine houses were set ablaze. After these incidents an indefinite curfew was imposed, but violent acts continued the following day and as many as nine persons were killed in bomb explosions as well as in stabbing incidents.

It appears that preparations were going on for some time. Recovery of huge quantities of explosives and arms bears testimony to this. But it seems the administration was caught unawares. The district magistrate admitted to our investigators that "we had not expected communal" violence, as Sikandarabad had never witnessed communal riots before."

According to him, the district administration was surprised to recover about 250 high power bombs, 19 'paper' bombs, a large quantity of petrol bombs and country-made pistols. A police officer said, "Had all these bombs been used, the entire township would have been destroyed." As such, five persons were buried alive when a two-storey house caved in after a bomb went off accidentally, while it was being produced. According to the district magistrate, of the nine persons in the house, six were from another locality, and had obviously come to make bombs.

Kishan Lal Agarwal, a Congress activist, said that "this place has no history of riots." Blaming politicians for the riots he said, "It all started when a Hindu Congress supporter was killed by some armed men who were on a booth capturing spree. The rumour spread that Muslims had killed him, so some people went to the adjoining booth and killed a polling officer and took his body away." And members of the two communities fought pitched battles, he recalled. Laxmi Chand, the BJP candidate, said the people were casting votes in their favour when rigging began. "Large scale booth capturing incidents occurred here," said the BJP candidate from Khurja parliamentary seat, under which some villages of Sikandarabad fall. He alleged that the municipal board chairman, Abdur Rahim Faridi, was the prime culprit in poll-rigging and incidents of arson. But the DM denied that Abdur Faridi had anything to do with violence. However, the Janata Dal (JD) and the Samajwadi Janata Party (SJP) men blamed the BJP for turning poll violence into a communal strife. They said that a large number of Muslims had migrated from the town under threats from the BJP. According to B.K. Yadav (the JD candidate), about 200 families had reportedly left town, and the exodus was still continuing as a repoll was to take place on 12 June, when more violence was feared.

Yet another riot during the elections took place at Benaras in Uttar Pradesh. It started on voting day, when Muslims were allegedly prevented from voting by the Hindus, while Hindus allege that it started when Muslims in their localities prevented Hindus from voting. However, it was difficult to establish who provided the spark. The atmosphere in Benaras was quite surcharged with communal sentiments as S.C. Dixit, a retired Director General of Police and a key VHP office bearer, was contesting from that city as a BJP candidate. Sadhvi Ritham-

bara, whose cassettes were being played on street corners had provided enough communal provocation.

Rumours, based on lies and hatred, according to journalist Tavleen Singh, were the immediate cause and within a matter of minutes Hindu and Muslim mobs were at each other's throats in full force in the filthy alleys and back lanes of old Benaras. In all, according to Tavleen Singh, ten Muslims and one Hindu were killed. Of course, the Muslims maintained that the casualties among them would be higher as long as the Uttar Pradesh government did not realize that the PAC was a communal force. Even the Mulayam Singh government could not act against the PAC culprits, perhaps for fear of revolt.

In Benaras, a large number of Muslims are weavers and they have been in this profession for centuries. They were the main sufferers in this riot too. They are not only soft targets for rioters but are also easily identifiable in their ghettos. According to Tavleen Singh, the mobs, allegedly led by the PAC, broke into the little hovels that pass for homes and ripped everything in sight. They shredded brocade saris, and smashed looms, and took away what was useful – television sets, money and jewellery. There would have been more killings but, in most cases, the men had run away and women and children were mercifully spared. However, the women of Muhammad Yasin's family were not so lucky. His wife's hands were chopped off and she bled to death. When our investigator visited his home, he was shown the bathroom with its blood-stained floor and covered with flies. Her hands were chopped off in this bathroom. Not only this, the rioters burnt alive his daughter, Baby (13) and his daughter-in-law, Shaida Khatoon (18). When the bodies were recovered it was found that their arms were chopped off, which led to all sorts of stories of dreadful mutilations and, inevitably, rape. The only survivor from the family was an eight year-old boy who saw these cruelties taking place.

It is unbelievable that such barbarism is being perpetrated in the name of religion. And yet non-violence is claimed as a hallmark of Hinduism by the very perpetrators of such barbarism. What is equally shocking and horrifying is that we have got used to such violence. We have been desensitized or we have become so passionately partisan that when people of other communities are brutally murdered we accept it as 'just'. Such acts and their legitimization by us will dehumanize our

society more and more, and lead to the end of all values.

Meerut has seen a number of riots since 1982. The riots in 1987 there had shaken the entire nation. The PAC had killed a number of young men and thrown their bodies into a canal. Meerut thus has become communally highly sensitive. In the riot in November 1990, twelve to eighteen persons died, Hindus and Muslims equally. The riot was over within twenty minutes as the entire town was placed under curfew which lasted for twenty days.

Riot again erupted on election day, 20 May. According to Professor Harpal Singh whose only son was killed in riots in 1987, the riot this time broke out because the BJP was highly upset that it was going to lose the Meerut city seat. The Janata Dal candidate, Ansari, was all set to win. There was complete polarization between Hindus and Muslims as most of the Muslims and the scheduled castes were to vote for the JD candidate and most of the Hindus for the BJP. On that day, twenty-eight persons were killed; unofficially, the death toll was about fifty. Of the official figures of the dead, twenty-four were Muslims and eight Hindus, of whom four belonged to the scheduled castes. About seventy-five people were injured, among whom the Hindus accounted for fifteen to twenty. It was obviously the handiwork of the BJP.

According to Prof. Harpal Singh, there was an attempt on the part of the BJP to capture booths on a large scale, and terrorize minorities and other JD voters to prevent them from voting. Prof. Singh said that in broad daylight sixteen Muslims and two Harijans were killed, and some of them burnt alive near Nigar cinema at Sarimal-ki-Dharamsala police station. The district magistrate and the senior superintendent of police were at Sardhana, looking after the BJP candidate. They returned at about 1.30 p.m. By that time it was all over. They then put the town under curfew. Again, from 8 to 12 June there was another round of communal violence which claimed about three lives. In this riot all those killed were Hindus, at the hands of Muslims. Prof. Singh feels that the police administration was responsible for not checking communal violence on 20 May. The killing of eighteen persons near Nigar cinema took place just 100 metres from the Buldhana Gate police station. In retaliation, Muslims of Khairnagar burnt all the Hindu shops in their area on 20 May. They stabbed a few Hindus, one of whom died in the Kasaiwala Gali of Khairnagar.

The investigation shows that the communal violence was well planned with the connivance of the administration. As far as the residents of Meerut were concerned, despite such polarization, Hindus and Muslims saved each other's lives and helped each other in other ways. As a result of this violence, election to the Meerut-Mawana seat was countermanded. Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan was not justified in countermanding the election in the entire constituency, according to Prof. Singh. He was of the opinion that since violence had taken place in two sectors, repolling could have been ordered only in the affected areas, and that Mr. Seshan seemed to have played quite a partisan role.

Baroda is another riot-prone area. It is a fast growing city and has complex problems that are multiplying. Like elsewhere, here too, riots often take place in the old city area. Due to an increasing rate of unemployment and crime (illicit bootlegging is very widespread in the city), communal violence can easily be provoked. The main cause of rioting on communal lines on 23 April was aggressive electioneering by the BJP. Baroda has become a stronghold of the BJP. On the night of 23 April, nine persons were killed and as many injured, in group clashes. The apparent cause was a minor incident in which a boy was hit by an autorickshaw. When mobs clashed, police opened fire, two persons were killed and seven died due to stabbing. The police lobbed 148 tear-gas shells and fired 27 rounds to disperse the clashing groups of Hindus and Muslims indulging in stone-throwing and arson in Fatehpura, Mathikhana, Patel Falia and other areas in the Fatehpura police chowki in the city. During incidents of arson, at least four houses, about eight roadside stalls and six vehicles were set ablaze by the miscreants.

The worst incident took place at Rajpara where a State Transport bus was stopped and two of the passengers dragged out of the bus and stabbed by the mob. In a similar incident a staff bus of the Indian Petrochemicals Corporation Limited was stopped by a mob and one of the victims stabbed brutally. It started at 10.50 p.m. and curfew was imposed at about 11.20 p.m. Most of the incidents occurred during this half-hour interlude, though minor incidents continued to occur up to midnight, when the police succeeded in sealing the whole area.

In Surat city too, disturbances took place, claiming two lives in stabbing in the Athwa Lane police station area, on 21 April. It should be remembered that Surat had so far been unaffected by communal vio-

lence. In fact, there had even been some theories as to why Surat was free of communal rancour.

Madhya Pradesh, under BJP rule, also witnessed communal frenzy at Gogaon, 17 km. from Khargone near Indore. The incident took place on 16 May, in which five members of a family were roasted alive. The communal riot was a consequence of a clash between two Hindu and Muslim youths. Curfew was imposed in the town at about 10.30 p.m. to bring the situation under control. In these incidents, twenty persons, including five policemen, were injured. The hooligans indulged in wide-spread arson in which over 115 kiosks, shops and houses were damaged completely or partially. The incidents were so widespread that fire engines from Indore, Khargone, Barwaha and Sanawad had to be rushed to the town.

Baroda city once again witnessed communal frenzy on 22 July 1991, on the occasion of the Muharram procession. This time seven persons were killed in police firing and stabbing and an indefinite curfew was clamped on the entire walled city areas of Baroda. The trouble started when the tazia procession was stoned in Mandvi area but soon the entire walled city was engulfed. The police had to open fire in Babamanpura, Mandvi, Fatehpura, Dumdherwad localities and several lanes and bylanes of the walled city. While five persons died in police firing, two succumbed to stab injuries out of the total of seven stabbing cases. As the situation ran out of control, the police imposed curfew at 3.45 p.m. in the entire area under Vadi, City and Panigate police stations.

Though it is undoubtedly true that the BJP under the leadership of Nalin Bhatt had induced militancy among the Hindus, the BJP has, of course, denied a hand in the frequent incidents of communal violence in the city. As pointed out earlier, there are several reasons for making Baroda so communally volatile. Communal violence is generally restricted to the walled city which is highly congested, with Muslims and Hindus living in segregation. High rates of unemployment, poverty and lack of education are some likely factors. A large section of the population in the slums and the walled city consists of non-Gujaratis who are said to have a more militant outlook than the locals. The mobs which collect within minutes of an outbreak of violence consist largely of persons in the age group of 15 to 35, who seem to have few other ways of giving vent to their frustration.

Whatever the local reasons, the nature of the riots discussed above clearly show that communal militancy has been fuelled by political propaganda of the BJP, VHP, RSS and Bajrang Dal on the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy. The BJP has come close to power at the Centre by using this highly explosive religious issue. In a multi-religious society with a history of animosity between its principal religious communities, nothing can be more dangerous than mixing politics with religion. Both the Shah Bano movement and the Ramjanambhoomi movement have shown this conclusively. A modern democratic society with in-built unjust structures becomes highly explosive. Primordial identities established on the basis of religion, caste, race, ethnicity or region, acquire a new potency, and violence erupts frequently if politicians decide to appeal to these primordial identities without changing the unjust social structures. Communal and ethnic polarization is a natural consequence of class polarization, increasing gaps between the rich and the poor, and monopolization of economic and power resources by a few castes or by a religious or ethnic community.

Communal Violence and the Role of the Media

The mass media play a significant role in reporting events in a democratic society like India. In fact, the media not only disseminate information but also help in shaping public opinion. This paper deals with the print media and not the electronic media. In India the electronic media are strictly controlled by the government and project only the government's point of view.

Before we discuss the role of the print media in reporting communal riots, it is important to discuss a related matter, viz., the press and freedom of expression. Some media theorists maintain that there should be complete and unadulterated freedom in reporting incidents of communal violence, irrespective of the consequences it may have. There are others who maintain that in reporting communal violence one cannot be allowed unrestricted freedom of expression in view of its serious repercussions in affecting relations between religious groups. Those who favour some restrictions can again be divided into two categories: those who favour voluntary restrictions and those who feel the government should impose a reporting code which must be observed by all concerned journalists.

I have always struggled for freedom of expression, but my field experience in investigating communal violence shows that certain reasonable restrictions, voluntary or otherwise, are highly necessary. Unrestrained reporting often leads to serious consequences in the form of loss of human lives and property. One must weigh human life against freedom of expression. There is one more important reason why certain reasonable restrictions in reporting communal violence are called for. Often

the reporter is coloured by his or her communal bias. If he or she is allowed to report with unrestrained freedom, it can result, in certain situations, in absolute havoc. I have experienced many such instances, some of which are mentioned below.

Personal biases are so strong in reporting communal riots that often I have felt voluntary restrictions may not work and it is better if the government, at least in such matters, intervenes and imposes a code for reporting. After all, human lives are at stake. Also, media persons face a number of problems in gathering information and reporting. It is necessary to throw some light on the nature of these problems in order to understand their complexity.

Often the reporters are faced with a deadline for filing reports. In a riot situation it is not always easy to gather correct information. One gets different versions of the same event. Rumours are always rife in such a situation and one finds many people who are willing to swear that they saw this or that "with their own eyes", whereas the fact is that not only is what has been heard a mere rumour, but the individuals themselves have exaggerated it while narrating it to others. I have experienced this in all the riots I have investigated. It is very difficult to get an authentic version. It requires a great deal of time and patience to get at the truth in emotionally surcharged situations. The reporter lacks both. She is in a hurry to file a report. She meets a few people, takes their opinion, selects what appeals to her according to her bias and files it as a news-story which is taken as gospel truth by the readers who are hundreds of miles away from the situation. When I was investigating the Meerut riots the whole atmosphere was so emotionally charged on both sides that it was quite a job to get at the truth. It took me a couple of days to weave a probable story. So it would be highly risky to get to the truth of the matter instantly.

Often the reporters descend from outside, from big cities like Bombay or Delhi. They are not acquainted with the local populace, their reliability, their mutual conflicts and rivalries and how they dish out stories to debunk their rivals. The reporter has no time to understand these niceties. One cannot rely on the government version either. It is often given with a view to hiding the administration's and police's weaknesses and inefficiency. Nor can one rely on casualty figures, for rumours normally exaggerate these too.

It is to be borne in mind that in middle-sized towns like Meerut or Biharsharif or Moradabad, the reporters of local newspapers are under tremendous pressure from their respective communities. Even if they know the truth, they hide it and report it in a way which would blame the other community only. And, in these middle-sized towns, people generally read local papers rather than distant national dailies. Local dailies give more news of local importance and, specially in a riot situation, these local dailies are in great demand. While investigating the Jabalpur riot of 1961 we discovered that local Hindi dailies had mentioned in their headlines that a Pakistani agent had been caught with a transmitter in a mosque. However, the story was found to be completely false. When we confronted local reporters with the facts they admitted that it was false. But when we asked them why they put out such a false story, they said they were under pressure. One reporter remarked that "you people come from big cosmopolitan cities like Bombay to investigate and you can afford to write a true story but we have to live here among our people and we have to say what they want to hear. We cannot survive here if we do not put out such stories." He spoke this with remarkable candour. This gave us an insight into what happens with the local press.

For local papers it is a question of survival in a highly competitive market. They want to maximize the sale of their papers in a riot situation. These papers are often owned by individual owners, and individual reporters put out stories which their owners want. These stories also reflect local political rivalries. Sensational news, factual or not, is much more in demand, specially in riot situations.

In an emotionally surcharged atmosphere truth is the first casualty. Everyone believes in sensational rumour mongering. During the Ahmedabad communal riots of 1969 the Gujarati press threw away all restraint and began to report stories based purely on rumours. Thus a paper called *Sevak*, an afternoon edition of the leading daily *Sandesh*, reported on 20 September that several Hindu women had been stripped and raped in public in Lal Miñi Chawl. The story was based purely on rumour. This news caused a sensation and many Muslim women were actually molested and raped. The story was contradicted the day after, when all the damage had been done. There was another interesting side of reporting during these Ahmedabad riots (and this pattern continues

even today). Most of the reporters being Hindu, whenever a temple was attacked, the news item unequivocally said, "a temple was attacked", whereas when a mosque was attacked it read, "a religious place was attacked", thus leaving it vague. Similarly, during the anti-Dalit riots in Ahmedabad in 1983, a news item was published that a Jain temple was stoned by Dalits and damaged. The story was entirely false. During the 1985 communal riots in Ahmedabad when a Hindu was killed it was often reported with the name so as to identify the community but when a Muslim was killed it would be reported that "a person belonging to one community was killed", so as not to identify his or her community. During the caste riots of 1985 in Ahmedabad, the *Gujarat Samachar* reported with such irritating bias that the police themselves burnt down the press. All this was done as the owner of the paper was anti-Solanki (Solanki was then chief minister of Gujarat).

At times even major English dailies like *The Times of India* and *Indian Express* carry dubious versions of events, causing a lot of damage to the situation as these papers enjoy much more credibility among the people and are read in many parts of the country. I would like to mention one instance each from both the papers. During the Bombay-Bhiwandi riots in 1984, a great deal of violence took place in the Kherwadi area of Bandra East. It was a Shiv Sena stronghold and there were many attacks on Muslims in the locality, most of whom happened to be vegetable and fruit vendors. An *Express* report in the last week of May 1984 said that Muslims in Kherwadi, most of whom were immigrants from Uttar Pradesh and dealt in illicit arms, had stabbed eighteen Shiv Sainiks. Naturally, this was sensational news and could have caused great havoc. But fortunately the police immediately contradicted it the next day.

Similarly, during the 1985 communal riots in Ahmedabad, *The Times of India* carried a news item which stated that some people pretending to carry a body for burial in a coffin were caught and arms were found inside the coffin, and that the police had arrested the culprits and confiscated the arms. I was curious to know the truth. I investigated the whole matter and met some of the people supposedly carrying the coffin full of arms. I discovered that there was no coffin involved. In fact, some Muslims were carrying an infant who had died, for burial (an infant is carried in one's hands covered with a sheet, and not in a coffin). On the way they were attacked by miscreants and the father of the

infant died on the spot, while the uncle and a few others ran away. In order to hide this truth, the story of the coffin carrying arms was floated and *The Times* had accepted it uncritically. Usually these papers are cautious, but occasionally they trip on certain facts for a variety of reasons. Sometimes a story is hurriedly published, there being probably no time to check it. At other times, it is due to the bias of the reporter who relies on rumour and does not care to check the truth. The *Indian Express* story referred to was more due to the bias of the reporter than anything else. It is difficult to say how *The Times* was caught napping.

Many more instances from Meerut, Moradabad, Aligarh, Bhiwandi, Malegaon, Hyderabad can be cited to show the biased media reporting. I do not want to go on quoting instances at length. But this write-up would remain incomplete if we do not throw some light on the positive role that a section of the print media plays in baring the truth about communal riots. We would not have known the truth about many communal riots but for some major English and language papers. I cite the example of the Hashimpura and Maliyana killings in Meerut in May 1987. It was through newspapers like *Chauthi Duniya* (a Hindi weekly from Delhi), *Sunday Observer*, *The Telegraph* that we came to know how the Provincial Armed Constabulary killed innocent people from Hashimpura and threw them into a nearby canal. The whole story about the shooting down of innocent people from Maliyana was reported in detail by *The Telegraph*. *The Telegraph*, *The Statesman*, *The Times of India* and some other dailies uncovered the Bhagalpur riots that were sought to be hidden from the public by the Bihar administration.

We cannot deny the fact that there are committed journalists who are bold enough to expose the truth and who display an investigative spirit. Their commitment is both to secularism as well as to modern investigative journalism. Their spirit must be appreciated. Also, we should note that even in the West, which supposedly represents advanced democracies and advanced journalism, newspapers are not free of biases in their reporting. It is well-known that the American media are controlled by the Jews and that news reporting about Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular, is highly biased. Edward Said, a Palestinian Arab, has exposed the American media in his book *Orientalism*. The American media display a similar bias against the Blacks too. This is also true of the media in other Western countries.

India is a highly pluralistic society. It has had a history of long conflict between Hindus and Muslims on the one hand, and upper caste Hindus and Dalits, on the other. We should not be amazed if we find biases in media reporting. India's democratic institutions are far from perfect. Yet we have managed to have a remarkably free press compared to other third world countries. Communalism, thanks to some of our unscrupulous politicians, is rapidly increasing, threatening to tear asunder the very fabric of our pluralist democracy. Our newspapers cannot remain unaffected by this virus. But we should be proud that even in this darkness there are at least a few committed journalists who have kept the banner of secularism aloft under difficult conditions.

Outburst of Communal Frenzy at Indore

There was a strong wave of communal violence throughout north, central and western India in September–October 1989. Communal riots took place in Kota, Badaun, Bhagalpur, Ratlam, Mhow, Khargon, Khambat, Palanpur, Hansot, Jaipur, Vadali, Nagda and several other places besides Indore. It was an unprecedented wave of communal violence in the post-partition period. What was it due to? Was it on account of increased religious frenzy? Economic deterioration? Some political design? I think it was a combination of all these factors, although the role of political design is predominant.

The ruling party was as much responsible for these riots as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Bharatiya Janata Party and Babri Masjid Action Committee. It is interesting to note that all these riots took place in the Congress-ruled states; other non-Congress ruled states were comparatively safer. It would, therefore, be of some interest to throw some light on this aspect.

Indira Gandhi split the Congress in 1969. For her, minority and left support was very crucial and hence she played what was then called 'the minority card' or policy of 'appeasement of Muslims'. It was with the support of the left and the weaker sections of society, including the Muslims, that she succeeded in consolidating her position. However, she lost Muslim support considerably during and after the Emergency and therefore, from 1980 she tried to garner the support of the Hindu middle castes which had become politically far more assertive. She tried to exploit the Meenakshipuram conversions to the maximum and also lent subtle support to the VHP. During that period too, a wave of

communal violence had begun with riots in Moradabad in 1980, Bihar-sharif in 1981, Meerut, Baroda, Pune and Sholapur in 1982 and Bombay-Bhiwandi in 1984. Again, these were all Congress-ruled states.

Rajiv Gandhi too resorted to the Hindu card, and unprecedented violence against the Sikhs broke out in November 1984. His pronouncements during the election campaign of 1985 were quite provocative and he tried to win Hindu sympathy. This repeated resort to communal politics seriously undermined the secular foundations of our polity. Also, it helped unprecedented growth of communalist and fundamentalist organizations, among Muslims as well as Hindus. The VHP acquired a momentum of its own and fundamentalism among Muslims too struck deeper roots. We do not want to delve deeper into the sociology and politics of communalism here in this paper. Suffice it to say that there are socio-economic and political factors which play a more important role than religion itself.

The present wave of communal violence has political rather than religious overtones. The ruling party, along with communal organizations, is playing its own game to grab votes. The Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy is being exploited to the hilt. It not only leads to sharp polarization of Hindus and Muslims, it also leads to sharp polarization of their votes. The committed Hindu votes will, of course, go to the BJP which is the political arm of the VHP and RSS, but there is no such strong Muslim communal party to command the committed Muslim votes (the Jamat-e-Islami does not contest elections and the Muslim League's presence is negligible outside Kerala). In the event of riots fuelled by the Ramjanambhoomi – Babri masjid controversy, there would be a strong sense of insecurity among Muslims and they would look towards the Congress for protection and hence they would, in all probability, vote for it.

It is not for nothing that elections were announced shortly after the fresh wave of communal violence started in September. The Home Minister, Buta Singh, not only had full knowledge of the Ramshila puja processions but had tightened up the district administrations for checking communal violence. It is the same story everywhere – that primarily it was the failure of the district administration that resulted in the spread of communal violence. This unabated wave of communal violence has certainly created a strong sense of insecurity in the minds of Muslims.

II

The communal riot in Indore which broke out on 14 September should be seen in the above light, apart from its local specification which we will briefly deal with here. Indore is one of the biggest trading centres of Madhya Pradesh, though the political capital is Bhopal. It is part of old Madhya Bharat and earlier was part of the Holkar-ruled state. The princely states were less prone to communal conflict and Indore had been generally free of communal violence, though occasionally some skirmishes did occur. It was competitive democratic politics in the post-independence era which induced an element of communal conflict in Indore. There were anti-Sikh riots in 1984 in which many lives were lost.

Today, in contemporary India, there are two main factors, apart from religion, which are responsible for sharpening communal conflicts: competitive politics and competitive economy. In all modern Indian urban centres both are present. Indore has a population of 9.5 lakhs according to the 1981 census (it has crossed the one million mark since then). Muslims form roughly 10% of the population, i.e., around one lakh. Politically, they do not have a high profile. There is neither the visible presence of the Muslim League nor that of the Jamat-e-Islami. Even the Babri Masjid Action Committee does not have any aggressive presence.

The Muslims in Indore are, by and large, Congress voters and occasionally they have voted for the opposition like the socialists and communists, i.e., they have been voting for either the centrist parties or left of the centre parties, though more for the former. The Muslims do not have political representation, either at the state assembly level, or at the central level.

Trade is traditionally in the hands of Jains, and the Banias who constitute the Hindu middle castes. The RSS has traditionally had a strong base in Indore and generally the trading castes constitute its base. The BJP also has a strong presence here. Now the same elements have formed the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to advocate the cause of Ramjanambhoomi. In independent India, due to expansion of trade and commerce these urban middle castes have greatly benefited and have acquired economic clout. But their socio-religious outlook has not changed correspondingly. It would be an interesting study by itself to see why

these traditional trading castes and communities have not generally been able to acquire a modern outlook. Their social conservatism has grown in intensity and traditional institutions have been strengthened. Though we do not want to indulge in a sociological analysis here, it can be said that one of the reasons for this is a sense of alienation which grows in urban centres due to continuing migration of those in search of better economic prospects. This sense of alienation seeks compensation by reinforcing the traditional social structure, the institution of caste and so on.

Thus in middle-level urban centres like Indore, trading castes become more conservative and aggressive when they see other lower castes and non-Hindu communities like Sikhs and Muslims become politically more assertive. They perceive this assertion as a threat to themselves and thus strengthen their caste identity. They seek to consolidate this identity through militant Hindu organizations like the RSS and the VHP.

The Muslims on the other hand have had no share in the economic expansion in post-independence India through legitimate channels. They have been increasingly marginalized, except for some relief which a small section of Muslims got due to employment in the Gulf countries recently. Most of them have settled in the Azad colony in Indore. Thus Muslims remain quite backward, both educationally and economically. They are not only becoming marginalized but lumpen and criminal elements are growing among them. Their religious conservatism and resistance to change should be seen in this light. Such elements can hardly be expected to develop a progressive and rational outlook. But the Hindus, in general, perceive them to be 'fanatics', 'fundamentalists', backward and illiterate. It is common talk that mullahs have great influence over the illiterate Muslims. This image of Muslims was further strengthened by the Shah Bano agitation. Incidentally, Shah Bano happened to be from this very town and hence that agitation had an adverse impact on the Hindus of Indore. To some extent it became a turning point in the history of communal relations. Also, what Muslims lose in the economic swing, they seek to gain through illegitimate economic channels. Thus one finds comparatively more anti-social elements among the Muslims, though the Hindus have their own share of such elements.

It is also interesting to note that the bulk of the Muslims in Indore

come from the lower strata of society. They belong to the Chipa, Lohar or Julaha (weaver) castes. Industrialization, instead of benefiting them, ruined them. They were further marginalized. Thus they took to other informal or illegitimate economic channels. The same has happened among the Hindus. Castes like Chamars, Sonkars are low castes and they too have taken to informal or illegitimate channels to enhance their status in the social hierarchy through greater identification with higher caste institutions like the RSS and VHP.

Apart from this social backdrop which is necessary to understand the recent communal flare-up in Indore, it is also necessary to understand the political scenario. The announcement of elections sharpened the political competition. It was commonly believed that apart from the BJP politics and Ramshila puja processions in Madhya Pradesh, the intense rivalry between the Arjun Singh and Motilal Vora groups was largely responsible for the wave of communal violence in the state. Journalist Subhash Ranade pointed out¹ that the towns where communal violence erupted — Ratlam, Mhow, Khargon, Dhar — were under the influence of the Arjun Singh group. The MLAs in these towns were loyal to Arjun Singh.

In Indore, Hindu and Muslim anti-social elements had different political loyalties. Some were loyal to the Arjun Singh group and had a close relationship with Mr. Jogi, the former collector and now a Rajya Sabha member, who belonged to the Arjun Singh faction. One Bala Beg, who was the brother of Arif Beg, the BJP leader, was involved in opium and drug-pushing activities and was quite close to the Arjun Singh group. One Mansur, on the other hand, belongs to the land-grabbing mafia and was also connected with Shafi, a big-time smuggler from Neemuch who was close to Sunderlal Patwa, the BJP chief in the state. Incidentally, Sunderlal Patwa (who later became chief minister) was close to Arjun Singh. These links also indicate the growing criminalization of politics in Madhya Pradesh.

The *Free Press*, an English daily from Indore, under the caption “who is behind riots”, said, quoting intelligence reports and home ministry officials, that some functionaries of the ruling party were under suspicion. These reports indicated that the riots were pre-planned. The state government officials were working on a theory that the riots were aimed at toppling the government of Motilal Vora by proving that his

administration lacked efficiency. Vora, the Chief Minister, himself indirectly affirmed this when he told Shyama Charan Shukla that he would place the relevant information before the Prime Minister.

We do not wish to implicate this or that faction of the ruling Congress in the riots. All we want is to assert that communal riots are often politically motivated, be it the politics of Hindu or Muslim communalists, or of the secular parties. Also, the ruling party and its factions have their criminal links. Narayan Dhanura, who is a Chamar by caste, was in the RSS earlier and has now joined the Congress. He led rioters near Jabran colony, it was pointed out by many affected women from the colony. Dhanura has a criminal record. His role indicated how low caste Hindus are trying to strive for upward social mobility through crime and politics.

Before we come to the main events of the riots on 14 October, it is necessary to throw some light on the Ramshila puja procession which was taken out on 23 September, and which helped communalize the situation. This Ramshila procession in which 'consecrated bricks' were taken out for being sent to build the temple in Ayodhya, the supposed site of the birth of Lord Ram, was a big event. It should be noted that these processions are also politically rather than religiously motivated. The ultimate idea is to mobilize the Hindus as a religious community for political gains, just as Muslim leaders do to mobilize Muslims on religious lines.

One Hindi daily from Indore portrayed this Ramshila procession in its headlines as *Ahalya ki Nagri mein Ramganga ka Uphan* (in this city of Ahalya there was an upsurge of Ramganga). Its subheading was, *Eitihāsik dharmyatra, Ram Ram se gunj utha akash* (the historical religious procession, the sky echoes with Ram Ram). This paper also reported that this procession was a manifestation of great fervour and devotion towards the Hindu religion and of the organized strength of Hindutva. The slogans raised were highly emotional and provocative, betraying the political intent. Some of the slogans raised were: *Sougandh Ram ki khate hain mandir wahin banaenge* (we pledge in the name of Ram that we shall construct the temple at that site only) and *Baccha baccha Ramka janambhoomi ke kamka* (every child is devoted to Ram and would work for Ramjanambhoomi).

Also, there were a number of *akhadas* (fighting squads) which made

an open display of naked swords, guptis and other weapons. This was a show of strength on the part of Hindu organizations like the BJP, RSS and VHP. This procession was reportedly four km long. There were 125 horses and more than 50 *akhadas*, and over 25,000 people in the procession. Many secular Hindus were critical of this needless show of strength. The Muslims of Indore took it as a challenge and some of their leaders, who had their own political calculations, wanted to counter this by taking out an equally impressive procession on the Prophet's birthday which fell on 13 October.

Abdul Ghaffar Noori, a rich Muslim with political ambitions, declared his intention to take out a procession on the occasion of Miladun Nabi, the Prophet's day. This was opposed by many other Muslims including the Shahar Qazi, the religious leader. Thus Muslims were divided into two camps – those supporting the procession and those opposing it in view of the communally tense situation. However, Abdul Ghaffar Noori, who was aspiring for the Congress ticket in the Lok Sabha election, wanted to muster his following among Muslims by mobilizing them for the procession. He ignored all pleas by the saner Muslims and Hindus. The administration which had allowed the Ramshila procession had no moral courage to refuse permission. Moreover, the Congress government could not take the risk of disallowing the procession and thus alienating the Muslims, when elections were round the corner.

When it was decided that the procession would be taken out, some prominent citizens of Indore issued an appeal for maintaining peace. These citizens said in their appeal – carried prominently by local papers – that festivals of all religions should be celebrated with a sense of togetherness. The procession was taken out despite apprehension of breach of peace. Many Hindus interpreted this to mean that preparations were made for the outbreak of violence and hence old men, women and children were not allowed to join the procession. Whatever the truth, it is a fact that both sides were apprehensive of breach of peace.

As a saving grace, many Hindus and others joined the procession which was taken out on 14 October, instead of the previous day, which was the birthday of the Prophet. An assurance was given by the organizers that no provocative slogans would be raised and no arms would be

carried. However, it is difficult to ascertain the truth. The Collector maintained that no arms were carried, while the Inspector General of Police (IGP) said that it was likely that weapons were carried inside bamboos used for flags. As pointed out earlier, there were quite a few anti-social elements among the Muslims and such a possibility cannot be completely ruled out. Afsar Beg, brother of Bala Beg who is an opium and drug dealer, said in an interview to our investigating team led by S. Insaifi, that one should not bow before oppressors and after all, life and death is in the hands of Allah. He hinted that there were weapons for defence.

The procession started peacefully on 14 October 1989, in the morning. Nandlal Mata, a Congress leader and a minister, joined it with many other prominent citizens. When the procession was passing through the Ram Laxman Chowk there was an explosion which caused confusion among the processionists. But they continued to march. Again, two explosions occurred and the procession was disturbed. People began to run helter-skelter. It was around 11.13 a.m. There was no leader of stature to control the situation. The mob went out of control and began to loot and set fire to shops and other property. Nobody knows who threw the bombs or crackers, whatever they were (some people say they were bombs and some others maintain that they were ordinary crackers). Some eyewitnesses maintained that they were thrown from Pavan restaurant near Ram Laxman Chowk, which belongs to some Hindu communalists, and even went to the extent of naming one of them – Rajju Sharma.

Dr. Rajiv, a doctor from M.Y. Hospital and a social worker, said that he too heard a bomb explosion near Bombay Bazar. According to him, people carrying green flags used their sticks to beat signboards after throwing off the cloth of the flag, and in no time, "I saw smoke billowing from various places." Others also corroborated this. Omprakash Raval, a noted social worker, said that an explosion was heard and there was total confusion. People began to run, but the collector and the IGP were wise enough to allow people to run away. Had they tried to stop them by firing at the mob, many more people would have died. In fact, the higher police authorities turned the barrels of their guns towards the sky, so that even if firing took place, it took place in the air.

Many people told us that when explosions were heard at about

11.35 a.m. near the Ram Laxman Chowk, arson and looting began simultaneously all over Indore. Huts began to burn at the same time, even in Jabran colony, several kilometres away. Not only that, all over the city telephone lines went dead for some time, almost simultaneously. This clearly indicated the preplanned nature of the riot. Majid, a reporter from the *New Bharat Times*, a local daily, corroborated this fact. He was in the procession and ran towards Karawghat area from Bombay Bazar and he saw that some miscreants had put cycles across the road so that those running away from the procession could not escape. Then he saw many people coming out with lathis and swords, and attacking those who were escaping from the procession. Everywhere shops and houses were on fire and innocent people were being attacked, beaten up or killed. Majid was also of the view that anti-social elements, land grabbers and others had conspired and engineered this riot to get the district collector, Bhagirath Prasad, transferred, for he was taking strict action against these anti-social elements, particularly against land grabbers and builders. Bhagirath Prasad was later transferred for 'failing to control riots.'

There is no doubt that both political and anti-social elements fully exploited the situation which developed in and around Indore since September. In early October, during the Navratri celebrations, some Muslim miscreants broke an idol inside a temple in Gautampura. Though the Muslims installed another idol there at their expense, Hindu sentiments were hurt and communal tension built up.

The religious fervour on both sides added to the gravity of the situation. The fervour of Muslims during the Miladun Nabi procession was of a matching degree. A Muslim cloth merchant distributed many bales of green cloth free. So Muslims used that cloth to turn their mohallas green by hoisting green flags and wearing green head-covers and arm-bands. Later, when the looting, arson and killing started, the Hindu miscreants used the green flags to identify Muslim houses. The people in Jabran Colony — whose inhabitants were all Muslims — told our investigators that Narayan Dhanure, who has criminal connections (he was formerly in the RSS and is now in the Arjun Singh group of the ruling Congress), was signalling to the bands of Hindu youth who came in batches and set fire to the houses. Almost the whole of Jabran Colony was burnt down. Some 270 huts belonging to Muslims were gutted and

15 huts belonging to the Hindus were left out.

On the other hand, in the Bombay Bazar locality the Muslim miscreants had a field day. One police officer of the rank of Deputy Inspector General (DIG) was stabbed. Sushila Nursing Home, a three-storey building, was set aflame and reduced to ashes. Dr. Sharma, husband of Dr. Sushila – the owner of the nursing home – was a freedom fighter and had worked with Subhash Chandra Bose. He was said to be very critical of anti-social elements connected with opium- and drug-pushing and it is suspected that these elements burnt down the nursing home. However, as a saving grace, many Muslims, including the Bohras, gave shelter to women patients who had come to the nursing home. In this locality, many Hindu shops were looted and burnt. Ratan Lal, a cloth merchant, sustained a loss of Rs. 2,00,000, whereas Kailash Chandra Uma, a tea shop owner, lost goods worth Rs. 4,00,000.

In Silawatpura, a Muslim locality, more than thirty-two houses belonging to Muslims were burnt by petrol bombs. Many shops in this locality were looted and burnt. The irony of it was that just opposite Silawatpura was the police colony. Muhammad Ishaque, a young rickshaw-puller, said that the night before, green flags had been flown out of the Muslim houses which were looted and burnt under the leadership of the three sons of a police sub-inspector – Bally, Rajesh and Timiyya — who had come there with some Harijans of Lodha and Kunjar communities who live in hutments nearby. It has often been seen that the upper caste Hindus make use of lower caste Hindus and Harijans for looting, arson and killing. Similarly, in Arjunpura there were three houses belonging to Muslims which were looted and burnt, and in Alapura locality seven houses belonging to them were gutted.

All this happened within a couple of hours after the riots had started. During this period, according to one reliable estimate, about twenty-seven persons were killed, of which twenty were Muslims, and seven Hindus. According to Dr. Rajiv, about 192 injured persons were brought to the M.Y. Hospital. 44 were seriously injured. About 24 were Muslims and the rest were Hindus.

About 1,000 persons were initially arrested, most of them Muslims. But many were later released. The police excesses during search operations were testified by all. Most of the victims of these excesses were

Muslims. Zubeda Bi of Chandan Nagar said that she was with her daughter and daughter-in-law in the house when “five uniformed policemen entered our house, put a gun on my chest and demanded the key. They removed gold ornaments like earrings, rings and payal. When I protested, they replied ‘you Muslims, you live on our crumbs and still want to create Pakistan here, shut up and live at our mercy’”.

Similarly, in Champabaugh area, several families testified to police abuses. In Aslam’s house something unbelievable happened. Aslam was suffering from high fever, his wife told us. She fell at the feet of the policeman and pleaded with him not to harm her husband. But, according to her, the policeman said, “*do goliyon ki zaroorat hai tumhare admi ko, uska bukhar theek to jaega*” (your husband needs two bullets and he will be free from fever), then he dragged Aslam out, fired two bullets at him and killed him.

Our team has recorded several cases of such atrocities. When we interviewed the IGP he also admitted to these excesses and acknowledged that the police, right up to the rank of Superintendent of Police, has been communalized.

It must be said that there were many instances of members of one community coming to the rescue of those of another community. Anant Lagu, a local CPI leader, told us that both in Khajrana locality and in Kachi Mohalla, where Hindus and Muslims live together, their elders met on 12 and 13 October and decided that if Hindus were affected Muslims would protect them, and that if Muslims were affected Hindus would look after them. This is what happened, and both localities remained safe. In Jabranpura, two Hindu boys came to the rescue of their Muslim neighbour and lay down on the ground to block the path, so that the fire brigade did not go away without extinguishing the fire in the Muslim huts. When Muslim goondas set fire to Sushila Nursing Home in Bombay Bazar area and the Hindu patients, all women, ran for safety, many Muslims in the area gave them shelter and looked after them. It is this humanity that is the saving grace of our society.

Kota — Another Graveyard of Secularism?

A reporter from *The Telegraph* who visited Kota, around a week after the riots, wrote, "The fire tenders have emptied their tanks but the embers of the riots that revenged this city are still smouldering."¹ Over two months after our investigator, Dr. K.S. Durrany, visited the city, the situation was still tense. Bomb explosions were being heard and many people lived in terror. It required considerable effort to make people speak frankly about the riots.

II

The riots in Kota were a direct result of such an atmosphere in the country. Kota, an important industrial city of Rajasthan, is directly connected by rail with Delhi as well as Bombay, which gives it an added advantage as a commercial centre. In Kota district, according to an estimate, there are more than fifty important industrial establishments which employ thousands of local people including Muslims who constitute around 9 per cent of the city's population of 8 lakhs according to the 1981 census figures. Around 89% are Hindus. Yet this city had known communal peace for more than thirty-three years. Communal riots had occurred in 1943, 1953 and 1956. An eyewitness who had seen the 1956 riot as well as the riot in 1989, said, "I have seen the 1956 riots and this carnage. In 1956, immediate steps were taken to control the mobs. But these riots showed that no one seemed to care any more."

As in any other place in India, Muslims in Kota have been generally poor, except the Bohra Muslims who are a business community. However, in the last two decades a large number of them have gone to the Middle East (according to one estimate almost 70% of the Muslim

families from Kota have sent one or the other member to the Middle East for a job) and they have acquired a measure of prosperity. Earlier, they depended on local jobs mostly in industries. In a position of such dependency the employer-employee relations were "smoother" — employers were Hindu and employees Muslim. Now, two changes have occurred. Since many Muslims began to go to the Middle East countries, they returned and worked not by compulsion but by choice. Thus dependency relations are no longer there. Secondly, since the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), controlled by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) appeared on the trade union scene, there have been more strikes and militant trade union actions. Thus the relations between Hindu employers and Muslim employees are no longer smooth. This has contributed to exacerbation of communal relations, though in a limited way.

Muslims have begun to show greater identity consciousness, the result of a deepening of competitive political processes. This has contributed to making relations between the two principal communities less smooth. Another significant factor has been the business competition, specially with the Bohra Muslim community, which largely suffered by way of looting and burning shops. This was important, but not a decisive factor in the present riots. The Bohra Muslims, with Khojas and Memons, became the main targets of attack, being a business community. Our study of various riots in Gujarat, in Ahmedabad, Baroda, Sidhpur, Bharuch, Mehsana and several other places, showed that business communities among Muslims, though quite peaceful and well integrated with their Hindu counterparts in society, were increasingly becoming victims of communal violence.

Kota was once a princely state and hence it had its own tradition of communal harmony. A feudal state has neither a competitive polity like a democratic polity, nor a competitive economy, like the capitalist economy, and hence there tends to be little inter-communal hostility and tension, except on some purely religious issues. Kota has now emerged as a modern industrial and business town in a modern competitive democratic polity. It is therefore quite natural that inter-communal tensions are building up and communal harmony is being undermined.

Like other similiar towns — Ahmedabad, Baroda, Hyderabad — the walled city has greater communal sensitivity. Kota within the walls, is

known as *perkota* and outside it is called *perkota ke bahar* (outside the walled *kota*). The walled city is also an old part of Kota, as it was built during the princely era. It is the main city and business centre. On the eastern side of the old city is Garha palace and the Tipta chauraha from where the religious processions generally start. It is from this chauraha (a four-way traffic point) that the tazia procession in Muharram starts. This tazia procession included two tazies by the erstwhile princely rulers. The princely rulers, though Hindu, did this to maintain communal harmony.

For years the Hindus and Muslims have lived together in the walled city in peace and harmony. Many mohallas have a predominantly Hindu population and a smaller Muslim population. The Qazi mohalla, for example, has ten Muslim houses surrounded by the Hindu Radhivilas mohallah. Shaher Qazi Anwar Ahmad, who traces his ancestry to Akbar, and is the religious head of the local Dawoodi Bohras, lives here.

The larger area of the city is outside the walled city. On the north-east is Dadawadi, Mahavir Nagar, Keshavpura, Aerodrome Circle. On its north is Chhavani chauraha, Goverdhanpura circle. On the north-west is Railway Junction and in the west is the Nayapura bus terminal and in the south flows the river Chambal.

III

Communal violence in Kota broke out on the occasion of Anant Chaturdashi, on 14 September 1989. The Anant Chaturdashi procession started from the Tipta chauraha and passed through the Muslim mohallas of Patnipole, Makbara, Ghantaghar, and its surrounding areas of Chandraghata on the banks of the Chambal river, Bajazkhana and Ladpura. The procession was to be terminated at Nayapura in a public meeting after the immersion of the idols of Lord Ganesh. However, due to the riots the immersion could not take place.

The Anant Chaturdashi procession contained a large number of *akhadas* (organizations meant for physical training) like Mathuresh Vyayamshala of Patnipole, Goth Ke Balaji, Bhoi Bajrangdal of Kotdi, *akhada* of Kaithunipole, *akhada* of Rampura, *akhada* of Gumanpura; units of the RSS, VHP, Shiv Sena and Bajrang dal; BJP members including BJP MLA, Dau Dayal Joshi; and many anti-social elements. The *akhadas* and anti-social elements, according to the Muslim

advocate Jamil Ahmad, carried swords, gandasas and other sharp-edged weapons. Jamil said he wrote to the Prime Minister about it. According to him, the trucks, trolleys and tractors accompanying the procession were filled with weapons, stones, and petrol drums. It was difficult to verify this allegation, though one cannot rule out the possibility. Many people had come from nearby villages to join the procession and according to one estimate there were about 10,000 people in it.

The processionists, it was agreed by most of the eyewitnesses, shouted highly objectionable slogans which had nothing to do with the nature of the procession. Some of the slogans were: "*Hindustan mein rahna hai to Hindu bankar rahna hoga*" (if you want to live in India, you will have to live like Hindus), "*Babar ki santanon ko Hindustan mein nahin rehne denge*" (we will not let the progeny of Babar live in India) and "*Hindu, Hindu, Hindustan, nahi rahega Pakistan*". It had been agreed earlier that objectionable slogans would not be raised. Such slogans were also painted on walls.

The procession reached the Muslim area between the time of *maghrib* (sunset prayer) and *isha* (night prayer). Between Makbara and Ghantaghar, the processionists stopped near a mosque and shouted these slogans. However, it did not have any effect. On the other hand, Muslims took strong positions in the densely populated Muslim area of Chandraghat, Bajazkhana, "to defend their families," said a restaurant owner near Ghantaghar. Among them were students of Islam higher secondary school located in the area and also other Muslim youths. The Ghantaghar area became like a battlefield.

It was very difficult to establish how the riots started even two months after the riots (when we made investigations). Hindus blamed Muslims and Muslims blamed Hindus. But all were united in their opinion that the riots were the handiwork of politicians. Both Muslims and Hindus unanimously agreed that the riots were preplanned. The Muslims strongly maintained that the BJP, RSS, Bajrang dal and the Shiv Sena elements were among the planners. Many Muslims maintained that they saw BJP MLA Dau Dayal Joshi leading rioters. The four page memorandum prepared by the Muslims of Kota said, "The communal riots and the above mentioned murders, looting, setting fire and other troubles were created by some of the leaders of the BJP, Shiv Sena, Bajrang dal, i.e., Dau Dayal Joshi (MLA), Raghuveer Singh Kaushal

(ex-MLA), Harish Sharma (MLA), Mani Bhai Patel and some other miscreants, culprits, habitual offenders and hardened criminals like Madan Dilawar, Ravindra Nirbhay, Joadh Raj, Kana Kattiya, Mahinder alias Bhuria, Balu Khatik." The memorandum goes on to list many more names. It is an exhaustive list.

The Chief Minister of Rajasthan, S.C. Mathur, blamed the same elements. According to the *Hindustan Times* of 20 September 1989, "the Chief Minister said that those behind the trouble in Kota had been identified and stern action would be taken against those elements." (Needless to say, no action has been taken till date). In a statement reported in the same newspaper of 16 September, the Chief Minister "blamed the VHP, Bajrang dal, RSS and other communal forces for raising provocative slogans in Kota." The slogans shouted "worsened the situation", the Chief Minister asserted. However, the *Rajasthan Patrika*, a prominent Hindi daily, strongly objected to the Chief Minister identifying the culprits in the riots. "He (S.C. Mathur)," wrote *Rajasthan Patrika*, "is not only misguiding the public but also misguiding himself."

The BJP, on the other hand, saw Congress manipulations in the riots. "The Congress (I) is using the usual BJP angle to get minority votes, but the allegations are baseless," said Lalit Kishore Chaturvedi, the BJP MLA from Kota. Also, the BJP's general secretary for Rajasthan and former MLA from Kota, Krishna Kant Goel, added that the BJP had lost a great deal of confidence because of the riots. "During the last few years we have been working to wean the Muslim voter away from the Congress," he said. K.K. Goel even maintained that the riots had negated the work done by the BJP for five years to woo the Muslim voters. He alleged that the Congress had managed to come across, as it did after most riots, as the sole saviour of the Muslim community in Kota.

Whoever was responsible for these riots, the Muslims in Kota strongly felt that it was the handiwork of the BJP and its associates. There is no doubt that they were shouting highly objectionable slogans in the procession and they could not be dissuaded. Secondly, everyone agrees that there was a total failure of the administration. If the administration had acted promptly, much of the loss of lives and property could have been avoided. Even the police officials at the higher level who came

from Jaipur, were taken aback by the police inefficiency – there had been a two-and-a-half hour delay in police action.

How was the procession, taken out in the late evening, permitted by the administration? Did the authorities not apprehend any danger? The administration was warned of the danger in advance. Though the district magistrate, Ram Lubhaya, denied having received any warning from the competent agencies, a Congress activist and a member of the Qaumi Ekta Executive Committee, Somnath Sharma, showed a carbon copy of the letter he had personally given to the collector on the afternoon of September 14 warning him of the possibility of violence.

Though permission to take out the procession despite communal tension was granted in the late evening, no proper arrangement was made by the police. Unbelievable though it may sound, it is a fact that there were only twelve or thirteen policemen on duty. The policemen were armed. When slogan shouting did not stop in the late evening, there was brickbating and the procession dispersed in panic. The policemen, hopelessly inadequate in number, fired on the mob and the district magistrate and the superintendent of police fled to their office, got in touch with the authorities in Jaipur and called in the army. Curfew was declared around 9.30 p.m. and the army moved in at around 11 p.m.

Meanwhile, the entire city was in flames, and anti-social elements were looting and burning the shops beginning from Ghantaghar area, and all prosperous business houses became their target. The Bohras suffered maximum loss, estimated to be around a crore of rupees. Some persons were killed in police firing and others by sharp-edged weapons, as shown by the nature of injuries and post-mortem reports.

It is really difficult to find out the exact number of those killed. Many were missing and some were presumed to be dead. Our investigator visited families of the dead as far as possible, and compiled a list. In this list there figure about eleven persons dead, whose ages ranged between 15 and 42, except two who were 60 and 80 years old. Of these eleven, seven were killed by gunshot injuries, and the remaining four by injuries sustained by sharp-edged weapons. According to another list published in the Urdu daily *Tulu-e-subh*, the number of dead among Muslims was twenty-two, four of whom were killed during their *isha* prayer. Those praying in the mosque were killed by swords or other sharp-edged weapons.

The post-mortem reports collected by our investigator show that in all, thirteen Muslims died, of whom nine were killed on 14 September, five by gunshot injuries and four by sharp-edged weapons. Three people died on 16 and 17 September (riots continued for four days, though on a smaller scale), one by gunshot injury and three by sharp-edged weapons. Lastly, one person died on 21 September due to multiple injuries inflicted by a weapon. Also, four Hindus died on 14 September by gunshot injuries. Three persons died in an explosion. In all, about twenty-one persons died, if one goes by the government reports, but if one goes by the report of the Urdu paper *Tulu-e-subh*, some twenty-two Muslims and four Hindus died.

The nature of injuries of those who died clearly shows that all Hindus were killed by gunshots, probably in the firing by the police on 14 September to disperse the mob. However, some of the Muslims killed, including those praying in the mosque, died due to injuries from sharp-edged weapons. This clearly shows that sharp-edged weapons were mostly used by the Hindus. But the fact that three Muslims were killed in an explosion shows that they were probably trying to make bombs to attack Hindus. Some twenty-six Muslims were injured, both by gunshots and weapons, some of them seriously. On the other hand, forty-one Hindus were injured, some of them seriously, both by gunshots and stabbings.

The deaths and injuries caused by gunshots were a subject of intense debate. Some people said that guns were freely used by both sides. The Hindus said that outsiders were brought in by the Muslims and made to stay in the musafirkhana and gun shots were fired from there. The Muslims, however, argued that no bullet was found in the Hindu area and all the bullets were found in the Muslim area, indicating that it was the Hindus who fired on Muslims. It is also a matter of debate whether the police resorted to firing or not. The chief minister himself admitted that the police had done so. But the newspapers have reported that there was no armed police with the procession; there were only lathi-wielding constables. The myth of police firing was probably created either to show that the authorities were prepared to meet the situation, or by peacemakers to show that it was the police who fired and not the Hindus or Muslims. If the police had indeed fired, it is not clear who ordered the firing.

As pointed out earlier, Muslims suffered the most and among Muslims, the Dawoodi Bohras suffered most severely. Loss of their properties comes to around a crore of rupees. A detailed list of losses of their property has been prepared by our investigator. Other Muslims suffered comparatively little losses, as they do not have business establishments like the Bohras. The Hindus too suffered, but again, their loss was comparatively less. Some twenty-five Hindu business establishments were attacked and the maximum individual loss seems to be the loss of Rs. 17,500 suffered by Dharam Das, whose boot shop was looted and destroyed. Chandra Prakash, who had a shoe shop, sustained a loss of Rs. 16,800. Other Hindus suffered losses ranging from Rs. 500 to Rs. 7,000.

In the case of Dawoodi Bohras, a firm dealing in pumps, paints, sanitaryware, etc., sustained a staggering loss of Rs. 21,70,000/- including property, stocks and cash. One Patanwala suffered a total loss of Rs. 16,75,000/-

In the midst of all this, some people did show humanity and did not care for religious barriers. Lokendra, who had had to be hospitalized, told our investigator that he had gone to the market area to visit a Muslim friend on that ominous day. It was then that violence broke out. He was trying to run for his life when a bullet hit him. Somehow he found his way to his friend Shehzad's house. For two days his friend's family nursed him. While Lokendra was there, Shehzad learnt that his grandfather was killed in the riots. Lokendra was scared, but the family continued to look after him till he could be taken to the hospital.

Such incidents show that all has not been lost. But we must realize that the situation is indeed very grim. Those committed to secularism will have to fight with ever greater determination the menacing increase in the incidence of communal violence and crass exploitation of religious sentiments for political purposes.

Bhagalpur Riots – A National Shame

The Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy took a heavy toll in terms of human lives. A thorough inquiry established that more than 800 people died in Bhagalpur and its suburbs, in addition to those killed in other riots in Jaipur, Kota, Indore, Hahasaram, Godhra and several other places. All these riots were apparently caused by the Ramshila puja processions (processions of consecrated bricks). But there were far deeper issues involved.

To understand the genesis of the riots, let us look at Bhagalpur, its environs and the political situation there. Bhagalpur is a district town and a fairly advanced one. It is a centre of education with many English medium boys, schools, convent schools, government-run high schools, about a dozen colleges, a medical college and a university. It is also a revenue division, has a commissioner and deputy inspector general of police and houses the headquarters of the district administration.

All this does not automatically lead to communal amity and religious tolerance. Bhagalpur is also a boiling cauldron of crime. It is notorious for criminal gangs and attracted media attention for the blinding of some criminals in 1980 by the police for political reasons. According to a prominent social worker, the blinding incident was a result of a fight between two groups of Congressmen with their own patronage of crime. The same source informs us that there was intense rivalry between Bhagwat Jha Azad and Sadanand Singh, a Member of the Legislative Assembly in Bihar. As a result of this rivalry, the criminal gangs supporting the respective politicians also began to clash. Bhagwat Jha Azad brought in a police superintendent of his choice, and attacks on Sadanand Singh's goondas began; and those caught were blinded.

The politicization of crime in this town cuts across communal lines. There are notorious Hindu as well as Muslim criminals. There is a fairly large proportion of Muslims in and around Bhagalpur. Many Muslims are either weavers or in the powerloom business. Some Muslims are well-to-do businessmen or property owners like the owners of the Shah Market in Bhagalpur. Thus, we see that in Bhagalpur there was everything required for fuelling a communal riot: communal rivalries, political rivalries and criminal rivalries. What more potent mix does one need for communal violence to explode? However, it seems that all these were necessary but not sufficient conditions for a riot as violent as the one on 24 October to break out. The need for sufficient conditions was fulfilled by the Ramjanambhoomi controversy.

The intelligence agencies, as well as the common people were aware that riots were likely to break out near Tartar chowk during the Ramshila puja procession. But the administration not only did not ban the procession, but did not even bother to change its route, despite protests from Muslims.

A few things more need to be taken into account before we come to the actual incidents. As pointed out before, there is rampant crime, both among Hindus and Muslims. And these criminals are patronized by different politicians. There are two notorious gangs, with the one headed by the Sallan group being patronized by Bhagwat Jha Azad and the Ansari group by Shiv Chandra Jha, both former Chief Ministers of Bihar. There is intense rivalry between these two factions of the ruling Congress and this is reflected in the conflict between the Sallan and Ansari gangs.

Ansari, patronized by Shiv Chandra Jha, was in jail for quite some time and it is alleged that it was Bhagwat Jha Azad who had put him there. However, on the eve of the Lok Sabha elections in November, there was some patch-up between the Azad and Jha factions of the Congress and the Ansari and Sallan criminal groups. However, some tension grew again when Shiv Chandra Jha brought in Dvivedi as superintendent of police. Ansari and some other anti-social elements were released from jail in order to utilize their muscle power in the Lok Sabha elections. But Dvivedi worsened the matter by launching attacks on some Muslim anti-social elements including Ansari, in the name of Sabha elections. But Dvivedi worsened the matter by launching attacks

during the riots, began to show his communal fangs right from this stage. The Ansari gang was, therefore, highly antagonistic to him and was waiting for an opportunity to settle scores with him.

Adjoining the Muslim mohalla of Tartarpur (in Bhagalpur), is a Hindu locality called Parvati mohalla at the end of which the university area begins. Parvati mohalla is inhabited by Yadavas and Kurmis, the backward Hindu castes. These two backward communities have their own criminals as do the Muslims, and often there are running battles between the criminals. They have their own areas of influence which extend right up to the university campus. In both these mohallas there are a number of student lodges where university students who do not get admission in hostels stay. There are many lodges in which both Hindu and Muslim students stay together.

The Hindus of Parvati mohalla celebrate a festival called Bindula Puja with great gusto. Be it Bindula or be it Muharram, anti-socials of both the communities play an increasing role in them. In 1989, the Bindula Puja happened to be a few days before Muharram in August. The Yadavas and Kurmis put up a shamiana which obstructed the passing of tazias during Muharram. The Muslims objected to this. Kamleshwar Yadav, a gangster of Parvati mohalla, wanted Muslims to lower the alam (a mourning flag) so they could pass the obstructions. Thus he wanted to establish his power over the area. Muslims had almost reconciled themselves to this when Arun Kumar Jha, the district magistrate, had the obstruction removed. Kamleshwar Yadav was arrested, but he was soon released under pressure from the Congress leaders.

Needless to say, the Yadavas protested the removal of the shamiana which they saw as the defeat of the Hindus; the Muslims saw it as their victory and displayed more vigour in the Muharram procession. Similarly, during the Bindula procession on 20 August, an attempt was made to avenge the 'defeat' of the Hindus at the hands of Muslims. Some anti-Muslim slogans were also raised by the processionists. And strangely enough, when the procession was passing through Shujaganj Bazar, it stopped there for eight to ten hours, and in an adjacent locality, a Muslim rickshawala was mysteriously murdered. The tension began to mount further after this murder. It was further exacerbated during Dasi-era and Chehlum (40th day of morning after the 10th of Muharram).

We can realize the gravity of the situation if we take the parallel developments on the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid front.

Earlier, only the Bajrang dal and the VHP were actively involved in the shila puja preparations. Now the Hindu anti-socials too came on the scene. The Ramshila puja procession was to be taken out on 24 October 1990. The organizers hoped that not many would join. However, the tension between Hindus and Muslims, some incidents of a communal nature in Nathnagar a few days before, in which Muslims were at the receiving end, and the joining in of anti-social elements, greatly added to the strength of the procession on 24 October. The administration allowed the procession despite warning by intelligence agencies that a riot was likely to break out near Tartarpur junction. The district magistrate was helpless himself and was under pressure from his political bosses who wanted the procession to go on for political benefits in the Lok Sabha elections. They could, after all, not dare to earn the wrath of the majority community by banning the procession.

The Muslims objected to the passing of the procession through Tartarpur area as they said that it was not a religious procession taken out on a Hindu festival. The Ramshila puja procession was a political one, they argued. Despite this, Arun Jha and superintendent Divedi not only allowed the procession, but also allowed it to pass through Tartarpur. The processionists were shouting highly objectionable anti-Muslim slogans like '*Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan, Muslims Jao Qabrastan,*' '*Jai Ma Kali, Karo Tartarpur Khali*', '*Babar Ki Santano, Hindustan chodo*'. Some eyewitnesses even maintained that the Bihar Military Police and some other assorted policemen also joined the slogan shouting.

Many Muslims had collected near Tartarpur, opposing the entry of the procession into their mohalla. The processionists were bent upon entering the mohalla. The procession was being led by two notorious anti-socials, Kamleshwar Yadav and Mahadev Singh, who were rivals of Mohammad Ansari, Shiv Chandra Jha's protege. The district magistrate and the superintendent of police were also accompanying the procession in a jeep. Some bombs were thrown on the procession, probably by Ansari and his men. There could be many reasons for this. If the bombs were from Ansari, as it is alleged, he might have targeted his rivals Kamleshwar Yadav and Mahadev Singh or, what is equally likely, they might have tried to attack the SP himself, for launching attacks on

Muslim anti-social elements and on Ansari's men.

Whatever the motive, it caused great turmoil in the procession. People began to run helter skelter. The DM and the SP escaped narrowly. They had to hide behind the jeep. It is also said that the DM had to take shelter in a ditch nearby. The DM was not ready to give permission for firing at the crowd, but the SP was bent upon it and at last, without the DM's permission he fired on the mob, reportedly killing four persons, two Hindus and two Muslims. Some maintain that only two Muslims were killed. All this happened before 5 p.m.

That evening, the procession turned into a marauding mob killing people and looting and burning shops and houses. Muslim anti-socials controlled by the Ansari gang began to counter the attacks by killing many Hindus. T.N.V. College and Sanskrit College, which were examination centres, were affected by violence. It is said that around twenty students from both sides were killed.

As it happens in other riots, wild rumours spread. The rumours had it that hundreds of students were killed by Muslims and their bodies were thrown into nearby wells. It was also rumoured that Ansari's men wore police uniforms and entered nearby lodges where Hindu students were living, brought them out on the pretext of sending them to secure places, and killed them and threw their bodies into nearby ditches and wells. These rumours spread very fast to the villages from where the students came, and soon mobs in these villages started killing their Muslim neighbours.

The marauding mob, hearing such rumours, spread into different localities of the town and began setting fire to Muslim shops and killing those who fell into their hands. Except Shah Market, no Muslim shop was spared. More than one hundred shops were looted, burned or damaged. The greatest loss was sustained by the National Watch Company which had a wholesale business. It should be noted that the Muslims of Bhagalpur are quite well-to-do, compared to other Muslims in India. But these riots changed the economic scene of Bhagalpur as far as the Muslims are concerned. One Aziz Naziruddin Khan Mani estimated the loss sustained by Muslims at about Rs. 15 crores. In the countryside too, there was widespread destruction of powerlooms, rendering thousands of silk workers jobless. Bhagalpur is known for its silk variety called tassar.

There was destruction of mosques and mazars on a large scale. These places of worship were special targets in Bhagalpur as well as in the villages. In the town area, mosques at Nayabazar, Mundichak, Shujaganj, Marufchak, Golghat and Burhanath were destroyed. Saffron coloured flags of the Bajrang dal were hoisted on many mosques. The administration never bothered to remove these flags which caused provocation to the Muslims. One should also say that the police force behaved no better than the armed Hindus. They were part of the killing and looting. Superintendent of police Dvivedi was playing a blatantly partisan role and he was being lionized by the communal Hindus. It was no different from what happened in Meerut in 1987. Perhaps it was a degree worse.

It was for this shameful role that Dvivedi was transferred from Bhagalpur district on 25 October. The Bihar director general of police, A.K. Chaudhary, recorded in a 'secret and most immediate' communication dated 25.10.89 that "in view of the prevailing situation at Bhagalpur, an urgent need has been felt for replacing the superintendent of police, Bhagalpur", and another communication (no. 6714) ordered Dvivedi to hand over charge immediately and proceed to Police Headquarters, Patna. He, in fact, handed over charge to Ajit Datta at 1.30 p.m. on 26 October when the entire town was plunged into communal violence. However, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi came to Bhagalpur on the same day and while proceeding to Nehru Medical College was surrounded by a big mob mostly consisting of plainclothes policemen who demanded Dvivedi's reinstatement. It was most unfortunate that Rajiv Gandhi yielded to the pressure and stayed Dvivedi's transfer. It was not only blatant interference in the state administration over which he had no jurisdiction, but it also gave licence to the policemen to involve themselves in violence without any sense of fear or restraint.

On 26 October a most gruesome massacre took place at Nin in which eighteen persons — five men, two women and eleven children — were brutally murdered. In fact, three Muslim families were given shelter in Jamuna Kothi by Dharendra Kumar Singh Munna and Pratibha Sinha, principal of a school and a communist leader. One of the families taking shelter in the Kothi was Pervez Anand's. Youth Congress President of Bhagalpur. On the morning of 26 October the residences of Pervez

Anand and two others were set ablaze by a mob reportedly 1,500 strong. The police chowki was less than a kilometre away but no one came to their rescue.

At 11.30 in the morning, more than fifty persons, all armed with sharp weapons, entered Jamuna Kothi. Eighteen people, out of the forty-four taking shelter there, were hacked to death. Children were flung from the third floor, some were beheaded and others had their limbs chopped off. One woman's breasts were also chopped off. Both Singh and Sinha watched the cruel executions helplessly. Can we touch such depths of religious hatred and yet be proud of our tolerance and secularism? And, what is worse, it was neither the first nor the last incident. However, one must admit there were some instances in which Hindus protected Muslims and Muslims Hindus. Though three Muslim families were taken to Jamuna Kothi for protection by the Hindus, they could not save their lives. Similarly, Tarrapur Muslims escorted to safety Hindu employees of the State Bank of India, after the trouble broke out.

The villages on the outskirts of Bhagalpur were very badly affected by communal frenzy. The case of Chanderi village was widely reported in the press. The world came to know of this incident through the lone survivor of the massacre, Malika Begum. In her statement before the Patna High Court she recalled how the well-organized gang carried out the killings. She said in her written statement that her father was killed by Prakash Mandal, her mother Shakila by Bijli Singh Jadav. Prakash Mandal belonged to the nearby village. Her maternal uncle was killed by Suresh Mandal, her aunt by Sushil Jadav, her cousin Rina by Changri Jadav, her uncle Ahmad by Bambilas Jadav.

Malika narrated the nightmarish experience of 27 October, when at least 108 persons were brutally killed. The entire locality was surrounded by Hindus and their houses were stoned. The Muslims moved to Malika's grandfather's house. Their house was then looted and set on fire. At this juncture the police appeared on the scene and the rioters fled. However, soon the police left, and the rioters reassembled and went on a rampage until the army arrived at about 10 p.m. The army assured them of a safe place by the next morning. The army officer, Virk, left them under the charge of the police and promised to come back the next day.

After the army left, the police asked the Muslims to go back to their houses, but they refused. However, the police warned them that something would happen again. The rioters came back in the early hours of 28 October and surrounded the house of Minnat Mian, Malika's grandfather and asked the Muslims to accompany them to another village. The Muslims refused to come out at first but the mob headed by the mukhiya and sarpanch cajoled them to do so. All the 125 inmates were taken to a pond near the shop of Prabha Jadav. Here, one of the persons was cold-bloodedly killed by the rioters. The remaining people tried to flee in panic, but most of them were caught and killed. Malika jumped into the pond after her father and mother were killed. But after she jumped into the pond her right foot was chopped off by Binod Jadav and Shambhu with a sword. She was rescued by Virk, the military officer who, to his horror, found that all those whom he had handed over to the police for safe custody for a night, were dead.

Obviously, such a massacre could not have taken place without the connivance of the police. It is even alleged that the whole thing happened in the very presence of the police. Some sources point out that previous rivalry between gangs operating from these villages or taking shelter in the villages might have been the cause. The leaders of the Bihar policemen's association allege that the entire incident took place at the behest of some political leaders. Superintendent of police Dvivedi had liquidated some ten anti-social elements who belonged to Chanderi and Logain villages a few days before the riots in Bhagalpur and some of the survivors might have been involved in throwing bombs on the Ramshilapujan procession. Only a thorough judicial inquiry can establish the truth.

The story of Timoni village is even worse. In Chanderi some fifteen Muslim households were affected. But in Timoni the entire village was wiped out. All the 125 households there tell the tale of horror which befell them on the morning of 26 October. Every house was burnt and looted by a mob reportedly 10,000 strong. Even wooden doors and frames had been extracted. Fortunately, the death toll here was low. According to the Nathnagar circle officer, Mohammed Rahmatullah, eleven persons lost their lives at the hands of the mob which had attacked the village. The reason for the relatively low toll was that most old men, women and children were evacuated from Timoni on the night of 25 October.

The villagers reportedly repulsed the attack with the help of two licensed guns. They knew that a bigger attack would be mounted; so, taking advantage of the darkness, most of the old men, women and children were sent to neighbouring villages. The few young men left behind tried to repulse the attackers, but were outnumbered. The attackers had quite a few guns with them. The village was surrounded on three sides and when these Muslims found resistance impossible, they decided to run. The eight elderly persons who lost their lives had refused to move the night before, thinking that the Katarni police station nearby had been informed and that the police would do something to protect them. They paid with their lives for their faith in the police.

One can go on documenting the failure of the police to protect lives and properties of Muslims in village after village. According to senior army officials helping to maintain law and order in Bhagalpur, not more than ten per cent of the Muslim households in the villages falling in the 10-mile radius of Bhagalpur could have remained untouched by the fierce madness and the dance of death which raged on the three days following the first clash on 24 October. So extensive was the killing in the villages that many bodies were buried, salt sprinkled over them and after being covered with earth, vegetables were grown on the land to hide the killings. Right up to the second week of January 1990, bodies were being fished out of the wells and ponds in and around the town and the local people maintain that many more lay buried in the innocuous-looking, unharvested paddy fields. And their apprehensions do not seem to be wide off the mark if the digging out of about a hundred bodies from a cauliflower field at Logain village is any indication. A top district official who preferred anonymity, said that he himself knew at least half a dozen wells in the suburban areas of Bhagalpur from where bodies were yet to be fished out.

The tragedy of Bhagalpur and the villages around owes much to the role of the police, on the one hand, and some notorious criminals, on the other. The people from Madaninagar village believe that notorious criminals like Mahaldas, Nanda Mandal, Motriya Yadav and Tarini Mandal were used in looting and burning houses. These criminals were also released later, on the occasion of the Lok Sabha elections. For three days from 24 to 27 October, organized massacre, arson and looting continued by crowds of people led by these criminals. Prostitutes were not

spared. The rioters killed Muslim prostitutes from Jogarsar and Mansurganj mohallas of Bhagalpur. A student from Jogarsar mohalla said that when rioters entered the mohalla, the Muslims ran for their lives towards the Ganga. There they were killed by Gangotras, ferocious criminals. More than fifty people died in this massacre. Near Bhagalpur station a pregnant woman's body was found burst open by a heavy stone. In Navtola mohalla almost all Muslim families were killed. Small children were caught by their legs and their heads pounded on the ground, killing them instantaneously in front of their mothers. In Jawahar Medical College one can find many children whose hands or feet have been severed.

The gruesome incidents of murder and mayhem appear worse than what happened during the partition riots. Many were killed in the trains also. The rioters found out the names of a particular community from the reservation charts and attacked them. At Murarpur station near Bhagalpur, 100 armed persons pulled out four persons from the 115-up Tinsukhia Express and killed them. The dead were poor labourers from West Bengal who were going to Delhi as contract labour. On this station again, five passengers travelling in the Azamganj Passenger were done to death. Six persons were thrown out of running trains. One person was killed in a train going from Jabalpur to Sultanganj near Dariarpur station. Because of these incidents, the running of the trains had to be stopped for some time. There are any number of such incidents, which would require several pages to describe. The police and the administration have been completely communalized. The games that the Congress party played in the last few years have completely destroyed our credibility as a secular country.

It is very difficult to estimate the losses, as more incidents are being discovered. Various agencies involved have prepared some estimate of the losses which are listed below:

Villages affected ...	206
Houses burnt to ashes ...	3,932
Shops looted and burnt ...	891
Powerlooms looted and burnt ...	3,000
Muslims killed ...	876
Hindus killed ...	150
Missing persons ...	106

Hindus arrested ... 1,100

Muslims arrested ... 900

Persons who lost their means of livelihood ... 50,000 to 60,000

Also, thirty-seven mosques, seven madrasas, eight tombs and five Shiva Imambaras were destroyed. The number of Hindu houses gutted completely is not exactly known but the figure is more than 300.

The above figures are at best tentative. More losses are likely to be there. Though the state government has announced compensation of Rs. 1,00,000/- for every person dead, few have benefited so far, as compensation depends on a post-mortem report and a police certificate and the police have been suppressing the number of deaths. In fact, even in Chanderi village where more than a hundred persons died, not more than a dozen have been given compensation so far because the police are reluctant to certify the deaths.

Hyderabad Riots — Who is the Culprit: Religion, Politics or Land grabbing?

The surcharged atmosphere in the country on account of vicious propaganda about the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy would lead anyone to believe that the Hyderabad riots from 6 December onwards were also caused by it. In any riot there are national (macro) factors as well as local (micro) factors. At times, macro factors play a major role and at other times micro factors cause major conflagration, and of course, often the two can combine. We cannot write off the Ramjanambhoomi–Babri masjid controversy as far as the Hyderabad riots are concerned, but the local factors certainly outweighed it.

Some other factors – which do not play a direct role, but are important to take into account – generate certain essential conditions for riots. These relate to the developmental process. Socio-economic development leads to urbanization, which induces immigration to towns by people from rural and less developed areas. Immigration not only leads to congestion in the city but also sends land prices shooting sky-high. Also, in the process of urbanization in backward countries like India, city development often takes place along caste and communal lines, especially in old city areas. People live in caste or community conglomerations. And that territory is to be ‘protected’ from alien immigrants.

Immigrants stream in as development accelerates and try to ‘infiltrate’ into various positions already in possession of other castes and communities. Such infiltration tends to disturb the vote-banks of certain politicians and political parties as the balance of population tilts away from one caste or community to the other. The politicians despe-

rately try to retain their vote-banks, if necessary by violent intimidation of the intruders. If intruders belong to another community, specially the 'rival' community, it is very easy to engineer communal violence. Anti-social elements are also generated in the process of urbanization in direct proportion to unemployment. They can be available by the dozens and are often at the beck and call of politicians. If we also have in addition a controversy like the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid issue, we then have all the ingredients to set a city on fire. One can well understand the Hyderabad riots, if one takes all these factors into account.

There was one more factor which cannot be discounted: the overthrow of Chief minister Chenna Reddy by causing widespread disturbances in the state. History tells us that when the British wanted to annex any princely state, they would do so on the excuse of disturbed conditions in the state. After all, the British rulers had no insignificant role in generating the Ramjanambhoomi controversy in 1854-55 in order to annex Awadh on the pretext of deteriorating law and order conditions. They eminently succeeded, not only in annexing Awadh but also in leaving a permanent scar on the relations between Hindus and Muslims. Our democratic rulers too have no compunction in causing communal riots, if other methods fail to overthrow an unwanted chief minister. Various interviews with concerned persons showed that dissident Congress members played a role in causing communal violence to overthrow Chenna Reddy. Earlier, there were indications that the dissident Congress members played some role in Karnataka too, in engineering communal violence to overthrow the then chief minister Veerendra Patil.

After these generalities, let us look closely at the concrete background of the Hyderabad riots. One cannot understand the communal situation in Hyderabad without reference to the Majlis-e-Ittihadul Muslimin. It had played a seminal role during the partition, and before police action in the state in 1948, and had left many a scar on the middle class Hindu mind on the eve of partition. After the police action, the Majlis had gone into political hibernation. It was revived in 1956 by the Congress to counter the communist influence during the chief ministership of Sanjiva Reddy. The Majlis naturally concentrated on the old city which was the Muslim stronghold and it took several

years' perseverance to cultivate its base in the old city.

However, the process of development led to the immigration of Telugu-speaking people from nearby rural areas to Hyderabad city and the poorer sections could find some place only in the old city. The Majlis, which was trying to build its vote-bank among the poorer Muslims, began to feel disturbed, and tensions built up between Muslims and Hindus, both belonging to the backward and poorer sections of society. There may not always be 'felt' tensions but 'low-key' tensions always persist.

These tensions became more perceptible once the BJP began to enter the area. It tried to build its influence among the Telugu-speaking Hindus. There was now direct rivalry between the two communal bodies. The Majlis, it is important to note, was always sought after by one or the other ruling parties in the state, the Congress or the Telugu Desam. These parties could get Muslim support in old Hyderabad city through the Majlis. The Majlis ultimately came to power in the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation with the help of the Telugu Desam. There was a comparative lull in communal violence in Hyderabad during the Telugu Desam rule because of the Majlis's support. There was no rivalry between the Majlis and the ruling party in the state. However, there was a major flare-up during the Telugu Desam period in 1983 as the BJP was making a serious bid to establish itself in the old city in the Hindu areas.

It is interesting to note that the first major communal riot took place in Hyderabad in 1978 when Chenna Reddy was the chief minister. It started with the Ramizabee rape case and the protest movement against it was converted into a major communal riot. In this riot almost an equal number of Hindus and Muslims were killed. Also, it was Chenna Reddy who, for his own political ends, started the practice of addressing the Ganesh procession. The Muslims did not take kindly to this. It is from that time that communal riots became almost an annual feature in Hyderabad until 1984, when the Telugu Desam came to power. It was the old city which was mainly affected. The tension in the old city became so acute that for a number of days it would remain under curfew – so much so, that in 1983, most of the missionary schools in the new city decided to stop admitting students from the old city because they could not attend school during curfew. In 1984 N T Rama Rao came to

power and there was a comparative lull in communal violence until 1990. As the BJP was supporting the Telugu Desam it could not afford to instigate violence.

There is another point to be noted here. The Majlis does not get much support from the original Hyderabad Muslims. They are against its militant postures. But the Majlis derives more support from the Muslims who have migrated from Maharashtra and Karnataka. Naturally, the migrants feel less secure in the new place and therefore, are in greater need of communal postures than the original inhabitants. They feel more secure by expressing their religious zeal. The Majlis has been instigating mainly these Muslims who have come from other places and settled down in Hyderabad.

Similarly, a large number of Hindus too, are coming to the city. A few are construction workers from Warangal and Nalgonda districts who happen to belong to the scheduled castes. The BJP tried to win them over in the same way as the Majlis tried to woo Muslim migrants. Due to these migrations it is estimated that between 1956 and 1984 there was a distress sale of properties worth Rs. 50 crores in the old city. Most of the money was pocketed by unscrupulous elements and shared by rowdies, goondas and politicians. Thus land grabbing has also emerged as one of the major causes of communal riots in this part of the city.

II

The riots in December 1990 started with a fight between two gangs of land grabbers, Muslim and Hindu. The incident took place in Hafiznagar area of the new city. It is alleged that the Muslim group had the backing of the Majlis and the Congress, while the Hindu group did not belong to any party. One Salman was killed by the Hindus. This obviously led to tension. Meanwhile, a notorious criminal called Sardar, who had committed nearly eight murders and was involved in several knifing cases and had gone underground, was found and killed by the police. Before he was killed, he threw a bomb on the persons who had killed Salman and two Yadavas were killed. The Yadavas now retaliated by killing four Muslims. These incidents took place several months prior to the riots. But the tension continued and from the time of Sardar's death, thirty people had died in communal incidents, most of them Hindu construction workers.

In October, BJP president L.K. Advani was arrested and this led to minor rioting. Attacks on Muslims took place and a few of their shops were burned down. As a result of these disturbances the police imposed 24-hour curfew on 23 October 1990. Curfew lasted for a fortnight. In this phase the anti-Chenna Reddy lobby had no role in the disturbances, which were mainly masterminded by the BJP. Throughout November minor incidents occurred, but there was no major flare-up.

On 7 December, an incident triggered off major disturbances. On that morning, an extremely poor Hindu hawker boy was fatally stabbed. It was difficult to know who had stabbed him. But since he was a Hindu, it was assumed that the killer must have been a Muslim. No sooner had this happened than 150 persons — it is alleged that they belonged to the dissident Congress lobby — descended on Karwar, the place where the boy was killed, and went on a stabbing spree. Fifty persons were stabbed, of whom twenty, mainly Muslim, died. This major incident led to disturbances in eighteen areas of the old city on 8 December.

The Majlis goondas attacked mainly poor migrant seasonal construction workers. It was alleged that about forty people were killed. Another section of Hindus attacked by the Majlis men were Pardis, who come from the border area between Gujarat and Maharashtra. They retaliated with stones, whereas the Majlis men were armed with swords and spears. This naturally led to a backlash from the Hindus and on 9 December many Muslims were killed. Although curfew was in force, few policemen were seen. It appeared as if the city was handed over to the goondas from both the communities. Those who died during these disturbances were mostly women and children.

Each time a Hindu migrant construction labourer was struck down, his body was taken by the BJP to his village in a procession. This spread communal conflagration to nearby villages which otherwise were free of communal rancour. Nearly ten villages around the area were affected and Muslim properties burned down. The BJP also carried on vicious propaganda against Muslims.

According to the Andhra Pradesh Congress president, V. Hanumantha Rao, communal violence broke out after the discovery of the bodies of a woman and her child in the Sabzimandi area on 7 December. "When their bodies were discovered," recounted Hanumantha Rao, "it was the turning point. After that it was no holds

barred and all guns blazed." A senior police officer corroborated this observation. On 8 December, two women were burned alive in Shankarganji area and in the toll of thirty-one, six children were among the dead. A nine year-old girl injured on 7 December succumbed to her injuries the next day. Some of the Pardi women narrated tales of the atrocities committed. Anuradha, a Pardi woman, said that the assailants descended on the cluster of huts belonging to the Pardis, and singled out men whom they knew. Some were killed with boulders. They caught hold of the women trying to flee, and cut off the breasts of one. Another pleaded with folded hands to be spared, but they cut off her forearms and set her on fire. Two children were stabbed and hung up from doorways.

On 17 December, ten days after the riots began, two Muslim children who were alone at home were killed. A pregnant woman and her child were also killed that day. Some women had their skulls smashed with lathis, as they begged for mercy. There were moving instances of humanism too. In the midst of all this horror, neighbours saved each other. Anuradha said her family and brother-in-law were sheltered by Hazira Begum who had sent off her own children to her mother. Hazira Begum said, "When you see your neighbours trembling with fear, can you send them out to be killed? We were scared when we took them in, we were equally scared when we let them out after the police came — scared for ourselves."

Another gruesome incident took place on 12 December, when a Muslim constable called Kader shot the assistant commissioner of police point-blank in the jeep in which both were travelling. Chief minister Chenna Reddy said in a press statement that the incident had nothing to do with communal feeling. The constable was suffering from mental fatigue as he was overworked and shot his officer because he would not let him go. Whatever it was, the Hindus and Muslims did take it in a communal sense and there were further incidents due to the killing of the ACP.

In these riots lasting over ten days, more than 134 people were killed and 300 injured, and hundred of shops, houses and huts destroyed. The loss ran into crores of rupees. The number of deaths was higher than officially claimed. According to a rough estimate, the actual toll would be between 200 and 300. Most of the people suspect that the Congress

dissidents had played a key role in enhancing the situation for overthrowing Chenna Reddy. It is no less significant that after his resignation the riots stopped in a short time, though some minor incidents continued. Again, this is not for the first time that this has happened. In Karnataka too, the same thing is said to have happened. Riots in Karnataka spread like wildfire in many towns in no time and mysteriously stopped after Veerendra Patil resigned from the chief ministership. The people in Karnataka saw the Congress high command's hand in these riots. Earlier, certain opposition parties in Gujarat used communal riots to dethrone chief minister Madhavsingh Solanki, who had enhanced reservations for backward castes in 1985. The riots in Gujarat also stopped after Solanki resigned as chief minister.

III

Our investigation team met many people from different walks of life to elicit their opinion on the riots. Ravi, a Telugu Hindu aged 34, who runs a provision shop in the old city, blamed politicians for the riots. He said common people, whether Hindus or Muslims, were innocent. They only became victims. However, he could not lay the blame on any particular party. He felt that in his area, Chatrinaka, three or four deaths took place because of the killing of the ACP by the constable.

V. Hanumantha Rao said that N.T. Rama Rao had a spate of luck that no communal riots took place while he was in power. It was so because the BJP had not focused so much on the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid issue. He maintained that the Telugu Desam was a secular party, as was the Congress. He felt that the current phase of communal incidents began after the notorious criminal Mohammad Sardar was shot on 9 October 1990. In fact, three or four people died in the violence following his death, but these were stray incidents and not inspired by communal considerations, though they did assume communal overtones later. Hanumantha Rao stated that the BJP was becoming unmanageable and was the only party in India which promoted communalism. He said the common Hindu in the country was in favour of constructing a Ram mandir, but not for the demolition of the Babri mosque. Many of them did not know that a mosque was proposed to be demolished for the sake of a temple.

Hanumantha Rao said that on 7 December, the immediate cause of

the riot was the killing of a poor hawker – in retaliation, Hindus had killed twenty Muslims. He felt that the role of the police was above reproach. In an old city there are densely populated zigzag lanes and bylanes and not enough policemen to manage the situation. According to him the police were not communal and did not take sides. He maintained that the Majlis-e-Ittihadul Muslimin does back certain factions of land grabbers, but refused to elaborate further. He claimed that the Majlis and the BJP, though apparently poles apart, come to a mutual understanding in cases of land grabbing, and that the Congress had no dealings with the Majlis, though it supported the Majlis in the municipal elections. He said that the Congress would see that strict action was taken against trouble makers and that they would soon be put in jail.

Salahuddin Owaisi, President of the Majlis-e-Ittihadul Muslimin, told our investigating team that the situation during N.T. Rama Rao's time was not as quiet as claimed. There were many riots which did not get reported because of Rama Rao's control over the press. But during his tenure the Majlis had kept riots in check. Salahuddin Owaisi said that about a year earlier there had been deep unrest among the Muslims and they had agitated on the streets. The police had not been able to control it and he (Owaisi) had wielded a lathi to control the Muslim crowd. Owaisi said that this was how the Majlis kept communalism under check and promoted secularism. The Majlis also put up Hindu candidates during the municipal elections. One year they had a Muslim mayor and another year a Hindu one.

Owaisi blamed the Telugu Desam for starting the communal riot in the recent phase. The trouble first broke out, according to him, in Shankaranpet where there was a Telugu Desam MLA, Indra Reddy. In this incident, many Muslims were injured. In the surrounding areas of Dhobipet and Nawabpet, Muslims were massacred. Not a single Hindu was killed in these areas. Owaisi maintained that in his constituency, fifty-eight mosques were demolished and two hundred religious sites were destroyed. He said that he did not reveal these figures to the press to prevent the communal situation from getting out of hand. He said that these figures were subsequently revealed by C.H. Vidyasagar in the magazine, *Frontline*.

Referring to the riots, he said that in the Pahadisharif area where

Muslims own grape gardens/poultry farms, at least twenty murders took place. The last murder took place on 25 December 1990. In Shamshabaugh area on the Hyderabad-Bangalore road, Muslims were attacked. When the bodies came to the city after the Shamshabaugh murders, the tension built up. The first attack of communal violence took place on 9 December at Sabzimandi when a 15-year old girl was raped and murdered. It was all done, according to S. Owaisi, by the Telugu Desam party to increase its Hindu vote-bank in his constituency. Then the Congress came in and took advantage to remove Chenna Reddy. The BJP also did not remain far behind and used it for its own political benefit. The Majlis president said that a report from the Central Bureau of Intelligence had gone from Chenna Reddy to Rajiv Gandhi about the cause of the communal violence. The CBI also blamed the dissident Congress faction.

Here it is interesting to note that the Majlis chief does not lay the main blame for the riots on the BJP, but on the Telugu Desam with which he has political rivalry. Even the blame on the Congress dissidents was of a secondary nature as far as Owaisi was concerned. No other person, Hindu or Muslim, blamed the Telugu Desam. Most of them put the blame mainly on the dissident faction of the Congress. This clearly showed that the politicians, though they use a particular community for their political ends, do not have real sympathy for that community or for its plight.

The head of the Majlis complained that the Muslims were treated as a hostile community by the police. The majority of those arrested were Muslims, while only 5% of Hindus were arrested, that too on minor charges. The BJP could, therefore, easily arrange for their bail. As opposed to that, many Muslims had been arrested under the Terrorist and Anti-Disruption Activities Act (TADA) which is non-bailable. Owaisi also said that professional killers from Nagpur were hired and housed in Vivek Vardhani College. Most of these killers, he said, were roaming around freely in the city. When asked who these men with black masks were, who had attacked the Hindus, he said that they were followers of the Ayyappa temple in Kerala. Hindus had been attacked by Hindus.

Next, our team interviewed some BJP leaders and followers. Ramulu, BJP secretary of Hyderabad said that the old city was a Muslim strong-

hold, with a 60% Muslim population. The Majlis was trying to concentrate Muslims there for electoral purposes. The migration of Hindus to the new city divided the Hindu votes and give greater strength to the Majlis. He said that out of nine constituencies, four were in the old city and five in Ranga Reddy district. He maintained that the Majlis wanted to drive out the remaining Hindus from the old city to have an unchallenged base there. He said that the Majlis and the Congress dissidents — for their own respective purpose — joined hands and caused communal violence.

Here too, it is clear that an allegation was being made with a purely political motive. There was no respect for objectivity or truth. The Majlis or the BJP served their own interests, rather than serving the interests of their respective community as they claimed to do. The BJP, no less than the Majlis, had its eyes on the Hindu voters. Ramulu also said that the educated Hyderabad Muslims were not to be blamed for the violence. It was mainly the people the Majlis had brought from outside, i.e., from the border of Maharashtra and Karnataka. He alleged that the Majlis had given them free land and created a vested interest. About shooting down the police officer, he said that the Muslim constable was a supporter of the Majlis and that it was not true that he was overworked or under stress. He also said that on 8 December, there were 192 cases of stabbing, of which 80 died; Ramulu claimed that all of them were Hindus.

Venkaiah Naidu, state BJP president, said that between 9 October (the day Mohammad Sardar was killed) and 29 October, before karseva started, forty-five people were killed and about one hundred stabbed. Stabbing was a speciality of Hyderabad, he said. The knife-edge is dipped in cyanide to fatally injure the victim. Naidu maintained that the police sub-inspector who killed Sardar was also a Muslim. He said that the riots had nothing to do with the Ramjanambhoomi issue. They were, according to him, inspired by the course of events in Karnataka. Rajiv Gandhi toppled Patil and was waiting for an opportunity to do the same in Andhra Pradesh. He wanted Chenna Reddy to revolt, but nothing of the sort happened and then the Congress dissidents created these riots. He alleged that these Congressmen were allied with the Majlis. The Majlis brought in people from Raichur, Gulbarga, Bidar. He claimed that some 500 Pakistani nationals had stayed back in

Hyderabad. He said that these riots were totally pre-planned and that it was mainly the weaker sections of society who had suffered.

The state BJP president said that the BJP was catching up in the rural areas too. About 14,000 karsevaks went to Ayodhya from Andhra Pradesh. Out of these, about 9,000 were from Telangana region and Hyderabad city.

M. T. Khan, a Telugu writer and poet, said that the Majlis was formed in 1936 during the Vande Mataram agitation. It was during that time that the first communal riot took place. However, for some time, the Majlis was in political hibernation and the Congress revived it when the left parties won many seats in 1952 and 1956. As a response to its revival, the Jana Sangh came up in this region. He said that due to the sterilization campaign during the Emergency a lot of Muslims from Karnataka and Maharashtra came over to Hyderabad and settled in *Sarfe-Khas* land of the Nizam, i.e., Bhavani Nagar. The Ganesh festival has been a regular affair for a hundred and fifty years. Since 1979 it has been centralized, with all the idols being brought together and then taken out in a big procession. The Majlis began to take out a Milad procession in 1978. According to him, the Ganesh procession was in retaliation to the Milad processions. Thus, since 1980, there have been communal clashes during these processions. The writer-poet stated that in the last five years, due to communal riots, there has been distress selling of land in the old city. A land grabbing mafia has emerged. Sardar was a land grabber and had his rivals in the Ahir caste. The land grabbers and politicians were hand-in-glove. The Majlis communalized the 'business' rivalry between Sardar and the Ahirs. The Ramjanambhoomi-Babri masjid controversy had also had its impact on the city. On 6 December, the Majlis brought out a pamphlet which said that if the Babri masjid was touched, Islam would be finished in India. Every Muslim family was asked to give one son for the holy war. It was, however, difficult to say whether this was part of a planned strategy or whether this pamphlet gave an opportunity to the dissident Congressmen.

Kodand Ram Reddy of the Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee said that Hindus and Muslims have a common culture to a large extent in the old city. Hindus of the old city enjoy mushairas and biryani, Dasherah and Muharram were jointly celebrated, and Hindus and Muslims shared some common heroes. But the new elite that has

developed do not belong to Hyderabad. These business and industrial elites come from the coastal areas. They do not understand the people of the old city historically and culturally. They call Muslims lazy and dirty. The development of this new elite has resulted in the neglect of the old city. The High Court and the Civil Court were also on the fringes of the city.

Ram Reddy said that in Shankerpali and Dhobipet, villages in Ranga Reddy district, shops belonging to Muslims were looted and mosques and some other properties destroyed. In Dhobipet, shops belonging to Hindus were also looted. In both these villages, property worth rupees 30 lakhs was destroyed. The looters, he said, belonged to the Telugu Desam. The main grouse of the Telugu Desam was that the Muslims had voted for the Congress, so they utilized the Ramjanambhoomi issue to aggravate communal tension.

About the role of the police, Ram Reddy said that the government constantly interfered in the working of the police and hence they were unable to act. From July to November, a number of stabbings took place, but the government and the police took no action. The police received calls from the chief minister to release certain people. About the BJP, he said that it was fast gaining ground and appeared more convincing to the Hindus. The BJP was criticizing the Dalit Mahasabha and the Marxist-Leninist groups. According to BJP propaganda, the Hindus being killed belonged to both Girijan as well as Harijan categories, but what was the Dalit Mahasabha doing about it? Why were the leftist groups not criticizing the Majlis when so many poor Hindus were being killed?

He also said that the BJP wanted the Majlis to consolidate its position so that it could use it as a threat among the Hindus. However, the top leaders of the BJP and the Majlis collude with each other when it comes to land grabbing. There are areas where the Majlis sells land and pays a commission to the BJP.

The Telugu Desam vice-president, Ahmad Ali Khan, ascribed the riots to the dissident Congress group. He said that the Majlis, being a communal party, might also have been involved. When the Congress withdrew its support to the Majlis, the Telugu Desam extended its support. He maintained that the BJP had won the single seat in Hyderabad with the support of the Telugu Desam; the party had

supported the BJP at that time, for the political scenario was very different. They had not know that the BJP would get so communalized. He also said that before criticizing the police, one should criticize the administration. The police had lost its independent functioning. He said that in the preceding one year there had been five different police commissioners in the city.

A number of local factors and state politics have played an important role in the Hyderabad riots. Politicians, land grabbers, anti-social elements and communal prejudices – all have contributed to the violence in their own way. But there was near unanimity that the dissident Congress members were instrumental in giving the riots an intensity and ferocity. Both Hindus and Muslims suffered, mostly from the weaker sections of society. The killers were professionals, hired by those who engineered the riots, not motivated by communal hatred as happens in many riots. Also, unlike other riots, Muslims were not the main sufferers. Both Hindus and Muslims were killed with equal cruelty and brutality. Thus it is difficult to call it a communal riot in that sense. For some mysterious reason, women and children of both communities were killed with the utmost brutality. It further emerged that the police was rendered ineffective by administrative interference. Not that the role of the police was clean, but it never got a chance to act.

Sociologically speaking, the economic development and political processes have changed the old equilibrium of the society in Hyderabad. The new elites and a section of the masses, especially the migrants, are not rooted in the culture of the city. The migrant people, specially among the weaker sections, are sought to be used as vote-banks and to create communal tensions, both by the Majlis and the BJP. The new elites, having never shared a cultural life with the Muslims in Hyderabad, carry their load of prejudices and easily develop anti-Muslim feelings, which in turn alienate Muslims from the new cultural stream which seems to dominate the city now.

Thus, it will be seen that with political, economic and other factors, sociological factors also play their part in communalizing the situation in Hyderabad today.

Benares Rocked by Communal Violence

Benaras is one of the holiest cities in India for the Hindus, who come from all over for a dip in the river Ganges. There are a number of temples in the city, including one of Kabir, the poet-saint, which is a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity. Besides, there are many Muslims, mostly weavers — Julahas — who have lived for centuries with the Hindus. The town has not been entirely peaceful over the years, and there have been occasional communal clashes. These clashes have been taking place sporadically since the early nineteenth century, mainly on the temple question, but there have also been simmering socio-economic tensions. Evidence of this exists in the British official records.

Benaras, or Varanasi, is highly crowded and has a maze of lanes and bylanes pulsating with life, and people jostling with each other. Benaras has several castes and sub-castes: Brahmins, Rajputs, Chamars, Kurmis, Ahirs, Koiris and Bhumihars. Muslims too, have developed castes and in Benaras one finds Sheikhs, Pathans and Julahas. Julaha Muslims are low caste Hindus who began to embrace Islam after the invasion of the Turks and Afghans, particularly under the Sufis' influence.

According to the 1981 census, the population of Benaras district is approximately 37 lakhs (37,01,006, to be precise). The male-female ratio is 1000:904, which is higher than the state average of 1000:885, though lower than the national average of 1000: 929. According to the same census, literacy is as low as 31.85 per cent; among males it is 45.95 and among females 16.9 per cent. Also, Varanasi district has 35.4% farmers and 16.9% agricultural labourers, 14.6% follow traditional occupations and 23.1% are engaged in miscellaneous activities. The Muslims constitute 20–25% of the population of Varanasi district.

Among these Muslims, almost 70% are Julahas.

The main occupation of Muslims is weaving saris, which are famous worldwide. Most of the weavers are poor and dependent on daily wages but a section of them have turned entrepreneurs and are quite prosperous. As they have acquired economic clout, they also aspire for a say in the political sphere. The dynamics of economic development changes social equations between various castes, and religious and ethnic groups, which in turn becomes a cause of social conflict. Low caste and backward caste Hindus are slowly rising in the economic sphere and they now aspire for better social and political status which is denied them by the traditionally privileged higher caste groups; hence caste conflict ensues.

A similar change is happening with the Muslims. Most of the Muslims were converted from amongst the low caste Hindus and for centuries suffered lowly economic conditions. These Julahas, benefiting from the market demand and the expansion of the sari business have improved their economic position and a section now own looms as well as run their own business. For a long time, Muslims were merely weavers and middle caste Hindus dominated the trade. It should also be noted that in urban areas the Hindu traders have been traditional supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party and they contribute to its election funds.

It is pointed out by many that the present riots in Benaras are a result of economic competition between Muslim weavers-turned-entrepreneurs and traditional Hindu traders who had, so far, held the monopoly of the sari trade. It is interesting to note that in these riots, many rich Muslims have also suffered a great deal. Though it would be simplistic to ascribe the riots merely to economic rivalry, this factor cannot be discounted. But although economic rivalry had played a major role in the Moradabad riots of 1980, and was a principal factor then, it would be difficult to agree with the view that the economic factor played a principal role in the Benaras riots of November 1991.

It should also be noted that S.C. Dixit, the former director general of police had contested elections to Parliament on the BJP ticket from Benaras and won. S.C. Dixit is connected with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Those who were on his election propaganda trail tell us how he tried to arouse powerful religious emotions among the Hindus. For the people of Benaras, in addition to the Ramjanambhoomi issue,

the Gyanvapi mosque issue was also raised; and being nearer home, it had a direct appeal to the Hindus. Also, because of what had happened during the karseva in Ayodhya on 30 October and 2 November 1990 and its exaggerated propaganda by the VHP and BJP, the police force had been nearly all communalized, and felt that Muslims were the real culprits and must be dealt with accordingly.

The riots in Benaras took place in the background of the by-elections which were to take place all over India. The BJP was determined to win the Assembly as well as Lok Sabha seats. It once again wanted to try out the well-tryed Hindu card for winning these by-elections. The BJP government had promised to construct the Ramjanambhoomi mandir immediately after coming to power in Uttar Pradesh (it could not do this for various reasons). After all, it had to satisfy its disgruntled cadres more so the rough and tough Bajrang dal cadre.

There is one more politico-economic factor which adds to communalization of politics in Benaras. As most of the Muslims are poor wage-earning weavers, they tend to support communist parties such as the Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist). In the 1967 elections when the Congress was routed in the entire district, the Benaras seat for Parliament was won by a Parsee, Rustam Saith, a CPI (M) nominee, and the Benaras south Assembly seat by a CPI candidate, whereas the Benaras north and cantonment seats were won by the then Jana Sangh. The communist candidates obviously won mainly with the support of the Muslim weavers. The communist victory shocked many people in the city and a Jana Sangh-Communist confrontation developed, which consequently took the form of a Hindu versus Muslim confrontation.

There were practically no communal riots in Benaras from 1947 to 1966, but in the twenty-five years from 1966 to 1991 there have been about twelve communal riots. In the 1967 riots trouble started with a tazia procession and three persons died; on 2 December 1969, Muslims climbed upon the temple of Lat Bhairo and threw leaven on the temple, resulting in an outbreak of violence. On 16 June 1972, Muslims were taking out a procession protesting against the Aligarh Muslim University Bill. The police had clamped section 144 and hence tried to stop the procession, resulting in an eruption of communal violence. On 23 October 1977, trouble started on the occasion of Durga Puja, between

Muslims and Bengalis on the issue of land at Deonathpura. This was a very serious communal clash, resulting in several deaths and excesses committed by the Provincial Armed Constabulary. On 12 December 1978, there was a minor clash resulting from brickbating on a tazia procession near Hanuman Phatak by some anti-social elements; on 23 November 1985, trouble broke out near Katuapura during the Durga procession; on 14 February 1986, when Muslims observed black day to protest the opening of the lock of the Babri masjid, there was stone throwing followed by stabbing and rioting; on 24 July 1986, there was brickbating on the Holiks at village Kotwa, and stone throwing on the tazia procession in village Lohta near Imambara. These are some of the major and minor incidents which have occurred in Benaras in the last few decades.

Tensions are already there which surface in the form of communal violence whenever an opportunity arises. Much fuel was added, in recent years, by the Ramjanambhoomi controversy which was further aggravated by the election campaign of S.C. Dixit of the BJP-VHP political family. The recent Benaras riot of 8 November 1991 is to be seen against this background.

This time, too, the rioting began with the religious procession of the Kali idol which was being taken out for immersion from Deonathpura to Dashaswamedh Ghat. This procession too, like any other religious procession in recent times, had its load of anti-socials, some of them drunk. The organizers belonged to the Nav Sangh Club and it seems the club members were divided into two groups, one led by Shambhu Nath and the other led by the BJP-VHP-RSS. Shambhu Nath seemed to be in the dominant position as he took command of the procession. He did not allow the other group to lead the Kali procession. This group comprised some 250 persons and was standing aside when the procession proceeded. However, this group merged with the procession later.

A section of the processionists began shouting slogans and firing crackers. When it entered Madanpura — a Muslim locality — slogan shouting and firing of crackers intensified. It is said that a cracker burst in a shop belonging to Mohammad Husain Pehlwan alias Natemian, who objected. Others from Madanpura also objected to the bursting of crackers. Though there was obvious danger of trouble breaking out in Madanpura, the police was conspicuous by its absence. This was corro-

borated by eyewitnesses. Some people also told our investigators that in this confusion someone disconnected the electric lines and plunged the area in darkness. The Kali idol too could not proceed further from Jangambadi and was immersed at Dashaswamedh Ghat at about 1 a.m.

As the procession did not proceed for a long time, rumours spread that the Muslims had broken the Kali idol, having objected to the fire crackers, and that a number of Hindus were dragged into the trouble in Godowlia area where the Sushil cinema house was located. The evening show was on and several Muslims who were in the theatre were dragged out. The Muslims were identified mostly by their caps and beards. Three were stabbed fatally. Two were burned alive in the presence of the police. According to eyewitnesses, the crowd demanded the arrest of Dr. Anis Ansari, a prominent social worker and rich businessman who was later killed by the police.

In Godowlia area, five persons died on the spot and ten were injured, one of whom died in hospital. Many Muslims present near Sushil cinema maintained that many Muslim women inside the cinema hall were raped by the Hindu rioters. However, this does not seem to be true, as it has not been corroborated by independent sources. On the contrary, police officials, journalists and eyewitnesses said that the cinema hall's manager acted on behalf of the Muslims that night. When the mob attacked, the manager locked seventeen Muslims in a closet and called for police help. The situation came under control when senior police officials ran to the spot of the tragedy. They clamped indefinite curfew in the eight police station areas, which were: Dashaswamedh, Bhelupur, Luxa, Chowk, Adampur, Jaitpura, Kotwali and Chetganj.

Shushil Kutty of the *Indian Express* was of the opinion that "On hindsight it can be safely said that the riots this time were planned and the plotting was the handiwork of Hindu fundamentalists, which resulted in a similar exercise by those in the minority community. The fact that the ruling party in the State is the BJP no doubt emboldened the former to take the lead." He further continued, "Stray members of the minority community were grabbed by militant Hindu youth and lynched in the Godowlia market. One young man was pulled out of the cinema theatre. All four to five men who became victims were dealt with in the same brutal way — stoned and then burned to death after

kerosene was poured over them. The killings were ruthless and fast — the members of the minority community couldn't do a thing. The authorities clamped curfew before they could retaliate.”¹

What was worse, the police did not take any steps after the incidents of 8 November, to defuse the situation. They further angered the members of the minority community by house-to-house searches and arbitrary arrests. These searches were more vigorous in Madanpura and other Muslim localities, although it was mainly the Muslims who suffered and were killed. This further angered the Muslims. Since strict curfew had been imposed, they were helpless, but were waiting for an opportunity. In fact, since the curfew was strictly enforced, and there was limited relaxation, they couldn't buy even essential commodities. The police had become totally insensitive to their feelings and remained complacent.

Until 12 November, there were minor incidents. On 9 November, two Muslims died in a bomb blast in Bajardesha mohalla. But it was not clear whether they were making a bomb or were victims of the riot. A case of fatal stabbing occurred in Madanpura area. The victim was identified as a Hindu. It was reported that he was a drug addict and had gone to buy drugs in that area. On 10 November, though no incident was reported, house-to-house searches continued in Madanpura area. In all, ninety-nine persons were arrested. While curfew continued in Madanpura, it was relaxed in Bhadaini and Assi from 1 to 6 p.m. for the Nag Nathiya Leela festival.

On 11 November, one Muslim was stabbed on a busy road in the Chetganj area during the curfew relaxation. Some eyewitnesses said that the police damaged two mosques in the Madanpura area. On 12 November, though no violence was reported, a large number of arms and ammunition was found in Doodh Ki Satti in Godowlia. On the same day, curfew was relaxed for three hours in all areas except Madanpura, where it was only for an hour and a half.

13 November was again a day of doom for Benaras. On that day, curfew in Madanpura area was lifted for three hours from 12 to 3 p.m. at the insistence of Dr. Anis Ansari, a rich businessman and a social worker of the area. The police searches continued in Madanpura area but nothing much was found. The district magistrate, superintendent and senior superintendent of police went to Jangambari with Dr. Anis

at about 2.20 p.m. At 2.30, Dr. Anis returned to his house and the officials went to Godowlia.

By 2.50 p.m., some Muslims appeared in the lanes and stabbed Hindus. It was reported that within ten minutes about eight persons were killed and several others injured. The DM, SSP and SP rushed to Madanpura from Godowlia on hearing of the incident and immediately imposed curfew. Three companies of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and local police began search operations in Madanpura. In all 326 Muslims were arrested. It is interesting to note that out of those arrested thirty persons belonged to the family of the mayor, Mohammed Swaleh Ansari, who was also a rich sari dealer.

The mayor was kept under house arrest for three days and not allowed to contact others. According to Swaleh Ansari it was political vendatta. The BJP was interested in the mayoral post. It contested but lost, and Swaleh Ansari won. The BJP lost the deputy mayor's post also, as another secular candidate won. Twenty-nine Muslims were arrested under section 307 of the Criminal Procedure Code and 118 under section 302. The 328 Hindus arrested were charged for violation of curfew. By 22 November, all, except 117 Muslims charged under section 302, were released. These Muslims were between 10 and 90 years old and had no previous criminal record.

Dr. Anis's death at the hands of the police was most unfortunate. He belonged to a rich business family of Muslims in Benaras. He was an old Congressman and nephew of the famous Urdu poet, Nazir Banarsi, who was known for his commitment to secularism. Dr. Anis was also the president of the local peace committee. The general view about him was that he was secular and popular among the Hindus also. He had friendly relations with the police and other district officials. In fact, these officials used to visit his house quite often. At times, he even influenced the transfer of some lower rank police officials. It was also reported that Dr. Anis was against the drug mafia in Madanpura.

Dr. Anis's family members told our investigator that from 8 November, he was actively involved in promoting communal peace. The police officials visited his house at least ten times after the 8 November riot. On 12 November, SSP Karamveer Singh had told Dr. Anis's family, "I feel relaxed when I talk to Dr. Anis. He is a nice,

peace-loving man." However, the same Karamveer Singh had beaten Dr. Anis mercilessly and brutally, and he died on 13 November in police custody. The police alleged that he was behind the killing of eight Hindus on 13 November. The BJP MLA, Jyotsna Srivastava, maintained that Dr. Anis told the DM at 2.30 p.m. that "now we will show our game" and eight persons were killed at 2.50 p.m.

The DM said that when officials came to Madanpura on 13 November, a bomb suddenly exploded near the SP, Jivan Chand Pandey. He was not hurt. According to the police the bomb came from Dr. Anis's house. But Pandey admitted that he had not seen anybody from Anis's house throwing the bomb. If Dr. Anis was really plotting all this, the question arises: was the police not aware of all this? Why was it fraternising and maintaining close relations with him? Why was he not arrested after the violence on 8 November? Jivan Chand Pandey even maintained that he had been on the list of communalists since 1977. It was then even more mysterious why the police maintained such a friendly relationship with him.

Dr. Anis's brother, Dr. Mohsin, was also arrested and beaten up by the PAC. His backbone and leg were broken. He was diabetic, but was not given water for thirty-two hours while in police custody. He was released on bail only on 6 January 1992. Even the noted Urdu poet, Nazir Banarsi was not spared by the police. Why were such excesses committed by the police on this prominent Muslim family? There are various views. One view was that some Hindu traders competing in the sari business with Muslims have been BJP supporters and they were out to humiliate, if not wipe out, their Muslim competitors. Moreover, the Ansari family had been supporters of the Congress for many years. So it was also political vendetta. Some Muslims maintained that it was an attempt by the BJP to humiliate prominent Muslims, to "put them in their place," and terrorize other Muslims.

The Sadbhavna Samiti members (Dr. Deepak Malik, Dr. S. Tripathi, Rakesh Singh, Dr. Qamar Jahan, Sushma Pandey and others) felt that the BJP had planned the riots on 8 November with the local administration to demoralize the Muslims. Two Muslim families, including Anis's family, were the most prominent sari traders; and the BJP traders who, according to the Sadbhavna Samiti, wanted to eliminate their Muslim competitors, could do so during these riots.

In the Benaras riots, a total of nineteen persons were killed. In a way the Benaras riot was unique. Anti-social elements did not take part in it in a big way. Not many shops were looted or burned. Only two Muslim shops in Godowlia area were burned. It was the police which played the main part. They were out to terrorize the Muslims. They looted cash, jewellery and destroyed looms, VCRs, TV sets. The loss of property, cash and jewellery was roughly estimated at Rs.2 crores. One woman from Madanpura said that when a police search party came she told them that there were no weapons in their house. The police said that they were not in search of weapons, but "give us the key to your cash box." A large contingent of the PAC raided Muslim houses in Benia-
bagh, one and a half kilometres from Madanpura, on the charge that a large quantity of arms was hidden there. Hundreds of people from this locality were mercilessly beaten up and arrested. In this riot, the rich Muslims suffered most. Seventy-five year-old Haji Abbas said that the police had destroyed his shop, and looted silk and cash amounting to rupees one lakh, and broken his arm.

In Benaras, two Hindi dailies – *Aaj* and *Dainik Jagran* – have a large circulation. The other two dailies – *Swatantra Bharat* and the evening *Bharat Doot* – have a limited circulation. Both *Aaj* and *Dainik Jagran* have communal overtones. They compete with each other and try to outbid each other in their sensational reporting, further sharpening their communal tone. According to Chandra Kumar, ex-editor of *Aaj*, "the paper is completely under the sway of its owner who wants to sell more by sensationalising news stories." *Swatantra Bharat* and *Bharat Doot* maintained more objectivity and poise, and were even dubbed as 'Muslim papers'.

Aaj and *Dainik Jagran* came out with sensational stories about underground tunnels, transmitters, petro-dollars. Interestingly enough, the BJP MLA, Jyotsna Srivastava, said that these tunnels could not be seen with the eyes, but required military equipment to be detected. As a result, many Hindu women also believed that there was a *surang* (tunnel) in Madanpura and they were afraid of setting foot there. Thus it can be seen that the local language press played a sensational role in the Benaras riots. Before the riots on 8 November, these two papers gave sensational headlines about the Ramjanambhoomi controversy. These inflamed popular sentiments. On 5 November, the headline in one of

these papers was, "Bomb exploded in Ayodhya — One dead and four injured." Both *Aaj* and *Dainik Jagran* also campaigned for the arrest of the mayor, Swaleh Ansari.

It should also be mentioned that the *Nav Bharat Times*, *The Times of India*, *Swatantra Bharat* and *Bharat Doot* maintained objectivity in their reporting on the riots. But the local administration accused them of sensationalizing the news.

The role of the district administration was lax. There was no proper police bandobust when the Kali procession was passing through Madanpura. The DM maintained that an adequate number of policemen was not available. The question is: did the administration not know that the Kali procession was to be taken out and that a proper number of police personnel had to be procured in advance? On 8 November, the residents of Godowlia were killed in the presence of the police. Two persons were burned alive right under their noses. On 13 November too, when Muslims were on a killing spree, the police were helpless. The administration did not take any step to quash rumours: While it permitted S.C. Dixit of the BJP to roan around freely in the riot-affected areas, other prominent politicians and social workers, including V.P. Singh, were not allowed to visit these areas. This speaks volumes about the objectivity of the administration. The administration failed to take any action against the two Hindi dailies. Instead, it accused the moderate papers like the *Nav Bharat Times* and *Swatantra Bharat* of being 'sensational'.

Benaras city will carry the scars of this violence for long. The holy city has lost its serenity and spiritual equanimity.

Recurrence of Communal Violence in Gujarat

Communal violence erupted in Ahmedabad and several cities of Gujarat on 2 July 1992 after the Jagannath Yatra was allegedly stoned by some miscreants. The violence continued unabated for several days and resulted in the loss of twenty-seven lives. Many persons were injured and property worth several crores reduced to ashes. Deaths occurred due to police firing, stabbing and burning. On 3 July four persons had died in police firing and one person was stabbed to death. In addition to that, 135 persons were injured in various incidents. The police had to fire sixty-six rounds and burst forty tear gas shells to disperse the rampaging mobs.

By 5 July, the death toll had risen to twenty-one, with rioting spreading to other towns of Gujarat like Surat, Baroda, Rajkot, Sidhpur, Morvi and Dholka. Violence spread to these towns when the VHP gave a call for a strike to protest against the alleged attack on the rath yatra in Ahmedabad. Surat, which was considered a peaceful town until recent times, has also come under the communal spell and during these disturbances in Gujarat two persons were stabbed in this city.

Ahmedabad, Baroda and several other towns and cities have become almost a permanent bastion of communalism. Communal violence in these areas can be sparked off on the slightest pretext. The current spell of communal violence, for example, started with the alleged stoning of the rath yatra of Jagannath. Can one blame such petty incidents for sparking off such widespread violence or should one go deeper to understand the genesis of violence, communal or otherwise? These petty incidents explain nothing. Yet, unfortunately, most blame these incidents and draw the wrong conclusion. For a proper understanding of

the phenomenon it is necessary to study the nature of the society which gives birth to violence.

It is an empirical fact that economic development and violence go together. Violence can take different forms, depending on the context. It can erupt as communal, caste, regional, linguistic or racial violence. All these forms of violence exist not only in India but in various other Third World countries in general, and South Asian countries in particular. Pakistan and Sri Lanka have also been dogged by ethnic and racial violence. After restoration of democracy, ethnic differences are surfacing in Nepal too, though they have not yet assumed serious proportions as in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The important question is, why is development accompanied by violence? Is this a hypothesis or a law? In fact, it is neither mere hypothesis nor is it a law. It is an empirically observed phenomenon. Given certain ideal conditions, economic development need not assume a violent form. However, ideal conditions hardly obtain in any society. In the process of development, one privileged section of society is replaced by another. In India, after the failure of the 1857 revolt, the feudal class reacted strongly against the rise of the new middle class. The feudal barons considered it below their prestige to be ruled by the 'babus' as the members of the rising middle class in government services were then known.

Caste conflict has intensified in India because the lower castes are acquiring a higher status in society due to reservations in government jobs. With equal rights, their hierarchical status changes into contractual status. The upper caste Hindus consider it below their prestige to deal on an equal footing with these 'lowly' people, and thus this change brought about by socio-economic developments results in serious caste conflict. Gujarat was rocked by communal violence in 1981 when the state government announced reservation of seats for Dalits in post-graduate medical courses, considered a serious inroad into the exclusive preserve of the upper castes.

Further, socio-economic developments bring greater awareness of rights among the weaker sections of society, specially if these developments occur in a democratic framework. Democracy allows all sections of society to organize and agitate for their rights. This results in a heightening of awareness, which leads to confrontation with the

usurpers of their legitimate rights. Capitalist development is uneven, not only in a regional sense, but also with reference to caste and communal divisions; it results in increased confrontation between these sections of society. On the other hand, politicians too exploit the increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots for electoral gains. The implementation of the Mandal commission report is the best example. In February 1985, Madhavsinh Solanki, then chief minister of Gujarat, had announced implementation of reservations for backward castes in the states and won the elections with a thumping majority. However, his victory was turned into a humiliating defeat with the outbreak of widespread caste violence. When he suspended the caste reservations, caste violence turned into communal violence which continued until he was overthrown.

Modern capitalist development seeks to create major cities and these urban agglomerations are far from homogeneous in character. Ahmedabad, Baroda, Surat and other cities in Gujarat are fast expanding. Increased urbanization results in increased crime and in the Indian social context, these crimes also assume caste and communal dimensions. It is also a well-known fact that economically less developed castes and communities are often compelled to take to crime as they do not find other more legitimate avenues open to them. It is for this reason that one finds more Muslims and Dalits involved in urban crime than upper caste Hindus. (Similarly, one finds more Blacks than Whites involved in crime in the U.S.A.) More often than not, these criminal gangs in urban areas also control votes and they deliver them to the politicians for a price.

Not only this, organized criminals develop political ambitions of their own and get politicized. They themselves contest elections and arouse caste and communal passions to win them. During the height of communal violence, a notorious smuggler from Ahmedabad contested and won the municipal elections from no less than five constituencies simultaneously. He was seen by his fellow-religionists, as their defender and their hero.

In Gujarat, there is strict prohibition, and this has led to intensification of crime. Ahmedabad, Baroda and Surat are centres of different industries and have a strong working class presence which needs cheap liquor. Their social conditions compel them to drink and no amount of

moral exhortations can be really effective. If liquor is not legally available due to prohibition, illicit liquor is resorted to and supplied by the liquor mafia. In Baroda — a highly congested and fast expanding town — illicit liquor is easily available. The 1983 riots, which resulted in large-scale killing, looting and pillaging, were a result of rivalry between a low caste Hindu liquor gang and a liquor gang led by a Muslim.

Large urban conglomerates like Ahmedabad and Baroda are also saddled with a growing influx of population from rural and less developed semi-urban areas, which result in complex problems. These people cannot be culturally and otherwise rooted in the urban set-up and remain rootless; this in turn creates among them a stronger sense of primordial identity. They try to cling to their caste and communal identities for a sense of psychological security. Moreover, they often find it very difficult to secure a job, and remain unemployed. This, in their psychological state of affairs, they ascribe to their belonging to a particular caste or community. Needless to say, this is in turn exploited by politicians for their own electoral ends.

In fast expanding cities land prices escalate rapidly. These prices touch dizzy heights in central areas of the city which are highly congested and are also commercial centres. It is precisely these areas in which crime thrives. The big builders are tempted to buy off land in these areas through legitimate and illegitimate means. The builders' lobby is interested in vacant possession so as to build new buildings and make quick profits. They collude with the criminal elements in society to foment trouble to scare people away from these areas and buy their properties cheap. This has been one of the important contributing factors for communal violence in several cities, particularly in Ahmedabad.

No wonder then, that communal violence erupts within the walled city which constitutes the city centre in Ahmedabad and Baroda. These also happen to be dens of notorious and well-organized criminals. The land sharks had played a significant role in provoking communal violence in Ahmedabad in 1985. They provoked violence in both Hindu as well as Muslim areas. Hindus ran away from Muslim areas, selling their properties at very low prices, and Muslims ran away from Hindu areas disposing of their houses at throwaway prices. This went to such an extent that the government of Gujarat had to issue an ordinance — Prevention of Distress Sale of Properties Ordinance —

and this had a mollifying effect on the situation. It must be noted that these builders had powerful connections with some ruling politicians. It is for this reason that they could get away unharmed.

It should be remembered that in provoking communal violence, politicians, anti-social elements and other vested interests (mainly economic) play a much more fundamental role than religion. It is significant that it is not religions but religious communities which fight, and these communities fight not about the tenets and principles of their religions, but for their competing self-interests. Unless development brings about a just and equitable distribution of its fruits, caste and communal conflict cannot be contained easily. Democracy is no doubt a sort of leveller, but it is highly vulnerable, inasmuch as it can be deftly manipulated by vested interests in their favour.

It may be argued that what has been discussed above has been happening all over India and not only in Gujarat; therefore, why is it that it is only in that state that there is such frequent recurrence of communal violence? To that one can answer that other parts of India are also vulnerable to communal violence. But those parts where all these factors combine together are much more vulnerable, especially if there also exists a strong communal party, like the BJP in Gujarat, to exploit the heightened communal sensibilities in a sustained manner. One should also add the strong presence of mercantile classes in Gujarat which are much more vulnerable to religious exploitation than others. This is one of the reasons for the faster growth of the BJP in the state. It is little wonder then, that Gujarat has become a communal tinder box, being set afire by even a petty incident.

Surat Shames the Nation

Surat is one of the fast industrializing cities in India. Its rapid expansion has very few parallels in the country. Its population has also increased phenomenally. All these factors have to be kept in mind in order to understand what happened in Surat in December 1992. Until recently, Surat was considered a bastion of comunal peace and harmony. In fact, there were a number of theories as to why Surat was peaceful whereas Ahmedabad and Baroda, two other important industrial towns of South Gujarat, erupted so often that communal violence has become endemic to them.

Some maintained that it was the presence of a large number of Muslim traders, an exceptional phenomenon among Muslims. In fact, Gujarat has three trading Muslim communities – the Khojas, Bohras and Memons – all of whom have strong roots in Gujarati culture. Members of these communities live in large numbers in Surat and have close interaction with other – Hindu — traders. Thus they are very well-rooted and integrated in the city culture. All of them have close business relationships with the Hindu traders and this, it was thought, was responsible for the exemplary degree of communal harmony and peace in the city. Also, the city, in view of rapid expansion in commerce and industry, had one of the lowest levels of unemployment. As the local population was not enough to fulfil the demand for labour, a large number of workers had to be brought in from outside, especially from Andhra Pradesh, Kathiawar (another part of Gujarat) and Orissa. The population of the city increased rapidly on account of this migration from other parts of the country.

The low level of unemployment was also considered to be one of the

causes of communal peace. When people are busy in their respective vocations, they have neither the time nor the inclination to indulge in violence. They are more busy earning their livelihood. The third factor which was thought to be helpful in maintaining cordial relations between various communities was the history of the city. The city had no history of communal violence and hence no bitter memories of the past. In fact, most of its people were proud of this heritage.

But the events of 7 December clearly showed that communal peace and harmony was being eroded slowly and gradually by the very factors which brought rapid growth and development. It has been a worldwide experience that economic growth and development bring in their wake certain adverse consequences also. Economic development often gives rise to violence (class, caste or communal) as it brings about changes in the social set-up (the old, privileged groups resist this change, often violently). It is also well-known that urbanization results in a rising graph of crimes. Also, in backward countries like India, development often results in increasing demand for illicit liquor (specially in those areas which are under prohibition), smuggled goods and other related products.

Rapid urbanization has other consequences as well. It brings about migration of workers on a large scale, at times seriously upsetting the old demographic balance. What is worse, the migrant workers are not rooted in the local culture and feel alienated. They come there to make money and consider the city to be nothing more than a vast transit camp. They have no stakes in the city, neither is there any emotional attachment to it. Such people, with their feeling of alienation, are generally violence-prone and can easily explode in a sensitive and tense situation.

Of late, Surat has had all these ingredients, thus pushing it to the precipice of violence. The sustained campaign of hatred indulged in by the BJP-VHP-RSS for the last several years, supplied the necessary fuel to the raging fire under the surface. On the other hand, the Babri Masjid Action Committee and other reckless Muslim leaders too played with the emotions of Muslims. There was simmering discontent within the Muslim community also.

As pointed out above, with the rapid expansion of Surat, criminalization touched new heights. The city became virtually a den of crimi-

nals. Many hardened criminals took refuge in this city. Others also, who were only interested in making a quick buck, flocked to it. This city became notorious for minimum government. Tax laws were openly flouted. A city where all laws are openly and unabashedly disregarded cannot remain an abode of peace for long. Also, the chief minister of Gujarat, Chimanbhai Patel, admitted highly dubious characters into the Janata Dal in order to establish his foothold in South Gujarat. It is also unfortunate that the city Congress leadership in Surat was appropriated by Muslims with an unsavoury reputation. The BJP was seen, in these circumstances, as a party which was different from the Congress and the Janata Dal, and hence more acceptable to the people. Its Hindu bias also made it more popular in the communally surcharged atmosphere in the country. Thus, riots in Surat city must be seen in the context of the socio-economic and political background.

A city which grew in population from 4.71 lakhs in 1971 to 15.71 lakhs in 1991 — a breathtaking growth by any account — could not have avoided violence, be it in communal or any other form, for long.

The major industries in the city are art silk, powerloom, textile and diamond cutting. Some large-scale industries which are mainly capital-intensive, have also sprung up in the city. Most of the workers work on a piece-rate basis and try to put in the maximum number of hours to earn more. Diamond cutting is a flourishing industry and it employs largely Kathiawari (Saurashtrian) workers. However, in the art silk and powerloom industries one finds workers from Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Tamil Nadu. They are very large in number and live, by and large, in hutment colonies which have sprung up in a number of places.

As pointed out earlier, development brings about changes in the socio-economic status of various caste and community groups. Over the years, the traditional upper castes — Vantias and Brahmins — have declined in influence and middle castes like Kanbis, Khatri, Ghanchi and Gola Ranas have emerged as dominant groups. The emergent groups are usually more dynamic but less value-oriented; they are more hard-working but do not enjoy a high degree of inner peace and harmony. They are less religious but more communal. This appears to be an inevitable part of the process of modernization. In tradition-bound societies people tend to be more religious than communal. While trad-

itional societies have had sectarian or religious conflicts, modern societies have communal conflicts. Also, the emergent groups, like the middle castes (both among Hindus as well as Muslims) tend to be more communal. It was the emergent middle class among the Muslims in the pre-partition period which brought about the division of India by adopting an irreconcilably communal attitude. It is the emergent Hindu middle classes and castes who are becoming increasingly communal to assert their aggressive domination. The BJP has given them a proper ideology and articulation. This class feels today that the Hindus were taken for granted and that their privileges are being threatened due to the burgeoning militancy among the backward castes and Dalits, on the one hand, and the militant assertion of their rights by Muslims and Sikhs, on the other.

I would also like to say a few words about the differences in attitude of upper caste Hindus towards Muslims and that towards Dalits and other backward castes. They consider Muslims as invaders who enslaved Hindus for a thousand years, oppressed them and demolished their temples. Not only that, Muslims are seen as people who could never become part of the Indian mainstream, who maintained their separate identity and separatist attitude and ultimately divided India. So they have nothing but contempt and hostility for the Muslims. This hostility acquires greater intensity when the idea of 'appeasement of Muslims' by the Congress is imparted to them by the BJP, which seeks to exploit the idea for political purposes.

As for the Dalits and the backward classes, they were exploited and dominated by the upper castes themselves. They simply want them to remain in their place and not aspire for equal social and political status. They may agree to throw some crumbs to them in the form of reservation. They would not be intensely hostile towards them as towards Muslims. Similarly, the Sikhs are considered a part of Hindu society and the Hindu ethos. There is close cultural interaction with them. They are also seen as protectors of Hindus from Mughals in the past, and as those who stood with the Hindus at the time of partition and refused to play into the hands of Jinnah. Their militant assertion today is seen only as a temporary aberration and not as a permanent alienation. Thus, despite what is happening in Punjab, the Hindus do not develop the kind of hostility towards Sikhs that they have developed towards

Muslims. This explains, to some extent, why the upper caste Hindus have developed such hatred towards Muslims and do not feel guilty even after committing the kind of atrocities which were committed in Surat. "They deserve it," they maintain. "This is what they did to us Hindus in the medieval period," some Hindus said in Surat. (This should not be taken to mean that all Hindus are of this view. We are referring to communal Hindus and those influenced by them).

II

After this somewhat long introduction we want to refer now to the actual events in Surat from 6 December onwards. It must be pointed out here that Surat has no history of communal violence. The last riot which took place was in 1927. Surat remained free of riots even in 1969 when Gujarat was rocked by unprecedented communal violence. Before the December riots, there were some skirmishes only in 1990 and 1992. But riots had never taken place on such a large scale and with such cruelties.

As soon as news of the demolition of the Babri masjid came, Surat, like other towns in the country, also became tense. There was anger and resentment among the Muslims. This was sought to be exploited by one Mahmood Pardewala who heads the Bhartiya Minority Suraksha Sangh (BMSS) and is a man of dubious underworld connections. He gave a call for Surat bandh. BMSS is a small organization with little following among the Muslims and Dalits. However, some men belonging to this organization tried to stop traffic and force a bandh on unwilling people. They even stoned shops and damaged them. Near the railway station, there was brickbating from both the communities.

Near Chowk Bazar, four shops belonging to the majority community were set ablaze. Shantinath Dyeing Mill was also damaged in arson by minority community miscreants. This invited well-organized retaliation from the majority community. At about 11.30 a.m. Pandesara Housing Colony was attacked after an announcement was allegedly made from a nearby Kali temple, to 'destroy Muslims'. Before this attack the Hindus wrote 'Jai Sri Ram' on their houses to save them from being attacked. A mob of nearly 2,000 people came equipped with lathis, choppers, etc. They first looted fifty houses belonging to the Muslims and then set them afire. They also killed some fifteen Muslims and threw their bodies nearby. They first stabbed and then burnt them, our investigators were

told. Some Hindus like Tiwari and others tried to save the lives of Muslims by giving them shelter in their houses and then showing them ways of escape. Many Muslim lives were thus saved. Some Hindus even tried to prevent the 2,000 strong mob from entering the area, but they did not succeed.

The manner in which the large-scale looting, burning and killings took place shows that they were pre-planned. The crowds which indulged in killing and looting carried weapons like lathis, swords, knives, iron rods, guptis, acid bulbs, bottles and stones. Several incidents of private firing were also reported. Though petrol pumps were closed, petrol was freely available. It was used for setting shops and houses on fire. Some shops belonging to the Hindus were also burnt, but their number was small, compared to the number of Muslim houses and shops which were attacked. What is also to be noted is that destruction of minority lives and property took place not only in localities where they were in a minority but also in those areas where they were either in substantial numbers or even in a majority. Huge crowds from outside came and outnumbered them. In many cases they were assisted by the local Hindu neighbours too. In many localities, Hindus and Muslims had initially formed Ekta samitis but when the attacking mobs came, the Hindu neighbours succumbed to pressure, or in some cases, even turned hostile to the Muslims.

In several places like Vijayanagar, Pandesara, Hidayatnagar, etc., people complained that the likely BJP candidates for the forthcoming Municipal Corporation elections collected information about Muslim families with a promise to renew their ration cards. However, this information was used for identifying the Muslim families and their houses for burning and looting. The same method was used by miscreants in the January 1993 riots in Bombay too. According to a report prepared by Kalpna Shah, Smita Shah and Neha Shah, "...for each identification of Muslim houses or shop informant was tipped Rs.100/-. And in one locality where riot was at its worst and the most barbaric and inhuman the Hindus wrote on their houses 'Shri Ram - this house belongs to Hindu' or they had the tiles inscribed of Hindu Gods and Goddesses, reminding the story of Alibaba aur Chalis chor."¹ According to the same report, "Even during the rampage utmost care was taken that not an inch of property belonging to a Hindu was damaged — to the extent

that even a wooden partition dividing a Hindu home from a Muslim one would be left unscarred whereas the adjoining Muslim home would be totally charred."

According to Mohammed Yousuf and Sadiqbhai Rangoonwala, a mob of 500 Hindus entered Masjid mohalla, also known as Qatar gaon, at about 7 p.m. on 7 December. They first set fire to three houses. Then they turned towards a dargah and a mosque, looted them and set them ablaze. Forty-five more houses were targeted, looted and burnt. Some houses and a mosque were razed to the ground. The attacking mob had even brought a road-roller belonging to the Municipality along with a driver to raze houses to the ground. How a road-roller could be brought from the Municipality is a matter for inquiry. In this locality too, persons like Amrutbhai, Dayabhai, Naginbhai and several others tried their best to save the lives of Muslims by hiding them in their houses.

A mob of around 2,000 persons attacked the huts of Muslims in Rajiv Nagar, Phatakwadi, around 2.30 p.m. First, they looted the huts and then set 116 of them on fire. There is a building called Mehul Chambers nearby. The miscreants threw burning cotton from this building onto the huts. The Makbara masjid nearby was also damaged. They tried to burn the mosque but did not succeed. The attacking mob consisted of Oriyas and Kathiawadis.

A Muslim mob, 200-300 strong, attacked Shantinath Silk Mill at about 12 noon on 7 December. The mill-owner, Harshadrai Brijlal Dakotia, was asked to close the mill. After the mill was closed, the two communities clashed near the corner adjacent to the mill. During this rioting the minority mob set the mill on fire after stabbing the watchmen at the gate. The Hindus then took revenge by burning eight houses belonging to the minority community from Sagram-pura- Golkiwad area. Both the mobs used burning cotton for arson.

The worst incident took place in Vijaynagar no. 2. Walls of bamboo, ten to twelve feet high, were erected to prevent the Muslims from running away from there. Also, floodlights were installed to watch the movements of the people in the area. The attack started on the night of 7 December and lasted until 9 December. A mob of 800, well-armed with choppers, iron bars and swords, came on the night of 7 December. Some time before the attack, the Muslims in the area had

tried to shift to a more secure place, but their Hindu neighbours had persuaded them not to leave and had assured them of their safety – but they could not save the Muslims. The mob set some 250 houses of Muslims on fire after looting them. They killed around 70 Muslims on the night of 8 December. Before mounting the attack the electric wires in the area were cut, plunging it into darkness.

Then the mob raped thirteen to sixteen women, and according to unofficial but reliable sources, each woman was raped by four to ten persons. After the rape these women were brought out and made to walk through the floodlit area. It is also alleged that a video film of the rape incident was made. But this could not be confirmed through reliable sources. This is probably not true. At least, no one has seen the film. The atrocities that were committed here send shivers down our spines. Local Imams in Vijaynagar were humiliated and were forced to say “Jai Shri Ram”. They were then chopped into two or three pieces. In one case a person was thrown alive into the fire. The heads of some children were struck on stone and then torn into two pieces. Elderly people were also beaten and killed. While some people were killed and burnt, others were burnt alive. Some were thrown down from the upper floors of buildings. In some cases, heads were chopped off. And, in order to wipe out the evidence, many bodies were either burnt or thrown into nearby drains.

In one case, the rioters killed all the six members of a family staying in Sadurrehaman Manzil and raped an eight year-old girl of the family; Yasmin, eighteen years old, saw her mother being fatally attacked and then she herself was stripped and raped by eight to ten persons. An Imam of the mosque was done to death before the eyes of his wife, Anwari Begum Kutbuddin, who was then raped. The mob then threw some inflammable liquid on her to burn her but she somehow survived and is in a private hospital. In another pathetic case, Jamila Bano, who was seven months pregnant, had to undergo the agony of witnessing her three children being hacked to death. She has become mentally unhinged and is in hospital. Gaddar, a Hindu, saved Yasmin’s uncle, Yunus. Similarly, many Hindu families saved several Muslim families. Otherwise the toll would have been much higher. In this locality too, everywhere one could see ‘Jai Shri Ram, Hindu no makan’ written on many houses. On inquiring we were told that this was the only way to

save one's house from being looted and burnt. A majority of the looters were Kathiawadis.

A mob of nearly 800 came to burn the Choksi Mills belonging to Mohammad Hanif. The watchman resorted to air firing but could not stop the mob from entering the mill premises. The owner told us that they had come with cotton waste and petrol. In this mill 95% of the workers and other staff are Hindu, yet it was not spared. Before burning the mill, the mob looted it — a tempo had been kept ready to cart away the looted goods. According to the owner, perhaps this act of looting and burning was to avenge the burning of Shantinath Silk Mill at the hands of Muslims. The owner suffered a loss of Rs. 1.5 crore. Other mills and factories looted and burnt are as follows: Well-known Silk Mills, owner Kassambhai, loss Rs. 25 lakhs; Wag Bakariwala Silk Mills, owned by Firoz bhai, loss Rs. 75 lakhs; Dada Silk Mills, owner Aarif Dada, loss Rs. 2.5 crores; Huzuri Cold Drink Factory, owner Mohsinbhai Huzuri, loss Rs. 25 lakhs. In Dada Silk Mills too, 95% of the staff was Hindu. At Udhna Magdalla Road, there is an industrial area where out of 400 units, only one unit belonged to a Muslim, and this was burnt. There were 800 shops along this road belonging to Muslims and all of them were burnt. All this happened on 8 December.

Mushtaq Ahmed from Gulshan Nagar (Pandesara) told our investigators that the miscreants first looted the colony on 8 December at 8 p.m. and then a hundred houses were set afire. On the same day at 5 p.m. the police had told the inmates to leave their houses and had assured them that their houses would be protected. But not a single house was saved.

Bahthena is a hutment colony, mainly occupied by migrant workers. The government had given them this land only a few months earlier, and hence the residents were not registered on the voters' list. About 500 people attacked the colony on 8 December. Before the attack the police had picked up around fifty persons from here. About 261 huts were reduced to ashes. It was a mixed colony and people of different communities stayed here. Some people in the colony told the investigators that no political leader had visited it. They complained bitterly against political leaders, police and the goondas. One Amrut Dattu told us poignantly that "*Garib ke kandhe par bandook rakhkar hi garib ko marte hain*" (literally translated, this means, they placed the gun on the shoul-

ders of the poor to kill the poor) and that "*Sab leaderon ko goli mardeni chahiyye*" (all leaders should be shot dead). On 9 December, the violence went on from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. and houses in different places were first looted and then burnt. Fifty houses were affected in Triveni Society; forty houses in Mina Nagar; ten in Dawalsa Slum; and a mosque in Vishram Nagar. All the rioters involved in these incidents were outsiders, i.e., either from Orissa or Kathiawar. Maganlal Bailal from Vishram Nagar said that although there is unity among the Hindus and Muslims, outsiders come and create communal trouble in the area. Near Central Road, Udhna, thirty-seven shops belonging to Muslims were looted and burnt by the mob at about 8 p.m. The rioters were from Orissa and other parts of north India. Similarly, at Pandal Market, a few shops belonging to the minority community were attacked, looted and burnt.

Another tragic incident took place on 10 December near Udhna station. A train was stopped at about 7.30 a.m., about 3–4 km. away from Udhna. A mob of 500, equipped with lathis, choppers, iron bars, fell on the train. They pulled out fifty Muslims and killed them. Some of the women were raped, killed and burnt. A rod was inserted into one woman, because of which she bled profusely. Then her clothes were torn and then she was thrown into the fire along with her brother. Many other women were forced to undergo the traumatic experience of witnessing the killings of their husbands and children before their eyes. Our investigators saw three salwar-kameez suits still lying on the spot.

In Nanpura Hijrawad area the Muslim mob attacked Hindu houses on 10 December and burnt five houses. A temple in the vicinity was also damaged.

It is very difficult to say how many persons were killed in these riots. A rough estimate shows that the number of those killed must have been around 300, most of whom were Muslims (around 95%); but the official death toll is below 200. Around thirty women were raped during this frenzied period. In all, about twenty industries were looted, burnt and destroyed, of which eight were large while twelve belonged to the small-scale category. Out of the eight large industries affected, one belonged to a Hindu. Also, more than 1,000 houses and shops were looted and burnt, of which more than 900 belonged to Muslims. Fifteen mosques and two temples were partially or wholly damaged.

Needless to say, the role of the police was far from satisfactory. Police commissioner Datta, who is considered honest and efficient, had cracked down on bootleggers and other anti-social elements, but this was generally resented by the policemen in Surat as it seriously affected their income from regular *haftas* (weekly bribe money). Commissioner Datta could not control the riots for two reasons: first, the policemen, out of resentment, did not obey his orders and secondly, in Surat too, as in other places, the police has been communalized. Looting, killing and burning went on openly and went unchallenged. No victim of violence could rely on the police for his/her safety and security. In fact, there was so much resentment among the police against the commissioner that some people even thought that riots were engineered to remove him from Surat. Though he was transferred as a result of these riots, there is not much substance in this theory. The riots were engineered by the BJP and they were well planned by them. The deeper causes and underlying factors have already been discussed in the introductory part of the report.

The BJP campaign has highly communalized common people as well as the middle class intelligentsia. Not only is violence against Muslims legitimized, but the rape of Muslim women is justified on the grounds that they deserve it since the Muslims did the same to the Hindus in the medieval ages. Though shocking, this is true. It is not as if all this was done in a state of emotional excitement. It is being justified even after the event — which shows the extent of communalization among the people and the degree of hostility generated.

As pointed out above, the Bohras, Khojas and Memons are the business communities of Gujarat. They are generally peace-loving and mild and hardly ever take part in political movements. Also, they are very well integrated with non-Muslims. Even these communities were not spared in the Surat riots. The mobs went about with a list of their shops and in many cases phoned and told the owners in advance that their shops were going to be looted, which shows how much confidence they had. Calling the police was, of course, of no help.

What was more shocking is that among the looters were not only the anti-socials and the poor and illiterate, but also those belonging to the educated middle classes and upper classes. Even women were not to be left behind. When jewellers' shops and shoe shops were forced open,

women were found frantically searching for proper sizes of gold bangles and sandals. Many of these women too belonged to the middle and upper middle classes. This shows the extent of degeneration of moral values in the modern consumerist society. Those who raise the slogan of 'Jai Shri Ram' are not hesitant to do anything, however barbaric — raping women and burning them alive, cutting children to pieces in the presence of their mothers and stabbing and throwing wounded persons into the fire — though they are well aware that Ram was a *Purushottam*, i.e., morally the best model of humanity.

The BJP, which aspires to come to power, encourages all this without realizing that with this degenerate behaviour the party would find it very difficult to rule in an orderly way. One must remember that those who perpetrate violence meet a violent end. But lust for power blinds a person as much as religious prejudice, and one can imagine what happens when both combine.

Riots in Bombay

Bombay has achieved the dubious distinction of setting an all-India record of communal madness under the leadership of the chief minister of Maharashtra who has lost the will to govern and yet has a strong will to continue in the seat of power. The whole of Bombay is burning even as these lines are being written. The city had begun to limp back to normalcy after the riots of 6–12 December 1992 which erupted after the demolition of the Babri masjid. Before complete normalcy could be restored, the city erupted again on 6 January, exactly one month after the demolition of the masjid. However, we will deal with the riots in the second phase in the second instalment of this report. Right now we will be concerned with the rioting in the first phase.

II

The demolition of the Babri masjid was no doubt a national shame. It deserves the strongest condemnation by all those having any respect for the Constitution and the rule of the law, if not for others' religion. Also, one can hardly exonerate the central government, especially Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and Home Minister S.B. Chavan. They knew that the Kalyan Singh government of Uttar Pradesh would not open fire on the karsevaks in Ayodhya. The Bharatiya Janata Party–Vishwa Hindu Parishad had already announced that they would mobilize more than 2,00,000 karsevaks. Kalyan Singh, the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh had given an assurance to the highest court of the country that the Babri masjid would be protected. One wonders how he could have protected the mosque when a mob of two hundred thousand highly motivated karsevaks had collected there, on whom he was unwilling to

fire. Who on earth could keep such a mob under control? How was the Prime Minister convinced by his assurances? One does not know.

Anyway, the inevitable happened on 6 December, 1992. The BJP-VHP betrayed the country and mocked at the rule of law. And the Prime Minister, by accepting the assurances of the Kalyan Singh government, betrayed the largest minority of the country. It was quite natural for the Muslims to express their anger against such vandalism. What is worse, the authorities did not even have the political imagination to anticipate such trouble. No proper instructions were issued to the police, in Bombay or in any other place. The police was left to its own devices to deal with the situation. Also, the police has its own stereotyped notions about the Muslims, stereotypes prevalent among others too. These stereotypes portray Muslims as aggressive, violent and a fanatical lot that must be dealt with severely. These stereotypes were further 'confirmed' when some Muslims in Bhandi Bazar and other areas indulged in petty violence, attacking buses, taxis, traffic signals or looting some shops. The police drew its own conclusions and began to put down this violence as harshly as it could.

A few words about Bombay exploding in such an unprecedented manner would also be in place. Bombay has grown into a megalopolis with a constant influx of people from various parts of India. More than half its population lives in slums in the most miserable conditions. These slums have mixed populations, made up of various religious, regional and caste communities. These slums are usually a maze of narrow lanes and bylanes and at times are so narrow in parts, that only one person can walk through them at a time. This makes it very easy for miscreants to hide and very difficult for law-enforcing agencies to pursue them in the baffling maze of lanes and bylanes.

These slums are controlled by different slum-lords who impose their own rule. More often than not, the governmental authorities have no existence whatsoever in these slums. The police can barely make its presence felt there. So either the police is in league with these 'lords' or just looks the other way when they enforce their authority. Much of the trouble in Dharavi and other slums can be ascribed to these slum-lords.

The ever-rising curve of unemployment and rising prices also boosts crime. Bombay's underworld is ever expanding, leading to gang rivalries. It is worse if the gangs are divided along communal lines, and

this is not rare. These gangsters have, more often than not, their own political connections and they may be connected with different warring factions of the ruling party. Bhagalpur too, notorious for its criminal gangs, had these gangs aligned to the warring factions of the then ruling Congress and this was reflected in the communal riots of October 1989. In Bombay too, it is being alleged that some notorious gangsters are aligned to the Sharad Pawar group which is at daggers drawn with the Sudhakar Naik group. This group rivalry is allegedly one of the contributing causes of perpetuation of communal violence, specially in the second phase. The editorial in the *Indian Express* published on 11 January 1993 also alleges that Chief Minister Naik is reluctant to call in the army as the credit of stopping the riots will then go to his rival, Defence Minister Sharad Pawar. This may or may not be true but certainly this is the perception of many political analysts.

The Shiv Sena is also playing a very active role in this conflagration. The reason is obvious. It has lost all its regional appeal, even in Bombay. Now it is the Hindutva platform which is being systematically exploited by the Sena since the Bombay-Bhiwandi riots in 1984. Though the BJP is exploiting communal sentiments in a very crude and raw form today, the Shiv Sena is even cruder in this respect. If the Shiv Sena has to prove its 'worth' vis-a-vis the BJP, it must outdo it (the BJP) in promoting communalism and this is precisely what the Shiv Sena is doing. Otherwise it cannot compete with the BJP which also has a considerable presence today in Maharashtra. It is no wonder then that Bal Thackeray boasted that his Shiv Sainiks were responsible for demolishing the mosque, though it was pointed out later that his men had never reached Ayodhya before the mosque was demolished. He also declared after the demolition that he was the happiest man after hearing that most awaited news.

It has also to be borne in mind that no chief minister in Maharashtra, however powerful, can touch Bal Thackeray, who must be placated. Sudhakar Naik first tried to break this power, and weaned away Chhagan Bhujbal and a few other Shiv Sena MLAs. But soon he was pitted against the pro-Pawar dissidents in his own party, and had to make his peace with Bal Thackeray. The chief minister's position became so weak that when communal trouble broke out on 6 December and the Shiv Sena paper *Saamna* began writing highly provocative

editorials and articles, the chief minister, instead of taking action against it, appealed to Bal Thackeray not to write such articles in the interest of peace. This shows the dire straits to which the Naik administration had been reduced. This also sends wrong signals to the police force, a section of which has covert, if not open, sympathies with the Sena. How can such an administration be relied upon for effective action against the miscreants?

III

After the Babri masjid was razed to the ground by the vandals of the BJP-VHP-RSS on 6 December, the nation in general, and the Muslims in particular, were utterly shocked. Even liberal and progressive Muslims felt that while the two-nation theory lies buried under the debris of Bangladesh, Indian secularism lies buried under the debris of the Babri masjid. They were not pained so much by the vandalism of the BJP-VHP-RSS karsevaks as by the inaction and indecision of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. They felt that this inaction was a great betrayal by the central government. History will never pardon the government for that.

As soon as news of the demolition of the mosque spread, Muslims in many areas of Bombay came out on the streets and expressed their anger by attacking buses, taxis and other public property. They even attacked some temples in certain areas and partially damaged them. Some of the anti-social elements among them looted Hindu shops also. However, if the police had acted with tact and imagination, this violence could have been contained and the miscreants could have been arrested, minimizing the loss of life and property. However, in most of the cases the police fired indiscriminately and many innocent people were killed.

Violence in the Bhendi Bazar-Null Bazar area started on the morning of the 7th, specially after the BBC news bulletins showed repeatedly the debris of the mosque. This shows clearly that in a country like India uncensored news can, at times, cause havoc. Even selective reporting of names of those killed from one particular community causes a lot of damage. It is, therefore, necessary to follow some norms for reporting. Many are of the opinion that if it had not been for the BBC news bulletins repeatedly showing the demolition of the masjid, the damage could have been minimized. A section of Muslims came out on the streets on the morning of 7 December in the Bhendi Bazar area, and

began stoning and looting some shops. Near J.J. Hospital they damaged traffic signals, bus stops and also some buses. They looted six shops belonging to the Hindus on Ibrahim Rehmatullah Road. Also, they extensively damaged Suleman police chowki on the corner of Maulana Shaukat Ali road and Underia street.

This went on for a couple of hours and then the police began firing after 12 noon. The way people were killed shows that firing was not so much for dispersing the mob as for killing people. One woman, Nasim Bano, aged 22, who was married just two years ago, was hit on the temple while taking a towel off the clothesline on the second floor of a building and the bullet passed through her heart, killing her instantaneously. This happened between 2 and 2.30 p.m. Similarly, a young boy, Mukhtar Ahmad, aged 17, had come out of his house in search of his father in Teli mohalla. The police fired from Maulana Shaukat Ali road and he too was hit on his temple and the bullet shattered his brain. He died on the lap of his mother. Another boy, whose name could not be ascertained was also hit. He was aged 22 and died after being admitted to the hospital. This happened around mid-day.

Zahid Husain Khan, aged 17 and studying in Standard XI, living in Bldg. No. 25, Room no. 6, Khandia street, off Maulana Shaukat Ali road, was hit on his left shoulder. The bullet passed through his heart. He died on his way to hospital. Another man called Asghar, aged 32, was hit by a bullet while coming out of a urinal on Maulana Azad cross lane no. 10 at about 11.30 a.m. He died. A colleague of his told us that the Hindus were throwing stones and bottles from Kamathipura side and Muslims were doing the same from Maulana Azad road side. However, the police was firing only on Muslims. This was, of course, a common complaint. In this area, we were told that in all, seven persons were killed in the police firing.

A Muslim mob attacked temples near Kalbadevi too. It began at 11 a.m. on 7 December. Near Pydhonie, one Jain temple was slightly damaged. The police fired in the air and dispersed the crowd. In Nagdevi street two temples – Nagraj temple and Hanuman temple – were attacked. The police fired in Nagdevi area and shot one person. Lakshmi Narayan temple was partially burnt near Dongri. Another temple in the area — Someshwar temple — was also attacked but only slightly damaged. One police constable was assaulted in Dongri area and

his rifle snatched. Near Bhendi Bazar Naka, one assistant inspector of police was shot and sustained three bullet injuries, but fortunately he survived. Between Bhendi Bazar Naka and J.J. Hospital, two persons were killed in the police firing.

Near Char Null on S.V.P. road, seven cars were burnt and thirty-eight shops looted by the Muslim mob on 7 December. Hindus also looted ten Muslim shops in this area. Seven Muslims and one Hindu were killed in police firing in this area on that day. Similarly, a police constable who had gone to Ghoghari mohalla during relaxation of curfew, was fired upon and his body was riddled with seventeen bullets, according to the assistant commissioner of police, Madhukar Zende. Some Muslims from Dongri area told us that Zende was an impartial officer who helped restore control over the situation in that area with minimum use of force. According to Zende, police had stopped firing at about 4.30 p.m. on 7 December and no disturbances had taken place since then.

The Null Bazar Market near Gol Deval – an old Hindu temple – is a very busy market with mutton and vegetable stalls and other shops belonging to both Muslims and Hindus. The majority of the shops of course, belong to the Muslims. It is a huge market and has a good business turnover. In this market, there are 512 shops, out of which ninety belong to Hindus and the rest to the Muslims. This market was set ablaze after looting the shops on 7 December at about 12 noon. The shopkeepers ran for their lives while the entire market was reduced to ashes. All shops in Lobangali were also completely gutted and the fire leapt across the lane and burnt a multistoreyed building. Husainin Mansion, housing many Marwari families. This building was also completely gutted. It is a complete mystery as to who set fire to Null Bazar Market. We interviewed many people around the market but most of them pleaded ignorance and said that they had not been present when the miscreants had set it afire. The whole market was reduced to ashes. Since there were both Hindu and Muslim shops there, it is more baffling as to who did it. Some Muslims said that it was the handiwork of some Hindu miscreants who came from behind the Gol Deval — why should Muslims themselves set fire to the market where they had more than 400 shops and Hindus about ninety? Moreover, the Hindu shops were those selling mainly vegetables, whereas Muslim shops sold costlier

and non-perishable goods. But no one could say for sure who the culprits were.

Most of the people living behind Gol Deval are Hindus. The fact that the police had to fire shows that the Hindus (read Shiv Sainiks) were on a rampage. Behind Gol Deval, there were a few Muslim shops – a pen shop, a cassette shop, a radio and T.V. repairing shop – which were all looted and gutted. In all, eleven Muslim shops met this fate. The police fired on the miscreants and according to the V.P. Road police station, ten persons were killed in the firing. This included deaths at the Two Tank area which is predominantly Muslim. Behind the Gol Deval it appears that a few Hindus were killed in the police firing. A local Shiv Sena board displayed the names of four people killed. It clearly shows there were widespread disturbances in the area. All this happened on 7 December. On that day, according to police sources, four policemen, including one police sub-inspector, Sheikh, were injured.

IV

Govandi and Excessive Police Firing

Govandi, near Chembur (in the eastern suburbs), is one of the largest slum areas of Bombay with a considerable Muslim population. Generally very poor, the most marginalized sections of society live here. Our interviews with a large number of affected people clearly show that the police went on a rampage and made Muslims their target. The evidence for this seems overwhelming. We interviewed those who had otherwise no axe to grind. They had hardly any political consciousness and barely manage to eke out a miserable living. We spoke to a number of women who appeared quite truthful in their presentations. In our view there was nothing which could make what they said doubtful.

Unlike Bhendi Bazar, it all started on 8 December in various areas of Govandi. In the early morning, on the 8th, the Muslims of Govandi reacted to the demolition of the Babri masjid by indulging in petty violence. It appears that they threw stones and other missiles and also damaged some Hindu temples. The Hanuman temple at Kamlabai Jhopadpatti in plot no. 19 in Shivajinagar came under attack at 6.30 a.m. The Hanuman idol of marble was chipped off from its base and removed. Other parts of the temple were also damaged. We interviewed a number

of Hindus in the area. But all of them denied any knowledge of who was responsible. Most of them felt that it was the work of some outsiders, whose religion or personal identity was not known. Muslims in the area also denied any knowledge, some even vigorously said that it was not their work at all. But circumstantial evidence makes us feel that some young Muslims, aided by anti-social elements, might have damaged the temple. Similarly, two other temples were also damaged, though not as much as the Hanuman temple.

It appears that this was the beginning of the trouble in Govandi. Next, it erupted near masjid Nur-e-Ilahi in Sanjaynagar, Bainganwadi. The Imam of the masjid, Maulana Hannan Ashrafi, told us that Muslims were guarding the mosque when some Shiv Sainiks came from plot no. 16 along with the police. The police started firing at the Muslims at about 7 a.m. One boy, Sibte Nabi, was killed and many injured. Policemen stepped forward and shot another boy, Rahimullah, aged 25, near Sanjaynagar School no. 4. It was as if the police had gone berserk. Three other persons were shot dead – Syed Kazim Ali, Shamim (aged 22) and Nasim, aged 18 years. Another person, Nihal, 25, was shot and injured at around 9.30 a.m.

Then, according to the Imam of masjid Nur-e-Ilahi, the police entered the mosque and set fire to it. There were four persons inside the masjid including the Imam. Six policemen had entered the mosque. They beat up those inside the mosque with rifle butts and asked them to line up. When they said that they wanted to put out the fire first, the response of the policemen was “let the mosque burn.” But when the inmates insisted on putting out the fire, the police shot one Abdul Ghaffar, a trustee, dead. He was shot in the chest. Another person, Mohammad Yaqub, was shot in the leg. The third person, Hafiz Kafi, was taken away by the police, and beaten on the way. He is reported to be dead. The Imam of the mosque was also beaten up with rifle butts. The mosque was damaged in the fire and three shops around the masjid were reduced to ashes.

Curfew was then imposed in the area at about 10 a.m. After the curfew, the timber shop belonging to one Haji Baitullah was set on fire. According to the owner, the State Reserve Police allegedly set fire to the shop. When the owner and some others tried to put out the fire, they opened fire. Syed Kazim Husain, aged 28, standing near his house

in a lane beside the timber mart, was hit by a bullet. He was taken to hospital where he died after three days.

In Shivajinagar Plot 31, D line, the police came around 4.30 p.m. Some people were inside the chawls and some were standing on the road. Apparently, there was no trouble in the area. The police began firing and one Muslim who was crossing the road, died. Two other persons, one of whom was 18 year-old Zafar, were using the toilet. The police broke open the doors and allegedly shot both of them dead. Another person – a Hindu – who was looking out from the chawl was also shot dead. One lady told us that the police pulled her son, Sheikh Islam, out of the house, shot him and took him away. He has not been traceable since.

A similar case was reported from Subhash Chandra Bose Nagar, on Plot no. 40A, Bainganwadi. His mother told us that Aftab Alam, aged 30, was pulled out of the house and allegedly shot by the police. Aftab was hit on his hand and stomach. According to the lady, the policemen, six in number and led by Inspector Nikam, also fired on the walls of the house. The bullets entered the room but fortunately no one was hit. The police set fire to a taxi parked outside the house. We saw the burnt remains of the taxi. In the same locality the police shot dead Nawab Ali, aged 30, living in house no. 115, after pulling him out of his house. We spoke to his widow who told us, sobbing all the while, how her husband was allegedly killed by the police. The police also pulled out another man, Jalil, around 25 years old, and shot him, but fortunately he survived. The police set on fire house no. 3 which belonged to one Mansur Khan, and reduced it to ashes. The nearby house of Bhika Raoji Bhalerao was also burnt.

Mohammed Saghir, 18, was pulled out of his house (no. 8), taken some distance away and shot dead. His body could not be traced. Similarly, Akbar Ali and Hamid were made to run and then shot, but both survived. In the case of Farouque Sheikh, he was pulled out from his house, led to a place further away, and then shot dead by the police. The police, according to an eyewitness account, were shouting 'Jai Shri Ram' while shooting him. Similarly, Mohammed Mehboob Sheikh was also shot, and wounded.

In Chikalwadi area of Bainganwadi, disturbances started at about 12 noon on 7 December. Some miscreants who could not be identified,

came from outside and burnt the mandir in the vicinity. The police reached the spot at about 12.15 p.m. The SRP broke open the doors of many houses and pulled out the people and beat them up. On plot no. 40, room nos. 6-7, the nephew of Mohammed Umar, aged 27, was beaten up and then shot dead and Mohammed Anwar was severely beaten up. Another person living behind this house was also allegedly shot but could not be identified. A small garment factory was looted. Afsari Begum told us that her house was completely destroyed. We saw the remains of the hut ourselves.

One S.A. Rashid told us that the police began firing on 8 December at 10 a.m., as a result of which five persons died, namely, Yunus Mulla, Israr Ahmed, Salim Ahmad, Rais Ahmad and Shamsuddin. Six persons were injured. On Datta Mandir plot no. 38, BEST chawl, the Muslim area was burnt along with some Hindu houses. The temple in the area was damaged by unknown people (presumably the Muslims) after the firing began. Aslam Khan and Afsari Banu told us that their houses were burnt by the police at 11 a.m. after imposing curfew. On the same day, police also fired from madrasa Jamia Qadariya at the nearby houses. We saw the bullet marks on the walls.

In Bandra Plot, Bainganwadi, disturbances broke out on 7 December. We were told that on plot no. 37-A, Salim Usman was standing near his room, no. E-8. Police fired at him at 2.30 p.m. and when he ran, the police chased him and shot him twice. He died in hospital on the same day. Another person, Salim, aged 40, was killed by a police bullet on 7 December at 11 a.m. while returning home from work. Mohammed, aged about 40, was hit by bullets while engaged in some work on 7 December, at about 10-11 a.m.

Another calamity struck in what is known as Kamala Raman Nagar near the dumping ground. In this area, there were forty-six huts, of which forty-four belonged to Muslims and two to Hindus. On 8 December, according to a resident there, the police came around 1-1.30 p.m. and first opened fire and then set fire to the huts without any provocation. When we visited the site not a single hut remained. According to Mohammed Hanif Ramzan Sheikh, a taxi driver whose hut was also burnt, five persons were injured in police firing, of whom two were still missing at the time of our visit. There were some Maharashtrian Hindus also staying in the same locality but their huts

were spared. And no one was arrested from amongst them.

In Shivajinagar plot no.6, flat no. F-6, one Amir Bano, aged 35, told us that at about 2.30 p.m. some people came and broke open the door. They were carrying swords, guptis and iron rods and were accompanied by two policemen. She was pulled out of her house and attacked in the presence of the policemen. She had deep wounds on her back and needed forty-five stitches. She was admitted to the hospital by her brother. She showed us her wounds. Mohammed Arif, 20 years old, was shot by the police in Lotus Colony plot no. 14, room no. 930, and then taken away. There has been no trace of him since then.

According to police sources, in all fifty-eight persons died, mainly in the police firing – ten in Lotus Colony and forty-eight in Chikalwadi, Indira Nagar. Markhadi and Bandra Plot in Govandi area. However, according to the sources in the Govandi Relief Committee, ninety-two persons died in police firing and 210 were injured. Also, 450 other people, including women and children, were injured in lathi charges. Twenty-one persons were missing. Thirty-five vehicles were burnt or damaged and forty-five pan-bidi shops were looted or destroyed and one masjid was also burnt. Thus it will be seen that the Govandi area was very badly affected. Almost all the people who died were killed in the police firing and again, almost all of them were Muslims. One can very well see the role that the police played in that area, where the poorest of the poor live. Not only was there no respect for life, there was no respect for the dead either. The most pathetic case was that of an eleven month-old child who died for want of medicine during curfew. When Saira Begum, the child's mother, approached the police for permission to bury the child, she was asked by the police to "throw it in the creek." The child had to be buried then in the nearby dumping ground in the garbage. The bloated body of the child appeared on the surface and had to be pressed down again in the garbage.

According to Maulana Mohammed Qasmi, member of the Jamiat al-Ulama, Senior Inspector Bhagwat Rao Patil was the main person behind the shooting of innocent people. However, deputy commissioners of Police, Pawar and Tyagi helped restore order and severely reprimanded Patil who then feigned madness and was admitted to hospital for treatment.

V

Malad East – Pathanwadi and Islampura

Pathanwadi in Malad East has a majority of Muslims, who constitute almost 80% of the population of this area. The M.H.B. colony nearby has mainly Hindu population. This area was quite tense after the demolition of the mosque. Here too, some Muslim youths started brickbating to express their anger on 8 December. The police came and resorted to lathi charge. But the Muslim youths threw stones at the police. The police then opened fire. Three Muslims were injured, but no one was killed.

Islampura is also part of Malad East but Muslims make up not more than 6–7% of the population in this area. There is a mosque from where Islampura actually begins. On 10 December about a hundred Hindu youths started pelting stones on the masjid at about 11.30 a.m. The Muslim youths from Islampura defended themselves. However, some Hindus also joined the Muslim youths for defending the area. Then the Hindus began attacking the Muslims from the Ambe temple, throwing soda water bottles and petrol bombs towards Islampura. But the Hindu-Muslim youth group from Islampura did not retaliate, as it would have damaged the temple. What was heartening was that both Hindus and Muslims had come together and they saved the Islampura mosque. Shankar Bhattacharya and Zuber Malik took the lead in their respective communities, in forging unity among the Hindus and the Muslims.

However, the Hindu rioters now shifted to Laman Nagar and damaged one mosque and stabbed one Chandmiyan who was the *bangi* (i.e., one who gives *azan*, call for Muslim prayer) of that mosque. According to Abdul Rashid the role of the police was excellent in that area. Police sub-inspector Thakur played a major role in preventing any outburst of violence in the area.

Squatters' Colony in Malad East was also badly affected. This is situated near the Chincholi railway crossing, and has a mixed population, with one-third of the total population being Muslim. The tension started building from 7 December. On the 8th, some minor clashes took place but nothing much happened. During the next two days, there were rumours among both the communities about being attacked by the other. But it was on the night of 11 December that the Muslim youths started throwing brickbats at about 11 p.m. They also threw petrol

bulbs. The Hindus retaliated. There were about 400 people on either side. The Hindus set fire to Al-Falah school and a mosque. At about 11.45 p.m., Muslims attacked the Gajanan temple and badly damaged it. Some Muslims were carrying choppers and swords. They stabbed Shyam Sunder, son of the temple priest, Laxminarayan, who was away at that time, and threw acid at the cow belonging to the family. They killed Prahlad Shinde, aged 19, inside his house.

Sub-inspector Nadaf, a Muslim, lathi charged a Hindu mob to disperse it. Some 800 Hindus marched to the police station demanding his transfer for this. The morcha was led by the Shiv Sena leaders. At 7 p.m. curfew was imposed and an hour after that, Saiyed, aged 19, was burnt alive near Swan Bharti Co-operative Housing Society.

It was alleged that some builders had a hand in the disturbances, as Govindnagar area belongs to Govindram Sakseria who wants to develop the plot. The builder had been trying to build a wall there in order to develop the plot subsequently. It is alleged that the suggestion to build this wall had come up in a joint meeting of the two communities and the builder had immediately agreed. The cost of the wall is estimated to be around rupees ten lakhs. One can very well understand the value of the land involved.

V

Bandra East, Bharat Nagar and Nirmal Nagar

The proportion of Hindus to Muslims in Bharat Nagar in Bandra East is 70:30. This constituency is represented in the Legislative Assembly by Madhukar Sarpotdar of the Shiv Sena, who is known for his communal outbursts and anti-Muslim position. Here too, the Muslims began throwing stones and brickbats on the morning of 7 December. They also threw sodawater bottles and other missiles at the police. The police began firing at about 10.30 a.m. without first resorting to lathi charge or teargassing. The police firing continued intermittently for three days, i.e., on 7, 8 and 9 December. Stone-throwing by the Muslims also continued for all three days. Twelve Muslims were killed in the police firing. Their ages ranged from 18 to 25 years. About forty-eight persons were injured, of whom four were Hindus. However, there were no instances of people being pulled out of their houses and killed. There was no complaint of police excesses in this locality.

The owners of Hanuman general store and Chamunda general store

in the locality were of the view that there was no Hindu–Muslim conflict in this area at all. It was between the Muslims and the police. But in the Government Colony, Bandra East, ten to twelve Muslim shops were looted by Shiv Sainiks. Near the police station there, about ten trucks were parked, of which one belonged to a Muslim. That truck was burnt by the Sena mob.

Behrampada is a big slum area in Bandra East, where 85% of the people are Muslims. Adjacent to Behrampada is Khernagar Housing Board colony wherein Muslims form only 10% and in the semi-slum area called Kherwadi Road, the Muslims make up about 30% of the population. Nearby is a temple of Lord Ganesh. This temple was allegedly damaged by the Muslims. However, our inquiries could not reveal who did it. Some Muslims maintained that they had not done it. They pointed out that there is a Ganesh temple right inside Behrampada which Muslims could have easily damaged, if they so desired. But that temple was quite safe. Why would they damage a temple outside their area then? However, even the old lady who is in charge of the temple was not available for comment. It was, therefore, not possible to ascertain who was responsible for it.

As soon as the news about the temple being damaged spread, the Shiv Sena mob began collecting but the police was trying to stop them. On the Muslim side too, a mob began to collect, but the Amir of Tablighi Jamat, Mohammed Ali, Babu Bhai, and F. A. Baba were trying to exhort them not to be restive as it would only harm the cause of the Muslims. But their plea was only partially effective. The mobs from both sides began pelting stones. All this happened on 7 December at 10 a.m. The rioting became very serious. The Muslim mob also became restive and began stabbing Hindus. The stabbing incidents took place for three days and some eight persons were stabbed. Three bodies were later recovered from a nearby drain and five were discovered from a nulla. Among those killed was a Muslim police constable, Afzal Ismail Sheikh (E.C. no. 270). It was perhaps a case of mistaken identity. The constable belonged to the Nashik rural district police.

On 8 December police inspector Kasbekar began firing at about 11.30 a.m., apparently without any reason. He was accompanied by three more constables. In this firing, a woman named Neelam Mazhar Khan was killed, though one Sharful Huda, a Special Executive Magis-

trate and member of the Congress Seva Dal alleges that the police had intended to kill him. In all, six persons were killed on 7 and 8 December, and fifteen were injured. All of them were Muslims

VI

Dharavi

Dharavi is considered to be the biggest slum in Asia. One finds here people of different castes and communities. There are a large number of Tamilians, both Hindus as well as Muslims. The Tamil Muslims are mostly engaged in the leather business. Generally, the Tamil Hindus and Muslims were thought to be well assimilated both linguistically and culturally. In Tamil Nadu there has been no history of communal conflict between the two communities and it was believed that linguistic and cultural integration helped create harmony between the two. Similarly, Malayali Hindus and Muslims were also well assimilated and not much communal conflict existed between them. But increasing communalization has pushed this assimilation to the background and communal differences are becoming more and more pronounced, both among Malayali Hindus and Muslims, and Tamil Hindus and Muslims. In Dharavi, too, relations between Tamil Muslims and Hindus have been quite strained.

Dharavi is also a den of criminals and slum-lords. One finds here gambling dens and centres of illicit liquor. The notorious gangster, Varadarajan, also had a large following in this area. Thus one can understand how explosive the situation can become in Dharavi once it gets out of hand. And it did get out of hand after the demolition of the Babri masjid on 6 December. All sorts of tensions surfaced.

On 6 December, some Hindus took out a victory procession at about 6 p.m. after the demolition of the Babri masjid. One of the slogans being shouted by the processionists was "*Talwar lenge aur mandir banayenge*" (We will take swords in hand and construct the temple). There were about 500 persons in the procession. This procession heightened communal tension. On 7 December stone-throwing began early in the morning. The Muslims allege that it was the Hindus who began throwing stones, but it is more likely that both sides indulged in the activity. People were throwing stones and petrol bulbs from the roofs of their houses.

It was alleged by the Muslims that at about 2 p.m. a mob of 100 led

by Shinde, the local corporator belonging to the Republican Party, attacked Muslim houses in the Khadda area. About fifty-six houses were looted and burnt. Also, the Muslims were driven out from there. On 8 December, both sides again started pelting stones at each other. What was interesting to note was that there was complete polarization between the Hindus and Muslims. All Hindus – Tamil, Maharashtrian, Gujarati and others – were on one side and all Muslims, whatever their regional origin, were on the other.

The police came at 11.30 a.m. on 8 December and opened fire; three Muslims were killed and four were injured in Chamda Bazar. The Muslim youths – some of whom were pelting stones – tried to surrender to the police, but the police did not stop firing, and killed three persons. Twenty-seven Muslims were arrested thereafter. The Hindus also looted the godown of a Muslim merchant, which had leather goods worth Rs. 45,000.

The trouble had erupted in various parts of Dharavi, which is a huge area. In Social Nagar, Muslims are in a majority. The victory procession passed through this area also. The processionists were shouting, "*Kamar pe lungi munh men pan, bhago landiya Pakistan*" (Wearing lungis and chewing pan, you circumcised ones go away to Pakistan). On 9 December a Hindu mob came and set fire to fifty huts, forty-six of which belonged to Muslims. All Muslims had to run away from there to nearby relief camps set up by members of their community. The huts were set ablaze at 9 p.m.; the fire brigade arrived at about 2 a.m. and put out the fire. Six Muslims died, and eighteen persons, including one Hindu were injured in the police firing at 2 a.m. Obviously, here the police played an anti-Muslim role. The police fired only on those whose huts were set ablaze by miscreants. In Social Nagar and its vicinity, two Hindu temples were damaged. Muslims set ablaze about fifty houses, and Hindus, in different incidents, reduced to a cinder one hundred Muslim houses. It was a free-for-all. But the Muslims alleged that while they had to face police firing for their actions, the police did not fire when Hindus indulged in mischief. That is why most of the casualties in the police firing in Dharavi were Muslims.

Similarly, the Mukund Nagar area (also known as Damar Company area) with a 90% Muslim population, was badly affected. There was intermittent trouble and the police resorted to firing repeatedly; five

persons, all Muslims, were killed, forty-five were badly injured, and 150 (of whom three were Hindus) sustained minor injuries. Thirty-eight houses were looted and the same number were burnt by the Hindu mob; yet there was no police firing, the Muslims complained. But when about eighty Muslim women went to complain to the police, they opened fire on the group, and one woman was badly injured. Not only this, some Shiv Sainiks attacked these women in the presence of the police, the Muslims alleged, and yet the police did not resort to firing. But the Muslims of Mukund Nagar also said that they were satisfied with the role of the police since the time deputy commissioner Pande took charge of the area.

Besides these major incidents, in Dharavi a number of other incidents took place, mostly of arson and looting. It created a climate of terror throughout Dharavi. Slum-lords and other criminals played no mean role in all this. Many slum-lords put up their own locks on the houses from which people had fled so that those locks could be opened only on payment of money or increase in rent. This climate of terror still persists. In all, about forty-two persons were killed of whom forty died in police firing and two in mob violence. Of those who died in the police firing, thirty were Muslims and ten Hindus. Of the two who died in mob violence, one was a Christian and the other a Dalit. Also, at least 300 persons were injured in police firing. But according to police sources, in all thirty-two persons died, of which twenty-two bodies were found (seventeen Muslim and five Hindu) and ten were yet to be recovered. Also, according to the authorities, about two hundred persons were injured. In all, 489 houses were burnt, ninety-one shops were looted and burnt, thirty-five garment factories and sixty business houses were looted.¹

VII

Mahim and Dargah Makhdum Mohiuddin

There is a large Muslim population in Mahim, particularly near dargah Makhdum Mohiuddin. In some parts there are middle and upper middle class Muslims and in other parts there are poorer Muslims living in kutcha and semi-pucca huts and houses. The Hindus and Christians in this area are fewer in number. However, in other parts, the Hindus are in a majority and the Muslims in a minority. There is a big slum behind the BEST depot, in parts of which Muslims are in a majority; the Kolis

(fisherpeople) who are supporters of the Shiv Sena, live in the other parts. There are also a few Christians in the area.

Mahim, it must be noted, is communally a very sensitive area. Communal trouble has occurred here a number of times. Early on the morning of 7 December the Kolis began throwing stones from their colony at Makhdum Nagar behind the BEST depot. The youths from Makhdum Nagar retaliated. Although the stone-throwing from the Kolis' side was quite heavy (they were throwing stones from above the terraces of the Housing Board buildings behind), not much damage took place. Meanwhile, in other areas of Mahim, like Vanjawadi, Mahim Bazar, Dargah Street, disturbances started as parents came out to inquire about the safety of their school-going children. An ambulance was arranged for bringing the children back home from school. The police stopped the ambulance and rumours spread that untoward things had happened, as a result of which some people began throwing stones at the police. The police then fired and stone-throwing and firing went on until evening on that day, in which five persons were killed. The toll would not have been so high if the police had not arrested Amin Khondwani, a noted Muslim leader and a former MLA from the area. Due to his arrest, the stir got intensified and the police had to resort to more firing.

On the 10th, suddenly, a rumour spread that Bal Thackeray, Shiv Sena leader, had been arrested. This was not true. It seems as if the rumour was deliberately spread to create trouble. As soon as the rumour spread, some miscreants from amongst the Kolis began pelting petrol bulbs on Makhdum Nagar, which caught fire and was completely reduced to ashes. More than 680 huts were gutted and about 1,000 families dishoused. They took refuge in various relief camps opened near the dargah. We saw more than 5,000 people who were being fed by the Mahim Relief Committee in these camps. They had run away from their homes with only their clothes on. They could not retrieve anything. The residents of the colony complained to us that when they came out to put out the fire the police fired at them. Thus it became impossible to save their huts. Everything was consequently destroyed. Mahim continues to remain tense.

VIII

Behram Baug, Jogeshwari (West)

Jogeshwari is communally a highly sensitive area. Behram Baug, in

Jogeshwari West is a huge slum on the eastern side of the western express highway. Both Hindus and Muslims live cheek-by-jowl in many areas of this vast slum in the western suburbs of Bombay; Muslims make up about thirty-five per cent of the population, the rest being Hindus and others. This area was badly affected during the disturbances in the wake of the demolition of the Babri masjid from 6–11 December.

The trouble started, like in other areas, on 7 December, near Pascal Colony and Shankarwadi. The former is a Muslim area whereas the latter is a Hindu dominated one. When mobs collected from both sides, the women persuaded them to go, and restrained their respective youths. The police also played a persuasive role. However, the mobs gathered again. A Muslim garage was torched at 3 p.m., which heightened the tension. This garage was located a little further away from Pascal Nagar. The Muslim women again tried to persuade their men not to indulge in violence. Similarly, the Hindu women dissuaded Hindu boys from Fernandes chawl from indulging in violence. However, in that highly tense atmosphere, persuasion did not work and violence erupted.

On 8 December Muslims started brickbating at about 11 p.m. to express their anger against the demolition of the Babri masjid. But there was no specific target of this brickbating. Three or four vehicles parked along the Link Road nearby were damaged; a temple nearby was also hit but not damaged. The brickbating continued for some time. The police came in two jeeps after about two hours. When the police came the mob dispersed and people went into their houses. The police entered one of these houses which was a house-cum-carpenter shop. There were six carpenters in this house. The police fired at the group, killing four of them and injuring two others. Those killed were Mohammed Maksud (26), Mohammed Aslam (25), Mohammed Anees (21) and Mohammed Nafees (19). The two injured were Mohammed Kamil (24) and Mohammed Ishrat Ali (20). They were all skilled carpenters. Of those killed, Mohammed Aslam had come to Bombay just six days earlier.

Mohammad Ashfaq Khan of Lorik Yadav chawl told us that on that morning the police took photographs of vehicles which they themselves had burnt. Curfew was imposed on this area on 9 December at 2 a.m. In all, twenty-one persons – nineteen Muslims and two Hindus – were arrested.

It is alleged that a Hindu pandit was burnt alive by the Muslims.

Similarly, a Muslim mob was attacked while going to the Muslim cemetery. The police also resorted to firing to disperse violent mobs and seven persons were killed. Subsequently, two persons, both Muslims, were stabbed to death. Thus, in all, nine persons died in Jogeshwari area in the first phase of the communal disturbances.

IX

Kurla, Halau Pul and other areas

Kurla, one of the eastern suburbs of Bombay, also has a mixed population. Certain areas in Kurla are highly sensitive. The Shiv Sena has a strong hold over the Marathi-speaking people in Kurla. On 7 December Muslims began stoning a Hindu temple in the Jugar Chawl area at about 2.30 p.m. The Hindus then retaliated by attacking a mosque in Mahajanwadi on 8 December; a Muslim school (MES School) was also attacked, as was a madrasa. One Suleman Sheikh's sari factory was set ablaze. Then one readymade cloth factory, one motorbike and one tanker, were all burnt. The local corporator, Feroz Matri's office was also burnt. The Muslims stabbed a 27 year-old man called Hanumanta Rama Arote and he died. A 35 year-old woman was killed by a police bullet in a building called Pasban in the Halau Pul area. Three other persons were injured in the police firing. Besides this, numerous stabbing cases took place but it is very difficult to get the details as people were afraid of speaking to our investigating team.

X

Ghatkopar, Asalfa Village

Ghatkopar, Asalfa village and nearby areas were also badly affected by the riots. One timber mart belonging to a Muslim was set afire. Three persons inside the mart were roasted alive. A builder, Damji Valji, wanted to develop the site and wanted it vacated, but the owner of the timber mart was unwilling. It is alleged that the timber mart was torched by the builder. In Khairani Road area there are a number of scrap shops belonging to Muslims. Five hundred such shops were set ablaze. Some families lived behind these shops but fortunately no one died. These shops were burnt on 9 December, allegedly by supporters of the Shiv Sena.

Sixty shops in Subhash Nagar, Bharat Market, Ghatkopar were also completely burnt. These were shops belonging to both the communities, Hindus as well as Muslims.

There were several other small incidents throughout Bombay. The total number of deaths admitted by police sources was 202, of which 137 were in police firing. However, this is a gross underestimate. The death toll seems to have crossed 400, and most of the people died in police firing. Barring a few places, it was a Muslim–police riot rather than a Hindu–Muslim riot. The Bombay police obviously displayed an anti-Muslim bias, though there were some impartial officers also. But they were few and far between.

Riots in Bombay – The Second Phase

The Babri masjid was vandalized on 6 December 1992, and Bombay witnessed communal violence from 7 December onwards. A month later, on 6 January 1993, communal riots broke out once again. The causes for this are varied and controversial. It is very difficult to say with certainty as to how the riots in the second phase began. One possible reason is the murder of two mathadi workers in Dongri area inside a godown. It was alleged that Muslims had murdered them out of communal vengeance. However, it is far from certain as to who the murderers really were. It is also maintained that the mathadi workers were killed in union rivalry. This was corroborated by the police, but only after the damage had been done.

Another view holds that riots began in Bhendi Bazar, Null Bazar and Mohammed Ali Road area on account of rumours that the Muslim dargah in Mahim was demolished by Hindus. It is true that a few cases of stabbing were reported from these areas. And undoubtedly this became the flash point for the riots. However, it would be utterly simplistic to say that the riots started only because of these stabbing cases, with no other factors at work.

In fact, the Shiv Sena was preparing for the violent outburst on a large scale. It waited for the flash point and the incidents in Bhendi Bazar–Mohammed Ali Road area provided one. The note prepared by the government of Maharashtra for Members of Parliament lists only those incidents between January 6 and 8 in which the members of the minority community attacked the Hindus. It is, to say the least, a highly biased view. By implication, the Maharashtra government seems to have accepted the Shiv Sena view that the riots were started by the

Muslims and that what happened thereafter was a 'spontaneous' response by the Sena and others.

However, a close scrutiny of events would belie the government's claim. Apart from other things, the mahaartis (roadside worship of the Hindu deities) had done a lot of damage to communal peace. Hundreds of Shiv Sainiks, BJP men and others participated in each mahaarti which invariably ended with anti-Muslim propaganda that exacerbated communal tensions and prepared the atmosphere for eruption of communal violence. In many cases the mahaartis were followed by attacks on Muslim lives and property. The government note mentions that there were thirty-three such artis between 26 December and 5 January, i.e., before the events to which the government ascribes the riots.

The police commissioner of Bombay himself had admitted on 7 January that the mahaartis were "aggravating" the situation.¹ And by 8 January, 113 such artis were already organized. What was worse, these mahaartis were allowed throughout the period of riots and 498 of them had taken place by 5 February, of which 172 had attendances of over 1,500, according to the government. It should also be noted that rioting had, in fact, begun on 2 January in Dharavi, leading to the exodus of Muslim families (as reported in *The Times of India* on 3 January). This exodus swelled to thousands within a few days. This has been ignored by the government note.

In fact, systematic preparations were made – including surveys carried out to identify Muslim houses, rickshaws, taxis and cars – much before the second phase of the riots began. For example, in Pratiksha Nagar near Sion-Koliwada, such a survey was carried out a week before the riots, and those very houses – identified as Muslim houses – were demolished during the riots. Bal Thackeray, of course, blamed it on an 'outside element, an anti-national element'. He even identified the anti-national element as 'Pakistanis', one crore of whom, according to him, have entered the country and spread all over India. He also mentioned the infiltration of 'Bangla Muslims' in the country. And on being asked to comment on the fact that the Shiv Sena had reportedly accepted having been involved in the riots, he said that the Sena had been forced to get involved because "our job is to retaliate". If there had been no Shiv Sena, the Hindus would have been slaughtered.²

Earlier, Pramod Navalkar, the Shiv Sena's leader of the Opposition in the upper house of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly, had admitted in an interview to Rajdeep Sardesai of *The Times of India*³ that "Our boys were involved in the rioting" and also added, "but for every five Shiv Sainiks on the street, there were also 20 anti-social elements involved." Manohar Joshi, senior Sena MLA, told the same reporter, "I will not call them Shiv Sainiks. They were all anguished Hindus who were spontaneously reacting to what happened in Jogeshwari." (Four Hindus were burnt alive in Radhabai Chawl, Jogeshwari on 8 January.) Some grassroots Sena workers told Sardesai that there were approximately 220 "active" shakhas (branches) in the city. On an average, each shakha has around 200 committed members. This itself gives the Sena an army of 40,000 Sainiks as against the police strength of just over 30,000.

According to Sardesai, "The plan decided upon in the shakhas was simple—spread the word that people's lives were threatened, that temples would be destroyed and that sophisticated arms were being brought into the city. The more active Sainiks began going through voters' lists and also finding out the names of building and shop owners in some areas. These lists were available with the Sena shakha pramukhs immediately after the December 6 riots."

All this clearly shows the involvement of the Shiv Sena in the January riots in a big way. The Sena had deliberately spread the rumour that sophisticated weapons had come for use in the riots, but what is surprising is that the then police commissioner, Shrikant Bapat, made a press statement that there was sustained firing for an hour from a mosque in Mohammed Ali Road area using an AK-47 rifle. He even said that the "shells were found," though the gun itself was not traced. This was an unfortunate statement and the commissioner had to admit later that no trace of any AK-47 was found and that such a weapon might not have been used. But to make such a statement when the riots were raging was highly irresponsible.

The then governor of Maharashtra, C. Subramaniam, also gave a statement to the press before he resigned that "there was foreign hand" in organizing these riots and he even promised to give details at a later date (he has not done so far). This shows that even the Governor, who is considered quite secular, had either lost his poise or was misinformed.

Another theory floated about these riots in the second phase was that builders had organized these riots. Apart from the fact that the builders' organization denied any involvement through a press statement, no such evidence was found during our investigations, except in Malad where in the first phase too, a local builder was involved in all probability. However, to say that the builders' lobby was systematically involved in these riots is to fly in the face of facts. At least, we did not find any evidence to this effect. Anti-social elements were undoubtedly involved, either of their own or they were used by the vested interests.

It is also maintained that one of the causes was the in-fighting within the two factions of the Congress, i.e., one led by Sudhakar Rao Naik, Chief Minister and the other by Sharad Pawar, then central Defence Minister. According to this theory, the Sharad Pawar group was fuelling the riots to destabilize the Naik ministry. It was also being said that since Naik had got Pappu Kalani and Bhai Thakur – both Congress MLAs belonging to the Sharad Pawar group – arrested, and their unauthorized buildings demolished, their men, in order to teach the Chief Minister a lesson, systematically organized riots in the second phase. However, it is very difficult to substantiate this theory.

Among the reasons given by Chief Minister Naik for the riots, was that various lobbies and mafias with connections in high places had provoked the violence, specially because he had dared to take them on. Here he may have been hinting at those two controversial MLAs and their clout with Sharad Pawar. But he also mentioned the demolition activities undertaken by the Bombay Municipal Corporation in the minority-dominated areas and other such incidents. There may be some truth in the theory that some people were interested in destabilizing the Naik ministry. Earlier, riots were organized to destabilize the Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh chief ministers. The riots raged in Hyderabad and in Karnataka until the respective chief ministers were removed.

However, one thing is quite certain – the Naik ministry failed totally in controlling the situation. The situation became so grim that many prominent personalities from the city, including J.R.D. Tata and Nani Palkhivala demanded that partial emergency be declared and the city be handed over to the army. The city had never before witnessed communal violence of such magnitude. Even the May 1984 riots were nothing compared to what happened during the January riots. The whole city

went up in flames and very few areas remained free from curfew. The Muslims, rich or poor, spent their days in sheer terror. During riots poor people are generally considered soft targets and it is they who die and it is they whose properties are looted and burnt. But during these riots in Bombay, even the richest Muslims were not safe. Their flats were located in high-rise apartment buildings and threatened. Many had to pay protection money. Even their cars parked in the courtyard of these buildings were found out and in many cases set ablaze. Hundreds of shops belonging to Muslims were looted and set afire. About 300 bakeries, mostly belonging to Muslims from Uttar Pradesh, were burnt to ashes, with the result that there was a serious shortage of bread for many days in Bombay. Even factories and industries were not spared. It appeared as if it was a systematic attempt to destroy the Muslims economically, in this prime commercial city. Shops belonging to the Bohras and Khojas, the two most peaceful Muslim communities who hardly ever take part in any political controversy, were not spared. Hundreds of Bohras and Khojas lost everything. Many of them had to leave the city for other places.

Also, it was for the first time that people fled in such large numbers from the city. It is said that more than 3,50,000 people — both Hindus and Muslims — left the city at this time.⁴ Special trains had to be run for the purpose. Many may never return now. Non-Maharashtrian Hindus also left for fear of being attacked by the Shiv Sena. And some left because they were attacked by the Muslims.

Despite all this, Sudhakar Naik maintained that he had not failed in his duty. He said, "I have taken the maximum possible measures to bring the situation to normal. I have not failed in my responsibility and left no stone unturned to tackle this abnormal situation. There was no lapse on the part of the state administration. On the contrary it worked round the clock."⁵ He also added that he did not resign, owning moral responsibility for the violence because, "as the head of the state, I must tackle the situation firmly come what may and must not run away from the situation." How he tackled the situation is now history. In fact, he failed, and failed miserably. He was totally ineffective, perhaps helpless. He was not able to get the Bombay police to put down communal violence with determination. To the impartial observer it appeared as if the Sena chief, Bal Thackeray, was in command.

The police was totally communalized, with very few exceptions. There was overwhelming evidence that the police was siding with the Sena. The policemen even used filthy language to refer to the Muslim police officers in their wireless messages, which are always taped. Some messages were recorded in which the policemen on duty sent a message asking for the fire brigade to be made available, as the miscreants had set fire to some houses. The police officer in the police control room then inquired about the community of those whose houses were set ablaze and on being told that they were Muslims, the officer concerned is alleged to have said that should be left to die, and that if anyone came out alive, he was to be shot. The Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights filed a suit requesting the High Court to take possession of the cassettes on which the conversation has been recorded.

People from various areas like Behrampada in Bandra complained to us that Shiv Sena goondas had set fire to their houses by throwing petrol bombs and that when they came out to douse the fire, the police had fired upon them. Some people even alleged that the policemen were leading some miscreants. It was also alleged – though this is difficult to verify – that some policemen gave their uniforms to the Shiv Sainiks. This may or may not be true, but there is no doubt that the Bombay police was showing open sympathy with the Sena. Despite such overwhelming evidence, nothing was done to checkmate it. Commissioner Bapat never admitted failure on the part of his men. However, he paid for his negligence when he was removed from his post and transferred out. But even this action was taken too late, when the miscreants had done what they wanted, and that too unchallenged. The army was called but it had no orders to shoot. Only a police officer could give orders to shoot. Thus the army was totally dependent on the police and could not be as effective as it ought to have been. This can be exemplified by an incident at Behrampada.

The local Shiv Sena MLA, Madhukar Sarpotdar, was alleged to have played a role in attacks on Behrampada. He was found in possession of a revolver and gupti and the army arrested him. But the police released him after Maharashtrian women demonstrated outside the police station and Bal Thackeray said that the police had done the “right thing”. This clearly shows that the police was taking a very lenient view of the activities of Shiv Sainiks. Bal Thackeray was writing highly pro-

vocative editorials in *Saamna*, the Sena mouthpiece and yet no action was taken by the Naik administration against him. On the other hand, Mr. Naik phoned Mr. Thackeray, requesting him not to write such provocative editorials and articles. This also shows how weak the Naik administration was.

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao was equally ineffective. He did not stir out of Delhi when Bombay was aflame. When some film artistes who met him in Delhi requested him to go to Bombay he said he could do so only after the Makar Sankranti festival on 14 January. What could be expected of a Prime Minister who gave more importance to his religious beliefs than to the bloodshed in Bombay? When he finally visited Bombay, the riots were over. He came not to stop the riots but only to pay a formal visit. It was a short visit and he merely passed through riot-affected areas without so much as getting down from his car and wiping the tears of those whose near and dear ones were killed. The reason given by him for not coming out of his car was that the security officers did not allow him to do so. Just contrast this with the conduct of Jawaharlal Nehru (who was then Prime Minister of India), in the 1947 bloodbath. When Zakir Husain, who was then Vice-Chancellor of Jamia Milla was surrounded, along with his students, by miscreants, he phoned Nehru requesting him to send police help. Nehru himself rushed in a car to Jamia, got down and chased away the mob. In Bombay, as pointed out above, the riots had stopped by the time the Prime Minister visited, yet he could not get down from his car though many victims of the riot who had lost everything were waiting for hours to talk to him.

The Prime Minister was content to send Sharad Pawar to the city when the riots were raging in Bombay. Sharad Pawar appeared on television and made an appeal for peace, but it was hardly effective. Though the intensity of rioting decreased in the city, it spread to other areas in the suburbs. One cannot say whether Sharad Pawar tried really hard to stop the riots or not. Many people, as pointed out above, made allegations that the riots had been engineered to throw out Naik and it is also true that when riots were raging in Bombay, dissension was raging in the Congress. Even Sunil Dutt, a noted film artiste and Member of Parliament from a constituency in Bombay, tendered his resignation from Parliament to the Prime Minister, out of sheer disgust. In his statement

to the press after resigning, he said that many riot victims approached him but he found himself helpless. He heard their cries but could not do anything and so he resigned.

The internecine fight within the Congress in Maharashtra had assumed such serious proportions that the leading newspaper, *The Times of India* wrote an editorial on 15 January entitled "Tell More, Mr. Naik." It said, "In the eyes of growing number of people, a suspicion is fast turning into an appalling certainty: that the internecine warfare within the Congress is responsible to a large extent for the continuing trouble in Bombay. Some in fact go so far as to allege that the rivalry between the defence minister, Mr. Sharad Pawar, and the chief minister, Mr. Sudhakar Rao Naik, may be at the very root of those troubles. Mr. Naik himself appeared to hint as much when he all but threatened to expose elements that have engineered the disturbances. The chief minister argued that in substance various lobbies and mafias with connections in high places (read Mr. Sharad Pawar) had provoked the violence in Bombay because he had dared to take them on. If what Mr. Naik says is even partly true, then it is of the utmost importance that he should be asked to divulge forthwith the details of this diabolical act of vengeance against him."

The BJP leader, L.K. Advani, visited Bombay on 16 January. His first halt was at Jogeshwari where four members of a Hindu family were burnt alive by Muslim miscreants. He too attributed the communal violence to the "foreign hand", without of course substantiating it or specifying which country had a hand in inciting the riots. He visited mostly the Hindu areas though he did talk to some Muslim victims also. He also maintained that the riots in Bombay were intensified only after the incident at Radhabai chawl in Jogeshwari. However, he desisted from saying that the reaction was out of all proportion, as more than 600 persons were killed in retaliation.

What was worrying most was the cruelty with which many people were killed in the Bombay riots. Most of the bodies were beyond recognition as they were highly mutilated. Many persons were chopped off into pieces; in certain instances, even heads were severed from the bodies. In some cases, a person was stabbed and then set ablaze after sprinkling petrol while still alive, to make his death more painful and agonizing. A most shocking incident occurred in the KEM hospital.

The miscreants stabbed an injured person just outside the operation theatre before he was taken in for surgery in a critical condition. The miscreants thought he might survive if the operation was successful. In fact, it was a case of mistaken identity as the person concerned was a Hindu and the miscreants thought he was a Muslim on account of his beard.

Apart from the fact that miscreants could come right up to the operation theatre with arms, it shows the extent of dehumanization of the killers and insensitivity of the communalists to such brutal killings. It was not only the question of killing 'the other', it was also the question of dehumanization and desensitization, not only of the killers but also of the community to which they belong. Our survey also points out that there was, in general, acceptance of what was happening. There was no protest against it in any form. The sympathies of the middle class Maharashtrians were with the Shiv Sena and their killers. It was only the very conscious and committed people who protested or took out peace marches. Workers were also divided along communal lines. The trade unions could not intervene at all, and this included left trade unions too, as the workers were not with them. The workers were, by and large, sympathetic to the Sena. Thus the situation of the left trade unionists was pathetic. They themselves would have liked to effectively intervene but their workers were not with them. Sharad Rao, president of the Municipal Mazdoor Union, had to explain to his workers about his condemnation of the mahaartis and their adverse impact on the communal situation.

One must understand that in such communally surcharged situations, the emotional appeal of religion is far more powerful than that of workers' unity. It is also partly the result of lack of efforts on the part of trade union leaders to politically educate their workers. Trade union activities have been confined, by and large, to economic demands for higher wages, dearness allowance, bonus, etc. In some places the Shiv Sena successfully tried to prevent Muslim workers from rejoining their duties after the riots. It happened even in Mazgaon Docks, which is owned by the central government.

In the 1984 riots too, the Shiv Sainiks had tried to stop Muslim workers from resuming their duties, but not on such a scale. Moreover, this time it was not only restricted to the workers. They even tried to

prevent Muslim children from going to school. They threatened principals of schools into not letting the Muslim children come to their schools. Even Lijjat Papad – purely a women’s organization – tried to prevent Muslim women from coming to work. It is this wide-ranging communalization which poses a great danger to our national integrity. Hindu nationalism seems to be having greater appeal than the composite, secular nationalism. So far, our dominant cultural ethos had been pluralistic and respectful of other cultural traditions. Because of the sustained propaganda for Ramjanambhoomi for more than five years now, Hindu intolerance has grown and the pluralist tradition devalued. All Muslims are seen as children of Babar (*Babar ki santan*) and Islam as not only an alien religion but also aggressive, violent and fanatical. Composite nationalism is being replaced by the Hindu *rashtra*. Due to the powerful propaganda of the BJP–VHP–RSS the consensus on composite culture appears to be breaking down. The Sufi–Bhakti syncretism is giving way to the Hindu monolith. It is being assumed that the Hindu monolith is confronting the Islamic monolith, though neither is really monolithic. The politicians can benefit immensely if such artificial monoliths are created and a confrontationist attitude promoted. After all, religion has great emotional impact which cannot be undermined.

The BJP propaganda had a terrible impact on the minds of Hindus, particularly Maharashtrians. The Shiv Sena is much more crude in its propaganda and is able to influence the lower class Hindus. And it is this class of people who mostly participate in arson, loot and murder. No wonder then that the riots in Bombay were very widespread indeed. Almost the whole of Bombay was engulfed by it. Only the southern tip of Bombay was an exception. The areas most affected were Dongri, Bombay Central, Tulsiwadi (Tardeo), Girgaum, Jacob Circle, Byculla, Reay Road, Cotton Green, Wadala, Antop Hill, Mahim, Dharavi, Behrampada (Bandra East), Kherwadi, Nirmal Nagar, Vakola, Andheri East, Jogeshwari East, Goregaon, Malad (East and West), Malavni, Borivali, Dahisar, Ghatkopar, Asalfa Village, Vikhroli, Bhandup, Mulund, Pratiksha Nagar, etc.

Some journalists were specially targeted in these riots. Those Hindi, Marathi and Urdu papers who wrote against the BJP–Shiv Sena faced the wrath of the Sainiks. Two journalists belonging to *Mahanagar* were manhandled in their office and some Urdu journalists like Harun Rashid

just managed to escape when their houses were razed to the ground and everything looted. Journalists had never been so systematically attacked before. But it must be said to the credit of these journalists that they stood their ground and never gave in to such terror tactics.

The death toll in the rioting in the second phase was quite high. *The Times of India* sources place it at 557 on 22 January 1993. Official sources put the death toll at 458 only, as hospital sources were yet to report 99 more deaths to the coroner's court from where the police compiles its figures. According to police commissioner Bapat, out of the 458 killed, 288 were Muslims and 170 Hindus. 133 persons died in police firing (75 Muslims and 50 Hindus, eight unknown) 259 in mob violence (186 Muslims, 73 Hindus) and 66 in arson (39 Hindus and 27 Muslims). Of the remaining 99, it is difficult to say which community they belonged to, but it is very likely that a majority of them were Muslims.

However, the figure of 557 also seems to be an underestimate. The death toll in all probability will exceed 600, as many bodies are still being discovered from various places. Also, field investigations show that many families reported their men missing and are hoping against hope that they might be in jail or somewhere from where they will return one day. But these are mere hopes. They will probably never return.

Sources at the coroner's courts said that the number of stabbing cases in the January riots was far higher than what is indicated by the figures. Several victims were stabbed seriously and then burned or thrown into gutters. Their post-mortem reports would indicate that they died of asphyxiation or drowning, even though the stab injuries alone would have proved fatal. Interestingly, the number of victims of police firing, 133, is almost the same as that in the December riots. According to the police, 132 people died when they opened fire in December 1992. This does not bear out the criticism in some papers that the police was not opening fire in the second phase of the Bombay riots, due to heavy criticism of its indiscriminate firing during the December riots. The fact that more Muslims were killed in police firing during the second phase too, shows the partial behaviour of the police (since most of the mob attacks in January were led by the Shiv Sainiks).

The economic loss was also staggering, this time. It was not only due

to looting and burning of property, which was only one aspect of the losses suffered. It was more due to stoppage of production and movement of goods. Nearly 10,000 houses were demolished or burnt and more than 1,00,000 had to live in refugee camps for various periods of time. Many are still living in relief camps, two months after the event. The state government has sanctioned only Rs. 5,000 for those whose shops and homes were looted. It is a pittance. This pittance also has not been received by all, thanks to the lethargy of the bureaucracy. The values of homes lost range from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 10 lakhs. Amina Taj had a two-storeyed home and a rickshaw — both were burnt. One family in Jogeshwari lost Rs. 12,000 worth of sarees alone. Many people are unable to return to their homes even now, and their fears are far from imaginary. When they returned to get the *panchnamas* made, or just to survey their lost homes, they found their neighbours uncommunicative. In some cases, walls had been erected and boards put up, saying, "Minorities not wanted." Amina Taj saw the leader of the attackers sipping tea with the police at the local police station.

All of them want to sell their rooms and "live with members of our community, if possible", even if it means, as Shahabuddin of Pratiksha Nagar said, "living in third-class surroundings compared with my A-class area". Shahabuddin is not alone in his sentiments, and his feelings represent what many others also feel. There has been distress sale of properties on both sides, i.e., Muslims selling off properties in the Hindu areas and vice versa. People are willing to pay a premium of 15 to 20% over the already high prices, for houses in areas where their own community is in a majority, for their future safety and security. Thus, in a way, the communal divide is complete.

Many have already left Bombay, finding no alternative. This has also brought to our knowledge the interdependence of the two communities in certain areas of economic activity. Garment exports received a serious setback, as most of the tailors are Muslims. Exports worth crores of rupees have been affected, as the Muslim tailors have fled to their native places and one does not know whether they will return at all and if so, when. The same is true of many other industries, specially the ones on a small scale and with export orders.

Also, due to frequently imposed curfews, workers could not report to work, and in many cases, with the industries and business establish-

ments themselves being located in the curfew-bound areas, there was tremendous loss of production. Goods could not be moved from one place to another as truckers were not prepared to take the risk of any attack on their vehicles. Though it is difficult to estimate the total economic loss, a rough estimate puts it above rupees 10,000 crores. This is no insignificant loss for a poor country like India. It is also feared that many foreign investors may now shy away from investing in India.

Tata Consultancy Services drew up a tentative estimate of the total loss due to the January riots. According to this estimate, the loss of gross value of output of goods and services comes to Rs. 1,250 crores; the loss of trading business Rs. 1,000 crores; the loss of exports Rs. 2,000 crores; the loss of tax revenue for the government Rs. 150 crores; and loss of properties about Rs. 4,000 crores. Thus, according to this estimate, the total losses come to nearly Rs. 9,000 crores. Add to this the compensation that the government will have to pay to the riot victims and destruction of their properties and we arrive at a staggering sum.

Those who think that they are “teaching a lesson to Muslims” are doing no less disservice to the Indian economy as a whole and hence their claim of being ‘true patriots’ is thoroughly baseless. In fact, viewed objectively, their behaviour is anti-patriotic. Also, such prolonged lawlessness has brought disgrace to the fair name of our country. The interview which Bal Thackeray gave to *Time* magazine, “Kick out the Muslims”, is not only rash but portrays India and its government in a very poor light. We have been justly proud of India being the largest viable democracy in the entire Third World. We can hardly sustain such claims any more. What was allowed to happen was really disgraceful for the country. Both the central and the state governments are responsible for such a sad state of affairs. They have given an impression to the world that the minorities are not safe in India and that its constitutional provisions are no longer honoured.

Even now, the central and state governments have done nothing to inspire confidence among the minorities. At best, they are making run-of-the-mill statements. One can hardly be sure that such violence along communal lines will not be repeated in future. There are no plans to overhaul the police force and thoroughly reorient it in secular values. Also, many key persons who bear direct responsibility for planning and organizing the January riots have not been touched. And it is unlikely

that they will be prosecuted, let alone be punished. No steps are being contemplated to make communal propaganda a punishable offence. Whatever law exists, is hardly ever applied. The next elections can once again prove disastrous if the BJP fights the elections on the Ramjanambhoomi issue. As pointed out by some, a law is urgently needed to make communal or sectarian propaganda a serious criminal offence and a candidate indulging in such propaganda should automatically be disqualified from contesting elections.

Also, in order to prevent occurrence of violence on such a scale it is for the secular forces to start a mass contact programme and intensify it wherever started, as in West Bengal and Bihar. The BJP has been isolated among the political parties but not among the masses. It is, in fact, hoping to get a majority in Parliament in the next elections (though it is unlikely that it will get an absolute majority).

Muslims will also have to do some serious rethinking about their behaviour. Secularism cannot be saved from the BJP-VHP onslaught if Muslims too, do not reorient their behaviour. Their leaders have been simply reckless and have never acted with a sense of responsibility. Their aggressive movements on the Shah Bano judgement and the Babri masjid controversy has only harmed the cause of the minorities. Minority communalism is not the best way to fight majority communalism. Majority communalism can be challenged only by secular forces.

PART 4

Secularism and Communal Harmony in the Indian Context

Secularism — Yesterday and Today

The term 'secularism' is being subjected to a variety of interpretations today. In fact, it has become a bone of contention, with secular parties like the Janata Dal, CPI, CPM and the Congress having one interpretation and the BJP another. What is upheld as genuine secularism by the other parties is dubbed 'pseudo-secularism' by the BJP. What is worse, it is not only BJP supporters, but many others belonging to the middle class intelligentsia, who have come to feel that it is the BJP's brand of secularism which is genuine, that the minorities are being pampered by these parties, and that they are no more than their vote-banks. Naturally, this debate and political discourse has created confusion in many minds. It is, therefore, necessary to clarify the issues involved.

When the Indian National Congress was formed in 1885, the principal minority, the Muslims, considered it to be a Hindu body. The Indian National Congress, therefore, not only had to assuage the feelings of the minorities, but it chose three of its presidents in the early years from amongst the minorities – W.C. Bonnerji (a Christian), Badruddin Tyabji (a Muslim) and Pherozeshah Mehta (a Parsee). It tried to convince the minorities that the Congress was a secular body and did not belong to any one religious community. Though Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, the great Muslim reformer of the nineteenth century, continued to oppose the Congress, this was for reasons other than its secularism – his class loyalty lay with the British; also, a social reformer often seeks support from the political rulers. Badruddin Tyabji and others actively participated in its proceedings. Badruddin Tyabji, a legal luminary from Bombay, became its president.

For the Congress, this was not a mere strategem to attract minorities but also a matter of principle. The Western-educated Indian elite were greatly attracted towards the concept of secularism as they wanted to get away from superstitious religious practices and a sectarian approach to politics. Moreover, a modern society could not be run on feudal lines and had to adopt a democratic and secular polity. However, in practice, things were much more complex. Even the elites could not get away from religion and religious influences so easily. After all, they could not have severed all connections from the past in one go, whatever their intentions. Thus, there emerged different trends in secular thought even then.

Though there was no such controversy regarding 'genuine' and 'pseudo' secularism, there did exist different trends of thought. It would be interesting to examine these trends as they do have a bearing on the current debate. C.A. Bayly's *The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad, 1880-1920* throws interesting light on this. According to Bayly, there were two major nationalist groups in Allahabad in the 1910s and 1920s – the one associated with the 'secular' Motilal Nehru and the other with the 'Hindu' Madan Mohan Malviya. Bayly refers to the divisions which existed from the very beginning "between the secular, and non-communal catch-cries used in the Congress publicity or the official pronouncements, and the idiom adopted by their orators." The orators and freelance publicists often used emotive symbols like cow-protection which were likely to deepen sectarian feelings.

Bayly feels – and rightly so, perhaps – that nationalism in India found it tactically necessary to wear two faces – one was that of community concern and the other was a secular, nationalist concern rising above any community concern. In other words, we can say that for the early nationalists, it was tactically necessary to employ the 'dharmic idiom' with the 'modernist idiom'. Individual like Motilal Nehru were inclined more towards the modernist idiom, whereas others like Madan Mohan Malviya were disposed towards the dharmic idiom. The latter was, of course, derived from pre-colonial times and had strong community concern. "It is the coalescence of these two idioms and their divergence," says Ranajit Guha, "which determined the tensions and defined the character of the elements that went to make up the relationship of Dominance and Subordination in colonial India."¹

Many of the inconsistencies of nationalist discourse in India may be explained, perhaps in terms of the coming together and contrary pulls of these different idioms, says Gyanendra Pandey,² a noted modern historian.

The nationalists could not have avoided such ambiguities in view of the prevalent Indian realities. The masses did not understand any idiom other than the dharmic. The elites, on the other hand, were attracted towards secular nationalism. The Khilafat movement, often denounced today with the benefit of hindsight, was the product of such an ambiguous and complex political and social situation. Mahatma Gandhi wrote on 24 September 1921 that, “The brave (Ali) Brothers are staunch lovers of their country, *but they are Mussulmans first and everything else afterwards*. It must be so with every religiously-minded man.”³ Today we insist that every citizen must declare himself/herself an Indian first and then anything else. But the Mahatma said otherwise, although even he could not remain consistent, thanks to the complexity of the social and political situation. Just four months after the above statement, Gandhiji stated, on 26 January 1922, “Nationalism is greater than sectarianism. And in that sense we are Indians first and Hindus, Mussulmans, Parsis, Christians after.”⁴ Anyone can see there is a sharp contradiction between the two statements made within a span of four months and yet both the statements reflect the real situation.

It is thus very clear that what should concern us is not this or that concept of secularism, for that often reflects only our philosophical positions. What we must be concerned about is how to tackle a complex situation we are faced with. It often implies a creative application of ideas, both religious as well as secular. We do harm to ourselves by being dogmatic. In a vast and complex country like India, with a multiplicity of cultures, religions and languages, no single political concept can meet the challenges.

It should also be remembered that more often than not, we express, through our philosophical concepts, our own interests, rather than pure ideals. It is not surprising when certain Hindu elites mean one thing by ‘secularism’ and ‘patriotism’, and Muslim elites something quite different. Maulana Muhammad Ali had very aptly expressed it in February 1912 in his article, “The communal patriot”. He says that the “Hindu communal patriot” sprang into existence with ‘swaraj’ as his

war-cry and a full awareness of the importance of terms like 'India' and 'territorial nationality', which suited both his community's interests and his own privileged political and economic position. The "Muslim communal patriot" owed his origins to a very different set of circumstances. The "Muslim community" had lagged behind the "Hindu" in every respect, he observed. When it (Muslim community) made up its mind to accept the inevitable and move with the times, it found itself face to face with a community vastly superior to it, in number, in wealth, in education, in political organization and power. Thus, according to Muhammad Ali, the Muslim conservative was pushed, in self-defence, into a position of "communal patriotism".

What the Maulana says reflects a great deal of reality. Our country was divided, not so much because of a clash of religions, as because of a clash of interests. If the dispute about the two different concepts of secularism – 'genuine' and 'pseudo' – is to be understood today, it must again be understood not so much in terms of its 'genuineness' or 'pseudoness', as in terms of a clash of interests. The 'pseudoness' of secularism is defined by the BJP in terms like 'pampering Muslims' or treating them as 'vote-banks'. Both these terms indicate interests rather than any philosophical concept. The BJP maintains that secularism so far has meant neglecting the 'Hindu interests' and that it seeks to promote these interests. This, in fact, is the crux of the whole matter.

Before independence, the Muslim elite fought for its interests in the name of 'Islamic nationalism' and had the country divided. Now the Hindu elite is fighting for its own interests in the name of 'Hindu rashtra' and, wittingly or unwittingly, is pushing the country towards disintegration. The Muslim elite – or a dominating section of it – changed, since the late thirties and early forties, its political idiom from the secular to the communal and forced its own way of thinking on the Muslim masses. The Hindu elite today – or a dominating section of it – is employing the communal idiom most assertively, and forcing its own thinking on the Hindu masses. Both the elites have employed highly emotive religious symbolism for mobilizing the masses of their respective communities.

A community's concerns, expressed through communal identities, are not condemnable *per se*. This has happened all along, not only in

India, but in other democracies as well. Also, in a multi-religious society like India, a certain degree of competitiveness is also inevitable. However, it is difficult to keep this competitiveness under control and it creates formidable problems for the country. The urge for separate identities cannot be banished in a democratic country, but it should not be allowed to be manipulated by the elites. In a changing and developing society, the urge for religio-cultural identities must be understood in its psychological perspective, for urbanization creates a strong sense of alienation which needs to be compensated through an assertion of such identities.

Secularism in India should not mean a denial of expression of religious identities, but all efforts should be made to keep its political expression in check. Religious identities can fulfil very vital psychological and social needs, but can be politically highly destructive. What should worry us, therefore, is the political expression of these identities. But it is also important to understand what transforms a social and psychological need into a political need. The distribution, both of power and of economic resources, is highly uneven in our society. Those who monopolize resources, seek to retain their monopoly through mobilization of the masses of 'their' community and those who have been left out use the same sense of religious identity to claim an 'adequate share' of these resources by mobilizing masses of 'their' community. Thus a clash of interest results in a clash of identities.

As far as minorities are concerned, the Nehruvian model of secularism gave them not only a sense of security but also an assurance of a just share in the political power and economic resources of the country. While the minorities – principally, the Muslims and the Sikhs – are asserting their rights (through assertion of their respective identities, of course), the BJP, representing the interests of a powerful section of Hindu elites, is mobilizing the Hindu masses through assertion of their Hindu identity as expressed through the powerful religious symbol of Ramjanambhoomi. The Muslims had similarly expressed their identity quite aggressively through the Shah Bano movement in 1986–87. The Shah Bano movement was, perhaps, the most organized and most aggressive expression of Muslim identity after partition. Maulana Abul Hasan Nadvi, the noted theologian, described this

movement as the largest after the Khilafat movement in the early twenties.

The Shah Bano movement evoked a strong reaction among the Hindus and strengthened the hands of Hindu communalists. Confrontation and competition can prove much more dangerous to minorities than to the majority. In the case of Muslims, it is even more so, for historical reasons. The Muslims were not only rulers in the past, they are also seen as 'guilty' of partitioning the country in 1947. It would be in the interests of Muslims to avoid such confrontations in future. However, that does not mean that they should surrender their political rights and accept an inferior status in any way.

But it is highly important to devise suitable ways to live in peace and harmony without giving up their equal status. It is an act of tightrope walking, but there is no escape from this. The Muslim intelligentsia should also understand that the Muslim leaders, in order to promote their own political interests, often become overzealous, especially on sensitive religious issues, and endanger the security and safety of the Muslim masses by provoking strong reaction among the Hindus.

The Hindu intelligentsia should also realize that the BJP is manipulating the Hindu identity (it has tried to create a homogeneous Hindu identity in the last few years which is more of a reactive kind, i.e., in Centre and it has come near it through manipulation of the Hindu identity-political interests. By so doing it has pushed the country on the precipice of another division. The BJP has set its sight on power at the reaction to the homogeneity of Muslim identity) in order to serve its own party. That is why it strongly attacks the Nehruvian model of secularism around which a broad consensus existed in the country for all these years. The Nehruvian model is quite reassuring to the minorities and must be protected and promoted if the integrity of the country is to be preserved.

The debate about 'genuine' and 'pseudo' secularism has been raised by the BJP to promote the political interests of a section of the Hindu elite. This controversy is indicative of threats to the interests of this elite. It is a last-ditch attempt on the part of this elite to retain its hold over the monopoly of political power and economic resources in the country. Naturally, this debate has shaken the confidence of the

minorities – confidence which can be restored only by re-emphasizing the Nehruvian model of secularism and ensuring a fair and just distribution of resources to all.

On Secularism and Pseudo-secularism

There has been an ongoing debate in our country on the meaning and implications of secularism. Some people argue that the meaning of the term should be determined on the basis of its dictionary meaning and its Western connotation, whereas others argue that we must apply the concept of secularism to the Indian context and thereby interpret it to mean *sarva dharma samabhava*. To this debate the Bharatiya Janata Party–Vishwa Hindu Parishad have added their own concept of ‘positive secularism’ and they denounce the Western or Nehruvian secularism as ‘pseudo-secularism’. This debate, obviously on account of its political overtones, has gone beyond mere academic confines and has assumed serious political dimensions. There is need for a more dispassionate and objective debate.

In the West, the concept of secularism evolved during the course of the struggle between the Church and the State for political supremacy. The rulers won and asserted their hegemony over theological supremacy. The rulers were called secular rulers, and secularism – now having assumed the form of an ideology – came to mean separation of the church from political rule.

Secularism means separation of politics from the hegemony of religion. In a truly secular state, religion will not influence, let alone dictate, the sphere of politics. Both the spheres will remain separate and enjoy perfect autonomy. In India, before the advent of British rule, there existed a holistic view of life which did not make a sharp distinction between religion and politics. Unlike Europe, there did not emerge any conflict between religious authorities and political rulers. There

was, in fact, a harmony of sorts, due to our integrated view of life. Dharma did not exercise absolute power over the rulers, nor did the rulers seek to subdue dharma to establish hegemony over it.

This applied more or less to Muslim rule too. Neither were the *ulama* thought to be supreme during the Muslim rule in India, nor could the ruler claim unchallenged supremacy over the *ulama*. They mutually coexisted, either in what we can call 'easy harmony' or in 'tense harmony'. The rulers pretended to accommodate *shariah* to a limited extent and the *ulama* often overlooked un-Islamic conduct of the ruler. There are very few instances of sharp conflict or unresolvable tension between the *ulama* and the rulers in the history of Muslim dynasties in India.

With the advent of British rule there was a qualitative shift in our socio-political structure. Colonial rule, though neither a monarchy nor a democracy, created the potential for free democratic rule in future. It was with this hope that the Indian National Congress was formed, although its immediate goal was not complete independence right away. However, India was a multi-cultural and multi-religious society and there was no option for the Congress but to assure all religious groups that their religious autonomy would not be tampered with and that they could join the Congress with an easy conscience. It was this assurance which enabled Muslims and Christians and Parsees to join the Congress without fear of Hindu hegemony.

It was in this sense that the Congress had adopted the concept of secularism. It was a practical strategy more than an ideology. In essence, it meant equal protection for all religions and an assurance to the minorities that Hinduism would not prevail over other religions and that all religions would enjoy equal rights, whatever the number of their followers. Even the Nehruvian model of secularism, though essentially Western in its orientation, accepted this. When questioned about secularism by some Indian students in Oxford in the mid-fifties, Nehru replied that in the Indian context it implied equal protection by the state to all religions.¹

The Muslims, led by the *ulama*, joined the freedom struggle, during the Khilafat movement, essentially on this assurance by the Congress. It is a well-known fact that the organization of Muslim theologians, the Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind, pledged its support to the Congress on this

understanding of secularism and always remained its faithful ally and vehemently opposed the creation of Pakistan on the basis of religion. Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, then president of the Jamiat-ul-Ulama-i-Hind, maintained that *millat* was international Islamic community and *qaum* was territorial nationality and the two should not be mixed up. He also quoted the holy Quran to show that Muslims and non-Muslims shared the same territory and hence belonged to the same nation. There was, therefore, no justification for the creation of a separate homeland for Muslims when their religion enjoyed equal protection in India and Muslims were guaranteed the right to practise their religion.

Thus, secularism in the above sense became an integral part of the Indian polity and was accepted by the religious majority as well as by the minorities. The Nehruvian model also accommodated this view, as pointed out above, and did not deviate from it. Secularism had a definite historical meaning and specific implications in our situation. It did not evolve in our society as it did in Western society, nor has it even been taken in that sense in our political context. Also, there is no need to change this connotation of secularism today.

The BJP maintains that our present secularism is pseudo-secularism as it amounts to 'appeasement' of minorities. It would be clear that the Congress had given an assurance to all the minorities, particularly to the Muslims, that their religion and religious laws would not be changed and it was on this assurance – as is clear from correspondence between Badruddin Tyabji and Sir Syed on the one hand, and between Tyabji and Hume on the other – that Muslims were induced to join that premier political organization. The very notion of composite nationalism in the Indian context implies that all religions should be guaranteed equal protection and every religious community should be allowed to flower according to its own genius. If this is dubbed as 'appeasement' of minorities, it would create unresolvable conflict, which might result in the fragmentation of our society.

It is also to be understood that a true democratic society would never mean dictatorship of the majority. Even the political minority cannot be coerced into accepting the majority view. A democracy guarantees that the political minority shall have every right to maintain its own position. This applies much more to religious minorities. Religious

minorities cannot be dictated to by those belonging to the religious majority. Religious minorities should be permitted, in a true democratic spirit, to preserve their own religio-cultural genius and their religious identity. It is only then that they can have a sense of being equal partners in a democratic enterprise. In a real democratic society even a person who is in a minority of one has the right to exist with dignity with his/her own convictions – this is even more true for a minority religious or cultural community.

Here one must also take into account the tensions generated between tradition and modernity by the process of change. These tensions are felt in all religious or religio-cultural communities, whether of the majority or the minority. Some communities may respond creatively to these tensions while others may not, or may do so very slowly and even imperceptibly. It might also result in a confrontation between modernists and traditionalists. In some communities, in view of greater advancement and material prosperity, there may be a sizeable section advocating modernization while in some communities, on account of their educational and material backwardness, this section may be weaker. There is no doubt that the Muslims belong to the latter category.

A government in a democratic society has to be careful while ushering in change. One should also remember that the deepening of the process of democratization results in sharpening the sense of distinct identity among different religious groups. This makes the situation further explosive. In such a delicate situation, perceptions become so heightened that even an attempt at persuasion on the part of the government might be interpreted by the community as 'coercion'. Also, orthodox leaders, especially in minority communities, exploit such a situation to the hilt.

Similarly, the conservative leadership among the majority community is ever ready to take political advantage and charge the government with favouring minorities and practising, as the BJP says, 'pseudo-secularism'. The ruling party, on the other hand, may not only be required to balance a delicate situation, but may have political compulsions of its own. Democracy is nothing if not a game of votes. It may reassure minorities that the government does not intend to bring any change against the will of the community. Such reassurances are cited as proof

of 'appeasement' of minorities by the BJP.

We should also understand that political parties and politicians are bound to play these games for their own purposes. But what is needed is effective intervention by the progressive intelligentsia in this debate. Their primary concern should be to enrich and strengthen secularism and democracy and their creative application to our society. Secularism should neither be reduced to 'pseudo-secularism' as the BJP has sought to do, nor should it be reduced to opportunism and a subtle form of communalism, as some ruling parties have done. Secularism is an effective antidote to communalism in our context and its strength will be the weakness of communalism. Majority communalism is, of course, more aggressive, but one should not try to minimize the dangers of minority communalism either. It should also be remembered that majority communalism feeds on minority communalism and vice versa. Thus, both strengthen each other.

Secularism is not only to be strengthened politically by fighting communalism, but also socially by advocating progressive social change in every religious community. I certainly do not sing paeans to what I prefer to call 'Westernised modernization' but I do feel that a certain openness to meaningful changes is a must. Traditional laws are certainly unfair to women and other oppressed sections of society, and they must yield to new laws which ensure equity and justice in the modern sense. Personal laws must be reformed and they must become more responsive to contemporary conditions. Religious authoritarianism should give way to creative applications of religious values and conservatism should be replaced by creative openness.

Secularism in the Indian context should also imply respect for pluralism and non-coercive, voluntary recourse to change. One should be extremely wary of BJP slogans like 'one nation, one people and one culture'. Respect for diversity not only embodies the democratic spirit, it is the real guarantee of unity. We should value democratic, not fascistic, unity. No democratic society can downgrade diversity and pluralism in the name of unity. Democracy and secularism are necessary as well as sufficient conditions for the unity and integrity of India.

Islam and Hinduism in Indian History – Conflict or Confluence?

History remains a source of controversy in many respects among succeeding generations. Much depends on who interprets it and what motivates the interpreter. History by itself or historical facts *per se*, though made much of, do not make much sense. This might come as a startling statement for many but historians with insight would readily agree there is much truth in it. Let us examine this in detail.

Historians know that facts do not speak by themselves; rather, they are made to speak. E. H. Carr¹ talks of the “cult of facts” and goes on to say: “The facts are available to the historian in documents, inscriptions and so on, like fish on the fishmonger’s slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him.”² He also observes in the same vein, “It used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them. It is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context. It was, I think, one of Pirandello’s characters who said that a fact is like a sock — it won’t stand up till you’ve put something in it.”³

Facts have their own significance; there is no attempt to run them down. However, facts as recorded in history in cold letters, written or printed, do not reveal the whole truth. Perhaps the truth may never be known. Most of us do not know the whole truth even behind contemporary events, however significant they might be. Let us take a communal riot, for example. Every newspaper carries its own version. A reader gets more confused than enlightened if he reads, say, four different newspapers — one in English, one in Hindi, one in Urdu and one in Malayalam. The crucial aspects of a riot — who started it, why, and

what was the triggering event — are endlessly debated and different conclusions derived. Was the triggering event the shouting of slogans against a community or was it stone-throwing in retaliation on a procession, we are never sure. Why is a riot engineered? Some people blame a religious community, some politicians, others anti-social elements and some socio-economic conditions. All these uncertainties remain, despite thorough investigations and in-depth analyses, in respect of contemporary events.

And yet, when it comes to distant historical events, say, the demolition of a temple or a mosque, imposing of *jizya* or a tax, we speak with such certainty and assertiveness as if it not only happened before our very eyes, but with full knowledge of all background events and motives. Selected events mixed with ideological fervour, are often passed on as sacred facts to the lay public, causing a great many problems in the contemporary world. One must, therefore, adopt a very cautious approach to history. It is neither sacred nor sacrilegious, neither an unmixed blessing, nor a sheer curse. It is neither a tale of woe and bloody conflict nor a story of harmony and confluence of cultures. Like our contemporary world, it has something of everything. A perceptive historian would see a historical event in all its complexity.

The demolition of a temple or a mosque may be an incontrovertible historical fact. But the mere fact of demolition does not tell us the whole story. Places of worship have not always been demolished on account of religious fervour, though the same may not always have been absent. It may have been motivated by more earthly reasons, like lust for plunder, humiliation of a ruler in whose domain the place of worship happens to be located, punishing those who have converted it into a centre of conspiracy, to meet a shortage of resources, etc. A cautious historian would keep various possibilities in mind while thoroughly examining the event and draw some probable conclusion without asserting anything as a certainty. Also, he would see the event in various contexts: religious, social, economic and political.

Let us consider some examples. King Harsha of Kashmir (AD 1089–1101; not to be confused with the seventh century emperor Harsha) “systematically melted down all metal images throughout the length and breadth of his kingdom, with just four exceptions,” says Kosambi. He also tells us: “The work was carried out under a special

minister for uprooting gods (*devotpatana-nayaka*). Each image was publicly defiled by leprous beggars who voided urine and excrement upon it before dragging it through the streets to the foundry. Not the slightest theological excuse was offered. The king did have a Muslim bodyguard of mercenaries, but went out of his way to offend them by eating pork."⁴

It is obvious that king Harsha was not motivated by any religious fervour to defile images. He was a man of culture and even supported Brahmins within reason and honoured a Buddhist preceptor whose pleading, in fact, rescued the four images, two of the Buddha. His motive in defiling the images, according to Kosambi, was economic. "The metal was needed," Kosambi maintains, "to finance the king's desperate and expensive wars against rebellious Damara barons."⁵

Similarly, if we study the socio-economic and political context of Aurangzeb's time we would see that his imposition of *jizya* too, was not motivated merely by his religious fervour which undoubtedly he did not lack. The depletion of resources in his costly Deccan wars was no less a contributory factor. But again, for political compulsions, his son Bahadur Shah had entered into a secret treaty with the Rana of Mewar in 1681, agreeing to abolish the *jizya* and to grant other favours to the Rajputs in return for military support whenever he should enter into a contest for the throne with his brothers Azam and Akbar.

It is very unfortunate that for political reasons the medieval history of India has been oversimplified as an arena of unrelieved conflict between Hindus and Muslims. The ideologues on both sides did their best to fit history into their own ideological mould, blatantly ignoring all other factors. As pointed out above, a cautious and honest historian has to discover all possible factors behind a historical event in order to fully comprehend it. How an ideologue perceives something and how a ruler behaves makes an interesting contrast. This contrast can be seen in all its sharpness in a dialogue between Allauddin Khalji and Qadi Mughith.

When Allauddin inquired from Mughith about the *sharia* (Islamic juristic) position of Hindus, the Qadi unhesitatingly replied: According to the *sharia* a kharaj paying Hindu is one who when the *suhassil* (tax collector) demands silver of him, should present gold respectfully and in all humility. If the *suhassil* spits in his mouth, he should open it without

any sign of contempt and in this condition too he should serve the collector to the best of his capacity... (The meaning of spitting in the mouth is that the *zinni* (the protected, i.e., the Hindu) should show utmost servility and that the religion of Islam be held aloft and the false religion be humiliated.)

Hearing the speech of the Qadi, Allauddin laughed and said: O Mughith, you are an *alim* (a theologian) but you have no experience. Though I am illiterate I have experience. You should understand that this way a Hindu will never submit to a Muslim unless he is deprived of all his possessions... I enforce whatever I find in the interest of people. People remain indifferent and do not obey my orders. I do not know whether they are right (according to the *sharia*) or not. Whatever I find in the interest of the country I decree...⁷

One can very well see the difference in perception as well as approach between the two. The ideologue has his own theory and a ruler his pragmatic compulsions. It is not, therefore, surprising, if they cannot appreciate each other. However, historians with a communal approach often fail to appreciate these compulsions or worse still, deliberately ignore them and draw oversimplified or mischievous conclusions. If the Qadi Mughith is quoted, his statement would make horrifying reading and could become a powerful instrument in straining relations between the two communities. However, apart from the fact that theologians like him hardly influenced political policies, it will also have to be seen what motivated the Qadi in his rabid anti-Hindu pronouncements — love of his own religion, lack of understanding of empirical reality, contempt for the natives (which in the case of Dia al-Din Barani also included native converts of lowly origin to Islam), or competition with other court theologians. Any one of these or a combination of several of these factors might account for what theologians like the Qadi say. It would be naive as well as dangerous to accept such statements at their face value.

Also, there is the question of conversion to Islam. This problem has also been frequently exploited by the communalists from either side of the religious divide. This problem too, needless to say, has often been oversimplified and conversions often blamed on religious coercion. It is hardly appreciated that religious coercion was but one factor among many and played a relatively minor part. Political motivation, social

situation and preaching by Sufi saints also played a significant role.

Sayyid Muhammad Husayni bin Jafar Makki, a widely travelled saint of the fifteenth century better explains the reasons and circumstances of conversion to Islam in India. In his compilation, *Bahr al-Maani Makki*, who was a disciple of Shaikh Nasir al-Din Chiragh-i Dihli, explains that the conversions to Islam did not lead to an elevation of the soul, as the converts recited the *Kalima* only to get more merit in this world. He then goes on to explain various reasons for conversion: one was fear of death and enslavement (coercion); another one was preaching by saints; and the third one, Makki says, was the bigotry of the ancestral religion, i.e., the social situation of untouchables and backward castes. They found Islam far more democratic and respectful of human dignity (although in medieval feudal society this also proved to be rather illusory, as social discrimination could not be done away with, in practice).

Jizya has been thought to be another cause of conversion. Noted historian, Irfan Habib, has shown that it was not by any means a light tax. Citing an example from a Punjab village, he shows that out of 280 males in a village, 185 were held assessable and of these 137 paid the minimum rate of Rs. 3, annas 2, per annum which at that time would have meant a month's wages for an unskilled city worker. Thus it was a regressive tax and hit the poorest hardest.⁹

However, historian A.J. Syed rightly points out since *jizya* was an important source of revenue it discouraged the state from advocating conversion to Islam. *Jizya* seems to have been systematically applied during Aurangzeb's reign (for reasons stated earlier), but one can hardly point out instances of mass conversion in this period. Syed says, "Conversion would mean loss of revenue to the state which was always in need of more and more money. I wonder how genuinely the state would encourage conversions. A tax so burdensome specially for the poor could be a great inducement for change of religion but the evidences of conversion do not support this presumption".¹⁰

A historian ought to see a ruler or his reign in the total social context. Conclusions are likely to be distorted if a historical period is seen in the abstract, or torn from the socio-political context. Undoubtedly, personality has its own significance and must be given the credit due to it. However, failure or success of the ruler's personality also has to be

seen in proper context. It was no sheer accident of history that Akbar was a great liberal; the reign of Aurangzeb must be seen in its social context. Akbar, it should also be admitted, eminently succeeded because he chose a liberal cause at a time when the Mughal empire needed the support of Rajputs and Hindus for its further consolidation. Moreover, it was a period of prosperity and the empire did not face any great crisis. Liberalism thrives only in such social circumstances. Akbar would have faced difficulty, if not severe problems, had he chosen to follow a bigoted cause. His social milieu could not have admitted of such a policy.

One must remember that apart from the ruler's personal trait, liberalism and fanaticism are also functions of the social and economic condition. A severely crisis-ridden society would need a sharper, firmer and what would appear to those outside the system, a more fanatical approach. Seen from this angle, like Akbar's liberalism, Aurangzeb's bigotry also had a social role to play. Unlike the period of Akbar's rule, Aurangzeb faced a severe economic crisis because of the long wars he fought. The empire, though apparently expanding, was beginning to lose its inner vitality. Aurangzeb was personally orthodox and put his orthodoxy to political use. In the event of crises, his options, too, narrowed down. His ancestor Babar, when faced with imminent defeat, had to take a vow not to drink, to induce his Muslim army to fight with greater determination. Aurangzeb, faced with political crises, had to resort to Islamic orthodoxy, to win greater support from his Muslim nobles. Thus he came to be greatly lauded by the orthodox Muslims and was held to be a model Muslim ruler. Aurangzeb may have tried to avert the crisis in his own way but in a pluralist society like that of India, with its own inter-religious tensions, he cannot become a political ideal.

Historian Percival Spear has given an interesting characterization of Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb "lacked the magnetism of his father and great grandfather but inspired an awe and even terror of his own. In his private life he was simple and austere in striking contrast to the rest of the great Mughals. In religion he was an orthodox Sunni Muslim who thought of himself as a model Muslim ruler. He differed from Akbar in consciously tolerating Hindus rather than treating them as equals, but his supposed intolerance is little more than a hostile legend based on isolated acts such as the erection of a mosque on a temple site in Benares." ¹¹

Here Spear makes an interesting point. "He differed from Akbar in consciously tolerating Hindus rather than treating them as equals..." Aurangzeb, despite his medieval Islamic orthodoxy, could not have followed the policy of intolerance towards Hindus. In fact, no ruler, howsoever bigoted, can survive in a religiously pluralistic society, by following a policy of intolerance towards one or the other religion. The real choice in such a society is not between tolerance and intolerance, but between tolerance and equal respect. For Aurangzeb, tolerance was a compulsion and respect a choice. His was a situational compulsion, as pointed out above. The situational compulsion was also such that, despite his orthodoxy, he had to marry a Hindu wife to ensure Rajput loyalty. He could not deviate from this course laid down by his great ancestors.

Aurangzeb did demolish temples, but the real motives for this have to be properly assessed. It seems to be an act of political rather than religious intolerance. Some of his *farmans* still exist, and produced by temple keepers at Varanasi and elsewhere, make the charge of intolerance appear untenable. One such *farman*, quoted by historian Jnan Chandra, makes interesting reading. The *farman* was issued on a complaint lodged by a Brahmin of Benaras. The *farman* issued on 15 Jamada I, 1065 AH (10 March 1659) reads as under:

"Let Abul Hassan worthy of favour and countenance trust to our royal bounty, and let him know that since in accordance with innate kindness of disposition and natural benevolence, the whole of our untiring energy and all our upright intentions are engaged in promoting the public welfare and bettering the conditions of all classes, high and low. In accordance with our holy law, we have decided that the ancient temples shall not be destroyed but new ones shall not be built.

In these days of our justice, information has reached our noble and most holy court that certain persons interfere and harass the Hindu residents of the town of Benares and its neighbourhood; and the Brahmin keepers of the temples, in whose charge these ancient temples are; and that they further desire to remove these Brahmins from their ancient offices, and this intimidation of theirs causes distress to that community.

Therefore our royal command is that, after arrival of this lustrious order, you should direct that in future, no person shall in unlawful way interfere or disturb the Brahmins and other Hindu residents at these places, so that they may as before, remain in their occupation and continue with peace of mind to offer prayers for the continuance of our God-gifted empire, so that it may last for ever. Treat this order as urgent." ¹²

Jnan Chandra has quoted several such *farmans* of Aurangzeb which go to show that he was not a purposeless or reckless demolisher of temples. Some historians with their own biases have rushed to such conclusions based on some events, without thoroughly probing into the purpose behind the demolitions.

II

History is not just an account of rulers. It must be studied at several levels. Common people do play an important role, so also do the community of thinkers, philosophers, litterateurs, poets and saints. At this level, too, history is no less rich and complex. One may discover more harmony and confluence of ideas at this level. The conflict of ideas may also be there, but this conflict enriches more than it destroys, whereas conflict of rulers destroys more than it enriches.

No one can deny the fact that the conflict and confluence of ideas immensely enriched our culture, art and architecture, no less than theological thought. Guru Nanak and Kabir were products of this confluence of theological thought. Both imbibed generously from Hinduism as well as Islam. Both deried theological exclusiveness and hypocritical ritualism. They were concerned with the essence of religion and not with the outward appearances, and found no area of conflict between the two major religions of their time.

The Sufi saints had their own contribution to make in bringing the two great religions and religious ideas together. Many Indian Sufi saints were votaries of Mahiyuddin Ibn Arabi's doctrine of *wahdat al-wajud* (literally, unity of being) which had far-reaching implications in doing away with man-made barriers of ritualistic religions. If everything, including human beings, is a manifestation of God and His Being, there can be no rationale for condemning the followers of this or that religio-

It is true that some theologians like Sirhindi vigorously opposed this doctrine and pronounced their own doctrine of *wahdat al-shuhud* (unity of perception). Nevertheless, a sizeable section of Sufis did follow Ibn Arabi's revolutionary doctrine and brought about a closer relationship between the followers of the two religions in India.

It is true that the Sufis did not promote rationalism. Their pronouncements and rituals often resulted in dissemination of superstitions, but that is a different story. What we are looking for here is a closer relationship or fusion between Hindus and Muslims. One cannot but admire the role of the Sufis who believed in the doctrine of Ibn Arabi (*wahdat al-wajud*) in this respect. What Mirza Ghalib said in 19th century India, "When communities dissolved, they became parts of faith (*iman*)," was a reflection of this inherited doctrine.

It is this doctrine which assumes the form of *sulh-i kul* (absolute peace) in Abul Fazl's thought system. The celebrated Iranian poet Hafiz, had put it in very simple words: "*ba Musalman Allah Allah ba Bārehman Ram Ram*" (Say Allah Allah to Muslims and Ram Ram to Brahmins). Abul Fazl was Akbar's theoretician as well as conscience-keeper and the emperor owed much to Abul Fazl and his doctrine of *sulh-i kul*. It is undoubtedly a medieval form of liberal (though not rational) humanism and came closest to our modern-day thought of secular-humanism.

Many Sufis adopted local Hindu idioms and attempted creative assimilation of Islam with Hinduism. Some Ismaili Agakhani *dais* (summoners to the faith) described the Prophet Muhammad as an avatar of Brahma and Ali as the avatar of Vishnu, or Ali as an incarnation of Ram and Muhammad as that of Veda Vyasa. Similarly, a Dawoodi Bohra poet, Sahiyedi Sadiq Ali who is greatly revered, by the Bohras, borrows the parables of the Panchatantra in his *Hasihat* (Exhortation) and describes Imam *al-waqt* (Imam of the period) as *satguru* (true guide).

As a result of this confluence of Islamic and Hindu thought, some syncretic religious movements also came into existence, the most interesting of which is Pranami Panth of Gujarat. The followers of this movement are estimated to be around half a million, and are found in Punjab, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and even in Nepal, besides Gujarat. Their temple is known as dham. According to the Pranamis, Krishna and the Prophet Muhammad are one. First Krishna

appeared in India and then the Prophet in Arabia. One Deochandji Maharaj, founder of the sect, started it in Amarkot in the tenth century.

Pran Nathji from Jamnagar in Gujarat, became a disciple of Deochandji and wrote a book called *Qalzum Surup* which is considered sacred scripture by the Pranamis. Their dham have a copy of this book kept on a pedestal and the Pranamis bow to it and perform arti. They have other books as well, written in honour of the Prophet, whom they revere highly. The rulers of Bundelkhand had adopted this creed. Chatrasal, a ruler of this region, had adopted Pranami Panth and had fought with Aurangzeb on the question of religion. He is buried at Mahuba. *Qulzum Surup* has many verses in praise of Muhammad.

It is interesting to note that the followers of Pranami Panth apply *tilak* (vermilion) on their forehead, wear the sacred thread and grow a *choti* (tuft of hair). But they denounce idol worship. They believe in one God. Lord Krishna and Muhammad are considered to be His Prophets, and Deochandji and Pran Nathji are revered as founder-saints. They show respect to the rightly guided caliphs who succeeded the Prophet, but accord greater reverence to Ali, whom Shia Muslims hold as the first legitimate successor to the Prophet.

Dara Shikoh, whom emperor Shahjahan favoured as his successor, was a great believer in the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*. He translated some of the Hindu scriptures into Persian with the help of eminent Sanskrit scholars from Benares. He wrote a book, *Majam al-Bahrayn* (Meeting of Two Oceans) in which he tries to synthesize the two great religions, Islam and Hinduism. He rejects artificial barriers between faiths. Says he in one of his verses: "God emancipated me from Kufr and Islam and graced me with honour; let me disappear in your own Being. Keep me aloof from the chosen as well as the common people." In one of his *rubais* (quadrants), he says that the waves, the drops, bubbles, are different forms of the same water. The reality is the ocean. Similarly, there are different names for different creeds, different races, but they are all parts of the same reality, namely the one Being which is linked with the ocean. One may use different names to describe the truth but they are all different names of God.

Apart from the Sufis, the poets, litterateurs and writers brought about a confluence of thoughts and enriched what can be described as

composite culture. Scholars like Al-Beruni made a rich contribution to this process of assimilation. Al-Beruni not only grasped the essence of Hindu philosophy, but also learned the Mahabharata thoroughly. He had great admiration for Hindu thought and philosophy. All this has been recorded in his book on India, *Kitab al-Hind*. He had accompanied Mahmud Ghaznavi. While Mahmud demolished and looted the temple of Somnath, Al-Beruni busied himself in collecting the treasures of Hindu philosophy. Unfortunately, much is talked about the desecration of the Somnath temples in our history textbooks, but hardly anything is mentioned about Al-Beruni and his work on India.

Amir Khusro was another noted personality worth mentioning here. A celebrated poet and a man of versatile talents, he was a great admirer of India and enriched its culture immensely. His contributions to Indian culture can never be forgotten. He was a poet, historian and musician, who invented musical instruments. He was proud of being Indian and compares India with paradise and feels it would be difficult to find its match in the world. He also mentions its fauna and flora in this connection.

One can mention many such examples. What is important to stress here is that it was not all conflict between the two great religious communities. A meeting ground did exist, both on the religious as well as the intellectual and cultural planes, but these aspects got de-emphasized. Our contemporary political conflict got projected in the past and we began to look at history in the light of this conflict. After all, we read history in the light of our own contemporary interests.

The Hindu–Muslim Problem – A Co-operative Approach

It is banal to state that even after so many years of independence a solution to the Hindu–Muslim problem is as far away as it ever was. If anything, the problem has worsened. There are many reasons for this, and they pertain to the political, the socio-economic, as well as the religious spheres. Regrettably, political processes are becoming more communalized in our country. Socio-economic constraints and the slow rate of development intensify rivalry between different caste and community groups. No wonder, then, that communal and caste problems are becoming more intractable.

Both politicians and competitors for economic resources and jobs, invoke religion for their respective ends. Thus, it appears as if religion is the main culprit and the whole fight is religious. In fact, this is not the case. However, since this is the general perception – and in this context it is perception which matters, not reality – we must deal with the religious aspect as well as all the others, so as to create a spirit of co-operation between the two major religious communities of India, Hindus and Muslims. Hence, in this paper we shall deal mainly with the religious aspect of the problem, especially as it relates to Islam. We wish here to project the Islamic viewpoint on the communal conflict.

II

Islam has been greatly misunderstood, thanks to bigotry and fanaticism on both sides. It is thought to be intolerant of other religions, especially of Hinduism, and is also projected as aggressively expansionist. Sociologically and psychologically speaking, when we confront an idea or a system of ideas in a conflict situation, our view becomes prejudiced.

At the political level, Islam and Hinduism have confronted each other in conflicting situations, each trying to steal a political march on the other. Hence the political elite from both communities have developed a highly prejudiced view of each other's religion and also of each other (although there have been instances of political collaboration between sections of the two elites). At the level of the masses, on the other hand, Sufi and folk Islam have become popular and evoked no animosity. We shall deal with this separately.

First, we shall examine some of the Islamic teachings to see whether Islam encourages pluralism in matters of religion or not, so as to judge correctly its potential for peaceful coexistence with other religions. The Quran states emphatically, "For every one of you we appointed a law and a way. And if Allah had pleased He would have made you a single people, but that He might try you in what He gave you, So vie one with another in virtuous deeds" (Q. 5:48). This verse unambiguously encourages pluralism.

Also, the Quran repeatedly says, "To every nation We appointed acts of devotion, which they observe, so let them not dispute with thee in the matter, and call to thy Lord" (Q. 22:67). Another verse says, "For every community We have ordained certain rites that they may commemorate the name of God by reading it over the cattle We have given them for sacrifice" (Q.22:34).

In yet another verse the Quran repeats the theme in these words, "And everyone has a direction to which he turns (i.e., everyone has a way of worshipping Him). So vie with one another in good works" (Q.2:148).

Also, Meccan Sura states elaborately,

"Say, O disbelievers,
I do not worship that which you worship
and neither do you worship that which I worship
And I will not worship that which you have worshipped
and neither will you worship that which I worship.
Unto you your religion and unto me my religion." (Q. 109)

One can find many more such verses in the Quran which do not approve of any compulsion in religion at all. "There is not compulsion

in religion," the Quran unequivocally declares (Q. 2:256).

It is also thought that Muslims are required by the Quran to demolish the religious places of other communities and construct mosques. Perhaps some uninformed Muslims do believe that. The Quran, for its part, states the contrary. "And if Allah had not repelled some people by others, cloisters and churches and synagogues and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down" (Q. 22:40).

It is clear from the above verse that Allah's name is remembered, whether it is in mosque or synagogue or church, and that Allah has protected all places of worship by repelling one set of people by another, that those who did not protect these places were repelled by Allah through those who could do so. Thus there is clear disapproval of non-protection, let alone demolition, of any place of worship. Demolishing a place of worship, or even refusing to protect it, is clearly acting contrary to the injunctions of the Quran.

The second caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab, did not pray in the Church of Palestine when he visited it during his sojourn in that city. When the archbishop of Palestine inquired the reason for this, the caliph said that no pretext should be provided for Muslims who later might claim the place on the grounds of their caliph having prayed there. Thus he took the necessary precautions in order to prevent a church being claimed by Muslims for conversion into a mosque. Both the Quran and the practice of the Prophet's Khalifa pronounce against demolishing any place of worship, whatever religion it may belong to. However, it must be admitted that practice rarely conforms to the ideal. Motivated by political vendetta, some Muslims have ravaged not only some non-Muslim places of worship, but also their own holiest place of worship, the Kaaba. In the early history of Islam, the soldiers of the Umayyad caliph Yazid burnt the Kaaba, as it had been occupied by his political rival, Abdullah bin Zubayr. (Tabari, the eminent Arabic historian, however, maintains that the fire was accidental. Whatever the case, it is a fact that the Kaaba was surrounded by the forces of Yazid and battle was waged there.)

It is maintained by some that Islam believes in beheading all those who do not believe in Islam. This claim has been partly answered by the verses above. When there is compulsion of any kind in matters religi-

ous, where is there room for converting a person at the point of the sword? As for the word *kafir*, it has been greatly misunderstood. It is necessary that it should be seen in its proper perspective. *Kafir*, literally, means disbeliever. Anyone who disbelieves in the truth revealed by God, is *Kafir*. But it is important here to note the statement of the Quran that all that was revealed before to other prophets, was also from Allah, and that Allah has sent prophets among all nations to speak in their own language. And for every nation, the Quran declares, "there is a messenger. So when their messenger comes, the matter is decided between them with justice, and they are not wronged" (Q. 10:47). Hence all those who believe in one or the other prophet and adhere to the norms of justice, are believers. The Quran not only requires belief in all prophets, but also equal respect for them without any distinction. "We make no difference between any of his messengers," says the Quran (Q. 2:285). The Quran also requires that a believer should accept all God's prophets, including those of the past, sent to different nations, without making any distinction among them, "Those who believe in Allah and His messengers and desire to make a distinction between Allah and His messengers and say: we believe in some and disbelieve in others; and desire to take a course in between – These are truly disbelievers..." (Q. 4: 150-51).

It follows that real disbelievers (*kafirun haqqan*) are those who do not accept all the messengers sent by God but discriminate between them. It is also important to note that not all the prophets have been named in the Quran. The Quran itself makes this clear. "And (We sent) messengers We have mentioned to thee (the prophet) and messengers we have not mentioned to thee" (Q.4:164). In the light of this and other verses mentioned above, some Sufi saints, such as Abdur Rahim Jan-i Janan (1699–1781, assassinated), have concluded that God had sent prophets among the Hindus, too, and likened Brahma to Adam and accepted the Vedas as revealed books. Certainly, it would not be in keeping with the true Quranic spirit to denounce the Hindus as *kafirun*, as has been done frequently by some sectarian Muslims.

It was never the unanimous view of the *ulama* to reject Hindus as *kafirun*. The Prophet himself, while concluding a treaty with the Parsees of Bahrain and Oman, accepted them as *ahl al-Kitab* (the people of the Book), although they have not been mentioned in the Quran as such.

Similarly, the third caliph, Uthman ibn Affan, accepted the Berber tribes of northern Africa as 'people of the Book', although it is doubtful whether they possessed any book at all. If the Berbers of northern Africa, whom Ibn Khaldan, the noted historian (1332–1383), describes as barbarians and most uncivilized people, could be accepted as *ahl al-Kitab*, why cannot the same be done with Hindus, inheritors as they are of a high civilization and culture, possessing a tradition of sophisticated philosophy, metaphysical theories and physical sciences? The Arabs were, in fact, highly impressed by the achievement of the Indians. The famous historian, al-Masudi (d.956/7), in his *Muruj al-dhab* observes about India:

In the remote past when all other nations were divided into various tribes (when others were at the tribal stage) certain people of India, adorned with the qualities of nobility, rectitude, wisdom and learning were trying to bring together people under a central government. They first established a central authority and claimed to rule over others. They appointed the Great Brahman, the Supreme Leader, as their ruler. It was the age of the ascendancy of the learned. The people made progress in all the fields of life. They extracted iron from mines, made swords and other weapons, built palaces, studied the heavens and the stars and the movement of the sun.

Al-Jahiz (d.869), who was a very talented essayist during the Abbasid period, also had praise for India and its achievements. He says:

The inhabitants of India are highly meritorious in astrology and medicine. They have a peculiar script. In medicine, too, they have a supreme insight. They have in their possession some strange secrets of the art of Aesculapius... In making busts and statues, in making pictures of colours and in architecture they are superb... Their music is also enchanting. One of their musical instruments is known as *kanka* (?) which is played on by striking a chord strung in a gourd. There is an uncommon fund of poetical wealth and oratorical affluence in their possession. They know the arts of medicine, philosophy and ethics. The book *Kalila wa Dimna* has

come down from them. They have plenty of courage and common-sense and many qualities which are wanting even in the Chinese. Cleanliness is a noted feature. They have good looks, tall stature and a taste for perfumes. It is from their land that the peerless ambergris comes for the kings. *Streams of higher thinking flowed down from India to Arabia...* (emphasis supplied).

Abdul Karim Shahrastani, a twelfth-century scholar of comparative religion, also admits that Indians are a great nation and great (religious) community (*umma Kabira wa milla azima*) but with divergent views and ideologies.

Thus the early Arab and non-Arab Muslim historians showered lavish praise on Indians and things Indian. They were all praise for their religion, metaphysics and ethics as well. Mahmud al-Shabistari, a scholar of the early fourteenth century, in his *Gulshan-i Raz* even justified idolatry. He says:

The idol is the expression of love and unity in this world, and to wear the sacred thread is to take the resolve of service. As both faith and unfaith are founded in existence, unity of God is the essence of idol worship. As things are the essence of expression, one out of them must at least be the idol. If the Muslim knew what the idol is, then he would not go astray in his faith. The latter did not see in the idol anything but external creating, and for this reason he became *Kafir* in the eyes of the law. If thou, too, would not see the reality that is hidden in the idol, thou will also be not known as a Muslim according to law.

As pointed out earlier, the third caliph, Uthman, accepted even North African Berbers as *ahl al-Kitab* (people of the Book). How could one then declare Hindus *kafirun* and condemn them? When Muhammad ibn Qasim (694–716, executed), confronted by the Hindus, wanted to determine their religious status, and questioned the *ulama* about it, they could not make a unanimous decision, the majority accepting them as *ahl al-Kitab*.

It is important to note that whereas most of the early Arab historians were full of praise for the Hindus and their intellectual achievements, the latter-day *ulama* have been hostile to them, often condemning

them as *kafirun*. Why this difference of attitude? To understand this, it is necessary to realize that our attitudes towards others are often determined by our interests, socio-economic, political, and the like. The early Arab historians spoke well of India and things Indian, as they anticipated the benefits to be had by developing contacts with them and trying to learn from them. However, it was different with the latter-day *ulama*. They were patronized by Central Asian Muslim nobles who were in competition with the Hindu elite. It was political hostility which assumed the form of religious hostility, and thus many *ulama* came to term Hindus *kafirun*.

It is no wonder that the Sufis adopted attitudes towards the Hindus entirely different from those of the *ulama*. The Sufis were not aspirants to power. On the contrary, they kept away from it and concentrated on spiritual matters. They found many parallels to the spiritual endeavour in Islam in the spiritual practice of Hindu yogis. Once Nizamuddin Awliya (1238–1325), a great Sufi saint of the Sultanate period, was walking with his disciple Amir Khusraw (1253–1325), along the bank of the Jamuna river, when he saw some Hindu women bathing and worshipping the sun. He promptly said, "*har qaum ra dini wa qiblagahi*" (for every people there is a religion and a way of prayer). The Sufi concept of *fana fi llah* also seems to have been derived from the Buddhist concept of *nirvana* which predates it.

It is important to note that the Sufis did not hesitate to use the local Hindu idiom in putting across their ideas and teaching. A Sufi saint from Maharashtra, Shaykh Muhammad, named his book on Sufis, *Yogasangraha*. He used the Marathi language and Sanskrit rather than Arabic terms, for he refers to *dil*(heart), *antahakaran*, *jalalivat tamogun* and *kamaliyat sadqun*. In fact, he uses all those terms which were used by Patanjali, Shankararacharya and the commentators on the Vedanta.

Shaykh Muhammad was not an exception. There were many other Sufi saints who thought like him. They were genuinely interested in spiritual practices. They knew that they varied in outward form, but not in content. They were the least prejudiced of all Muslims against the religious practices and the idiom of the Hindus. Some Sufis of Gujarat even projected the Prophet as an avatar of Krishna and composed poems to this effect. Also, the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* (literally, unity of being) was universalist on account of its pantheistic con-

tent. The entire universe, according to this doctrine, is a creation of God and reflects His glory. Thus there is no question of fraternizing with only that section of humanity that holds similar beliefs to oneself, while rejecting the other for having different outward beliefs. The Sufis, holding to the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*, fraternized with all.

III

Today, for reasons other than religious sentiments, we are almost obsessed with our past. As pointed out above, it is essentially political hostility which has, for reasons of legitimation, been transformed into religious antagonism. We oversimplify history and project into it nothing but religious conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims. However, as students of human affairs, we should remember that human relationships and especially inter-group or inter-communal relations, are characterized by ambiguity, complexity and relativity. We do not intend to examine this question in detail. Much has been written about it. All we wish to emphasize is that historical events must be examined in all their richness, depth, complexity and ambiguity.

We should also remember, as pointed out earlier, that human behaviour is not motivated by any one factor alone, however important it may be. It is not rare for religion to be a major factor, but it is not the only motivating factor. If this holds true with regard to ordinary human beings, not involved in any significant power struggle, then it applies all the more to the rulers and people in positions of power. If we avoid oversimplification and try to understand past and present events in all their complexity and ambiguity, we will be able to comprehend better the real motives. This will contribute to reducing religious conflict and promoting better understanding.

Let us keep in mind how much we differ among ourselves in interpreting contemporary events. Take, for example, Operation Bluestar. Did Indira Gandhi order it for her own political motives or because of her hostility towards Sikhism or, perhaps with the aim of stirring up Hindu chauvinism and thus enhancing her chances in the elections? Had she turned communal or did she conceive of herself as the only leader capable of promoting the country's unity? One could adopt any of these opinions depending on one's political interests or one's involvement or *a priori* inclination. The debate goes on. Among Sikhs,

too, there is no unanimity of opinion in this matter.

When we differ so deeply on a contemporary event, how can we say anything with certainty about the remote past? And yet we state our opinion about historical events with the utmost certitude, completely ignoring the complexity and the possible range of motivation of the historical actors. These were neither religious bigots nor great liberals. They were mainly motivated by their own political interests. Let us not lose sight of these facts. If we adopt this more sophisticated view, much of our perception of history and historical events can change.

IV

A changing society throws up very complex problems, the ethnic problem being one among them. Communalism in India is a modern phenomenon in the sense that with the advent of British rule the socio-economic structure and, in consequence, the political relationship between different communities, especially between the Hindus and Muslims, began to change. Pluralist societies undergoing change are rarely totally free from communal or ethnic tensions. The communal phenomenon suddenly came to the fore when the feudal, autocratic power relationship began to change to a capitalist, democratic one. This change began to deepen further when socio-economic transformation began to accelerate after independence. New forces and new relationships gradually emerged on our social and political horizons. This transformation, again, needs to be understood in all its complexity, richness and ambiguity, without resorting to oversimplifications.

Most Third World countries are experiencing, in varying degrees, ethnic or communal problems. Countries which were considered a model of unity and amity, are being torn asunder by ethnic and communal conflict. Who would have thought just a decade ago that the peaceful island of Fiji in the Pacific would experience violent ethnic convulsions? The conflict between the Fiji Indians and the natives was of an economic and political nature. It broke out with the election of a Fiji Indian-supported coalition led by Dr. Timoci Bavadra. This generated resentment among the natives who felt left out in the economic and political race for power. The native Fijians asserted themselves, democracy was subverted, and the natives seized power through a military dictatorship.

The Tamil-Sinhala conflict in Sri Lanka, too, is a result of the changing socio-economic balance there. The Tamils were perceived by the Sinhalese to be a privileged minority. Even Buddhist monks, normally regarded as exceptionally peaceful, became involved in the anti-Tamil movement and resorted to violence. Until recently, these countries had known ethnic peace, but the developmental process generated conflict. Such a conflict always assumes communal or racial overtones. Many more examples could be given from other countries of the world.

The Hindu-Muslim problem in India, to which the Hindu-Sikh problem has now been added, is of the same variety. In reality, the Hindu-Muslim problem is not religious in nature. The conflict, in fact, lies in the secular area. Unfortunately, it expresses itself and is projected in a religious idiom. Whatever may be the case, we have to tackle it from the viewpoint of the perceivers and not only from that of the actors in the drama. The religious dimension, too, has various aspects to it, including the cultural.

V

Hindus complain that Muslims are unwilling to become part of the national mainstream. The claim is partly true. If we look at it from the point of view of the north Indian Muslim urban elite, it appears to be true. But it is not true with regard to either the north Indian rural Muslims, or to Muslims in general in the southern and eastern parts of India.

In fact, the centre of gravity of the communal problem lies in the Hindi belt (in which one may include Gujarat and Maharashtra). The urban elite in this belt insists on a separate identity and has a definite sense of Indo-Islamic culture. The urban middle class Muslims of this belt are quite proud of this Indo-Islamic identity. Furthermore, since the nineteenth century, this area has had a history of Hindu-Muslim conflict. This conflict has been the driving force of the Aligarh movement. Above all, it was the centre of Muslim power. In this belt, especially in its urban areas, live most of those Muslims who are descendants of the erstwhile ruling classes. The political battle for Pakistan was fought mainly by the Muslims living in the Hindi belt. It is, therefore, not surprising if the feeling of having a separate identity is more pronounced among them. Again, it is the Hindus of this belt who feel

very strongly about separatist attitudes among Muslims and their refusal to be part of the Indian mainstream. However, the problem has its own complexity and ambiguity, and should not be viewed exclusively in religious terms, as frequently happens. The roots of separatism are in politics, not in religion, and one has to go back in history to search for them. When Emperor Akbar adopted a liberal policy towards Hindus, it created resentment among a section of Muslim nobles, mainly those who were of Central Asian origin. Subsequently, this section of Muslim nobles found their rallying point in Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624), a Naqshabandi Sufi theologian. In fact, it all began with the Naqshabandi, Khwaja Muhammad al-Baqi Billah (1563–1603) in Delhi. Baqui Billah began contacting the Muslim nobles and, later, converted Sirhindi who had been a liberal under the influence of the Sufi intellectual, Abul Fazl, to his point of view.

Sirhindi, eventually surnamed by his admirers *mujaddid-i alf-i thani*, wrote letters (*maktubat*) to various Muslim nobles and stressed the importance of Islamic orthodoxy, opposing the un-Islamic policies of the emperor. He found support among those nobles who did not want to share power with the Hindu nobles. The tussle continued. Aurangzeb Alamgir (1653–1707) executed Dara Shikoh, who was also an outspoken liberal. The Muslim nobility sided with Aurangzeb, who emerged victorious. Shah Waliullah (1703–1762) also tried to inspire the Muslim nobility of India to restore Muslim power, but he failed.

The Central Asian Muslim nobility had lost its original identity and developed a new Indo-Islamic one. This fact must be recognized, as it has much bearing on the question we are discussing. The constituents of this identity are Islamic as well as Indian. Its Islamicness asserts itself in certain circumstances and its Indianness in others, depending on the situation.

After the advent of British rule, a new phase of the struggle for power began. It was during this struggle that took place among the urban Muslim elite of north India, that the Islamic element began to reassert itself. This was so because the struggle was between the Muslim and Hindu elites. The Muslim elite, in order to mobilize the support of the Muslim masses, tried to generate a sharp sense of Islamic identity and separateness among them. There has been a strong element of Hinduism in folk Islam. The names, traditions, customs and other cultural

elements were marked by a strong Hindu influence. The Muslim elite, not for religious, but for political reasons, began to urge the Muslim masses to purge their customs of local Hindu elements. The Deobandi *ulama*, on the other hand, during the second half of the nineteenth century, took up this campaign for religious reasons. They thought that unless Muslims in India practised 'pure Islam', they would inevitably fall prey to a process of a degeneration.

However, our main concern is not the theological and legal stream of thought. We are more concerned here with the political aspect. Analyzing the conspicuous increase of separatism in nineteenth century Bengal, Rafiuddin Ahmad, a noted scholar from Bangladesh, says:

Such changes were due solely to the campaign of Islamization, improvements in communication that brought the rural Muslims into close contact with their urban co-religionists, wider diffusion of education, Islamic as well as western, and finally, communal tensions resulting from a variety of social and political factors, all contributed to the increasing aloofness of the ordinary Muslims from their Hindu neighbours.¹

Rafiuddin describes various changes which began to affect the nature of the emerging identity of Bengali Muslims. He observes that the earlier *nasihat-namas*, written as late as the seventies of the nineteenth century, often referred to the Creator as 'Sri Sri Huq', 'Sri Sri Ishwar', 'Sri Sri Karim.' The increasing tendency now was to substitute such un-Islamic honorifics as 'Sri Sri' by 'purer' – i.e., Arabic and Persian – invocations such as 'Allahu Akbar' or 'Allahu Ghani'. The style of addressing a person showed the same trend, 'Sri Srijuta' of an earlier era giving way generally to such Arabicized honorifics as 'Janab', 'Munshi' and 'Maulavi'. Even the titles of *nasihat-namas* underwent rapid transformation. Bengali titles were replaced by Arabic ones, such as 'Tariquah-i-Muhammadwa', 'Akhbar al-Marifat', 'Bedar al-Ghafilin' and so on. These changes were symbolic of the psychology behind the campaigns of Islamization. They showed how the crusade against polytheism was increasingly taking the road to cultural separatism.

A similar process took place among other Muslim communities, for example, the Meos of Rajasthan and Haryana, who were highly assimilated.

lated Muslim communities. Nevertheless, the political competition between Hindus and Muslims intensified during the freedom struggle, and the process of cultural separatism and Islamization reached its height at the time of partition. It was at the time of the partition of India that the Khoja Muslims of Gujarat gave up their Hindu names and customs.

It is proper to view this cultural separatism and Islamization not simply as a facet of 'Muslim fanaticism' but rather as a sociological process which, to a great extent, resulted from the political struggles between the elites of the two communities. It was, furthermore, the result of heightened political consciousness. Of course, it is very difficult to say whether cultural and religious consciousness precedes political consciousness or vice versa. It surely is a highly complex process. But it is an empirically established fact that political struggle between two communities does lead to religio-cultural separatism.

In this connection, the case of Indonesia (especially Java) is frequently cited. The Muslims there have been deeply influenced by the local culture which, by the time Islam arrived, had already been exposed to Hindu culture for centuries. The Javanese, and hence, to a large extent, the Indonesian, cultural symbols are Hindu. Their national dance is based on the Ramayana and their names, in many cases, resemble Hindu names. But in Indonesia, Muslims are in an overwhelming majority and there was, or there is, no struggle between Hindus and Muslims. There is no fear of Hindu domination. As pointed out above, identity formation, the crystallization of the elements that make up one's identity, is as much a socio-political process as a religious and cultural one. And the sense of separateness begins with the urban elite, not with the rural masses.

As the example of nineteenth century Bengal makes obvious, in India too, there took place a remarkable degree of cultural assimilation, perhaps as striking as that of Indonesia. But things began to change with the increase in education and the intensified struggle between the elites of the two communities. Even today, there is a heightened sense of cultural separatism among the north Indian urban elites. This process intensifies with increasing communalization. Even in these conditions there is a degree of cultural assimilation between Hindus and Muslims in the rural areas. Their dialect, mode of dressing and social customs have a lot of similarities. A good number of empirical anthropological studies bear this out.

Whatever the political compulsions or processes, cultural or religious separatism cannot go beyond certain limits. Even at the height of separatism, the identity of the Muslim elite remains an Indo-Islamic identity. The Muslims of India cannot escape their sense of Indianness in the cultural and social sense. Their social ethics are as much Indian as Islamic. Their Muslimness cannot completely submerge their Indianness. The Islamic world, also, refers to them as Indian Muslims.

In the southern and north-eastern parts of India, like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam, Kashmir and West Bengal (leaving aside the Bihari Muslims of Calcutta), there is a remarkable degree of cultural assimilation between Hindus and Muslims, not only in rural but also in urban areas. They enjoy a common social system, share cultural values and, of course, speak the same language as their Hindu co-citizens. In Kerala, the Muslim marriage ceremony is called *mangalam*, and their marriage customs are matriarchal like those of the Hindus. In Kashmir, Sufis are called *rishis* and are venerated by Hindus and Muslims. Another commonly venerated Sufi poetess in Kashmir is Laleshwari (popularly known as Lal Ded), who was a contemporary of Nuriddin Rishi (Nund Rishi). She was a Shaivite and composed poems in the popular language. Kashmiri Shaivism has a strong element of unity of God (*tawhid*).

Thus it would be seen that a sense of cultural separatism is prevalent in a small section of the urban population in north India, and its importance should not be exaggerated. And, as pointed out above, this sense of cultural separatism is getting further accentuated due to the intensification of communal feelings. Electoral processes and political opportunism have much to do with the growth of communalism all over India. If the sense of cultural separatism is to be arrested, instead of attacking it, one would do better to attack communalism and create better and more harmonious relationships between Hindus and Muslims.

In trying to tackle the problem of communalism more objectively and fruitfully, two dimensions of the problem must be clearly recognized. First, we must accept the fact that with more education, a sense of one's own identity is bound to develop which would tend to separate a person from other communities/castes. This is happening with regard to all castes and communities. It is a psychological process. Even the

Dalits, due to the spread of education, are becoming highly caste conscious. This seems to be inevitable and must be accepted in the right perspective.

The second dimension of the problem has to do with the deliberate attempt, by the leadership or the elites of each community, to serve its own interest, to build up an atmosphere of confrontation leading to a conscious striving for separatism between the communities. It is this process that we have to bring to an effective end. Confrontation must be replaced by co-operation. Polemics must be replaced by dialogue.

We also have to recognize the fact that India has chosen a secular and democratic course and is a pluralistic society. In the modern context, democracy cannot be stabilized without secularism, and secularism cannot remain stable without genuine pluralism of both religion and culture. To strengthen the forces of pluralism (on which secularism and democracy depend) we will have to develop a sense of equal respect for all religions and cultures. Mere tolerance is not enough. In a way, tolerance is a negative quality. It would say: since this or that cultural or religious group exists and cannot be wished away, let us tolerate it. We must go beyond this kind of merely passive tolerance and inculcate a positive, equal respect for other religions and cultures. Respect is a positive quality. The Muslims should show as much respect for Hinduism as they have for Islam; similarly, Hindus should not view Islam with any sense of suspicion. Hindus do tend to become doctrinaire, although Hinduism is not so. Islam, theologically speaking, is no less tolerant as shown from the Quranic verses above. But Muslims are far from being tolerant in practice.

Both the communities – and, first of all, prominent members sincerely committed to the cause of communal peace – must undertake genuine self-criticism. We will also do better if we recognize that communalism *per se* is bad. It should not be divided into the artificial categories of minority and majority communalism. One feeds on the other. We have witnessed this clearly – if any proof is required – during the Shah Bano and Ramjanambhoomi–Babri masjid agitations. Here, Muslim communalism was at its aggressive worst, which in turn fed Hindu communalism. It appeared as if there was total confrontation between the two communities.

Every Hindu and every Muslim should recognize that arousing com-

munal feelings and actions is the game of vested interests and that they themselves often become its victims. In most towns, cities and villages, they live cheek-by-jowl and in peace. There is no confrontation among them, unless it is created from above. Generally, it is observed that the common people are genuinely religious and far less communal, whereas the elite and leadership are far less religious and far more communal. The common people also have more respect for one another's religion than the elite. Common people are involved in their own struggles for living. Those who take a confrontationist attitude hardly ever concern themselves with the people's struggles. They raise abstract emotional issues, such as the Babri mosque and the Ramjanambhoomi temple, which are hardly connected with the people's real struggles. These priorities must be reversed if communal confrontation is to de-escalate.

The Muslim intelligentsia, furthermore, have become supersensitive on religio-cultural matters. While some of these concerns are genuine, they should not lose their sense of proportion. They should take into account the sensibilities of the majority community and should realize that in a pluralistic society a minimum degree of tension is bound to remain between the majority and minority communities. They should try not to overreact, as they often do, thus further exacerbating the situation. An open mind and accommodative approach are a basic prerequisite for their playing a positive role in inter-communal relations.

The Hindus should realize that the progress of the country is possible only when there is communal peace and a co-operative spirit between the majority and minority. If minority feelings intensify, the integrity of the country will be endangered, much more so with heightened communal consciousness. They should show more consideration and respect for the Muslim minority's cultural and religious sensibilities – although culture is, of course, a complex category since it is often common between the majority and the minority, especially at regional levels. Minorities, as a rule, tend to be more sensitive on such issues.

Muslims should also understand that the indigenous element in their identity is very important and should not be underrated. True religiosity and genuine faith are far above pettiness and cannot be seriously affected by imbibing local traditions. In fact, no Muslim community in this world is a 'pure Islamic community'. A 'pure Islamic community',

anthropologically speaking, is a mythical category. Nor should Muslims make their identity merely past-oriented. If they want their life to be more meaningful in the contemporary world, the present and the future must enter effectively into their consciousness about their identity. They should thus opt for a progressive and not a regressive identity, which means that they must open themselves to change and shake off their feudal past. The Muslims have imbibed feudal values so deeply that they find it difficult to shake themselves free. But it will have to be done. Islam has little in common with feudalism.

These are some tentative suggestions for developing a co-operative approach between Hindus and Muslims. It is easier said than done. But let us remember that, given a strong will and determination, nothing is impossible. We should not be dismayed by the problems that face us. They are bound to arise. After all, we are engaged in the process of nation-building, which is a mighty task. In Europe, the process was comparatively simple, since each society was based on a single religion and one language, and the process of industrialization had been rather pervasive and advanced. Ours is a multi-lingual and multi-religious society and industrialization is proceeding at a slow pace. We are far from modernized.

Let us not be disheartened. Great challenges require great determination. We should go about the task with equanimity and sincere commitment.

Sufism and Communal Harmony

We are faced with a serious problem of communal conflict in contemporary society. It would be very difficult to achieve the objective of modern nation-building if this conflict keeps on surfacing. It is, therefore, highly necessary to harness all our resources, spiritual as well as material, to bring about national unity and integrity. As for spiritual resources, we must look up to the best in our heritage, specially to those who belonged to the Sufi or Bhakti movements. These movements were based on true religiosity, not on sectarianism; on humanism, not on religious denominations. In this paper, we propose to throw some light on the role of the Sufis in bridging the gap between two great religions of India, Hinduism and Islam. This would certainly help to remove many mutual misunderstandings.

There are a few things which must be properly understood in this connection, right at the outset. Firstly, it is not true that Islam spread only with the help of the sword and that the Muslim rulers' primary interest was to preach Islam by force or by persuasion. The Muslim rulers were primarily interested in ruling and governing India by whatever means possible.

Those who believe in the theory that Muslim rulers were primarily interested in spreading Islam either oversimplify things or are victims of certain prejudices. It is not possible to argue with those who judge things on the basis of sectarian prejudices, for they have already adopted a point of view and are not open to other opinions. But we would like to impress upon those who are not strongly prejudiced, but simply tend to oversimplify, that the reality of the past is often much more complex than what we assume it to be. Successful rulers are more pragmatic than

ideological zealots. Ideological zeal may at times help to capture power but it hardly ever helps in retaining it. Allauddin Khalji adopted a similar stance when Qadi Mughith advised him to rule according to the *sharia*. He bluntly told him, "I do not know what is and what is not according to the *sharia*; what I do know is that I must govern in the interest of the state."

Secondly, it is simply not true that it is easier to govern if those governed happen to be fellow-religionists. It is empirically very well borne out that a religiously cohesive society is not necessarily a conflict-free society, that conflicts are material in nature — either maldistribution of material resources of the society, or a struggle for power. Both could be either intra- or inter-religious in nature. Europe was religiously quite cohesive throughout the middle ages, yet saw more socio-political conflict than India during the same period. One should, therefore, not make hasty assumptions that the Muslim rulers could have resolved political conflicts by adopting a programme of massive conversion to Islam.

One cannot understand historical forces objectively and scientifically if one limits the dynamics of history to religion only. One has to understand the dynamics of social conflict — and the causes of this conflict are often material in nature — to properly understand the nature of conflict in history. However, with some valuable exceptions, our whole focus in medieval Indian history has been on religion. The earlier we get rid of this obsession, the better it is for us and for the nation.

Unfortunately, the communal interpretation of history has been made very popular in India. What is more unfortunate is that it is not only the British who did it to divide us, so that they could continue to rule, but we ourselves have continued to remain obsessed with such an interpretation. This interpretation of history revolves around the concept of one ruling community tyrannizing the ruled community, and also around a number of places of worship belonging to the ruled community being destroyed. Intra-religious conflicts are totally neglected and Hindus as well as Muslims are assumed to be socially perfectly cohesive communities without any internal conflict, who keep on expressing their religious solidarity against each other. Such assumptions, needless to say, are highly oversimplified and must be rejected.

Another fallacious assumption on both sides of the religious divide is

that Islam and Hinduism are incompatible with each other. Hence, no integration has ever been possible between them and they have always been mutually embroiled in conflict. There are some detectable fallacies in these apparently neat assumptions. It is assumed that any theological incompatibility would inevitably result in social incompatibility. In other words, if there are theological differences, social differences are bound to arise. This is not only empirically not borne out, but even Sufis proved this assumption wrong by bringing about various religious communities together in their *takias* and *dargahs* (shrines).

There have been as many intra-religious doctrinal incompatibilities as inter-religious ones. In both the religions, sectarian rigidities have often resulted in a great deal of religious conflict. However, it is also important to note that the masses, by and large, remain unaffected by these controversies. It is only the religious elite who fan them to serve their extra-religious interests. Had these interests been of a religious or a doctrinal nature, the Sufis – intensely religious people – would not have succeeded in reconciling them when the *ulama* had failed to do so. The *ulama* assumed rigid doctrinal postures as they were more interested in having a political say than the Sufis who always remained alienated from the power structures.

Thus we see that religious compatibility or incompatibility is not on purely theological merit; rather it is motivated by other considerations. Again, religious compatibility cannot be decided at any one theological level. What appears to be incompatible at one level may get reconciled at some other level. Thus at a higher philosophical level the concept of *advaita* and *tawheed* (unity of God) seem reconcilable. Often, religious and theological language tends to be symbolical rather than excursive and we make of these symbols what we wish to make of them, or what is in keeping with our extra-theological interests.

Many Sufis held Brahma to be Adam and considered the Vedas to be the divinely inspired books. Learned theologians like Allama Mashrigi and Khwaja Hasan Nizami (a Sufi and the *sajjada nashin* of the shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya) accepted some gods of the Hindu pantheon like Ram and Krishna as prophets who were among the 1,24,000 prophets supposed to have been sent by Allah. A Sufi poet of our time, Maulana Hasrat Mahani, held Krishna in great esteem and used to visit Mathura every year on the occasion of Janmashtami. In fact, all the

Firgani Mahli ulama of Lucknow held Krishna in great esteem. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the son of a practising Bengali Sufi, brought to bear a catholic outlook on Islam and maintained that one must distinguish between *din* and *shariah*; while *din* (essence of religion) is one everywhere, the *shariah* rituals, outward practices, personal laws and such other matters differ. Thus in Maulana Azad's view, while Islam and Hinduism are incompatible at the *sharia* level, they are compatible at another level.

There is no doubt that Maulana Azad's outlook was deeply influenced by his Sufi heritage, though he was not a practising Sufi. The Sufis, it is important to note, distinguish between *sharia* and *tariqah* (i.e., a religious way, method or procedure). The *tariqah* essentially refers to the way of life of a Sufi without outward religious encumbrances. While most of the Sufis do not disregard *shariah*, they do emphasize their own intensely felt religious ways of living and practising their faith. For them while *sharia* differentiates, *tariqah* integrates. It was under this Sufi influence that Maulana Azad emphasized the difference between *din* and *sharia* and thus gave a useful outlook for a multi-religious society like that of India.

Seen from our perspective, neither the theory of the spread of Islam at the point of the sword nor that of the incompatibility of Islam and Hinduism, is tenable and empirically maintainable. While the religious elite have always emphasized theological differences, the Sufis and saints have brought masses from both the religions closer together. Here in this paper, we deal with the endeavours of the Sufis and saints and their outlook about the multi-religious society of their own day and the way they dealt with religious tensions in their society.

II

It is difficult to surmise the beginning of the mystic trend in Islam. The Sufis trace it from the Prophet himself and find its justification in the Quranic verses. There are a number of verses in the Quran called *mus-tashabihat* (those unsure of meaning) which can be interpreted in various ways and some Quranic verses are highly symbolic. Some of the verses which the mystics interpret in their own way are as under:

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. A likeness of His light is as a niche in which is a lamp – the lamp is in a glass, the

glass as it wears a brightly shining star – lit from a blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western, the oil whereof gives light, though fire touch it not – Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom he pleases. And Allah sets forth parables for men and Allah is knower of all things (The Quran, 24:35).

By the star when it sets. Your companion errs not, nor does he deviate. Nor does he speak out of desire. It is naught but revelation that is revealed. One Mighty in power has taught him. The Lord of strength. So he attained to perfection, and he is in the highest part of horizon. Then he drew near, drew nearer yet, so he was the measure of two bows or closer still (The Quran, 53:1–9).

These are only two of many verses which lend themselves to mystical interpretations and from which the Muslim mystics derive their beliefs and practices. The Prophet was looked upon by them as a model of perfection, one who spent long hours in night prayers and fasted for days. He was reported to have tied stones on his stomach to control hunger while praying. Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law, is the next model to derive inspiration from. Ali was reported to be a deeply spiritual person with great control over his desires and was given to constant praying and devotion to Allah.

Undoubtedly, some companions of the Prophet and other Muslims in the early period, like Imam Hasan Basri, who is considered a great Sufi saint, had Sufi qualities about them. Sufism, in fact, systematically began during the late Abbasid period. It is well known that the early Abbasid caliphs, like Mamun and his immediate successors, supported the Mutazalite relationalism. They were supporters of liberal theology and expression of free thought. But with the caliph Mutawakkil a reaction set in. The Mutazalites lost their influence and the persecution of the unorthodox began. Persons like al-Muhasibi, an early Sufi, who had opposed Mutazalism and refuted their doctrines, were no longer free to teach or preach in Baghdad.

It was this period which was emotionally and psychologically suitable for the germination of Sufi doctrines. It was an extremely difficult period, both spiritually and materially. The Abbasid power had declined and a sense of insecurity had set in. On the other hand,

speculative theology under the influence of Greek thought and philosophy had a field day. Religion had become a purely intellectual and speculative affair and starved of spiritualism and emotions. The days of liberalism were over, and religious persecution increased due to the decline of the Abbasid power. There was yet another dimension to the Abbasid society. It had attracted people from various parts of the world, particularly from Persia, India, Central Asia, Syria and other parts of the Roman Empire. There were people of various faiths – Muslims, Zoroastrians, Christians, Jews and even Jains and Hindus, though the last two were very few in number. Thus, the Abbasid society had grown to be a multi-religious society.

Sufism and its origin must be seen against this background. Society had developed a sense of insecurity, was starved of the emotional aspects of religion, had gathered people of different faiths and the Abbasid power was on the decline. The theological elites were indulging too much in speculative theology and reasoning. Such a religion had no appeal for the masses. They needed a religion which could serve as a solace and also give them a sense of security and provide an emotional outlet. The Sufis did precisely that. They distanced religion from sterile speculative theologizing and endowed it with spiritualism and emotionalism. They personalized religion and used it to give stability and a sense of security to the common people. To use Indian terminology, *bhakti marg* got ascendance over *jnan marg*. *Jnan marg* can be followed only by the elite, whereas *bhakti marg* is open to all and is far more reassuring to them than the *jnan marg*. However, it must be said that as far as the Sufis were concerned, they combined both *marifat* (*jnan*) and *ibadat* (*bhakti*).

Many attempts have been made to define Sufism. Here we give its definition by a greatly acclaimed Sufi, Junaid Baghdadi, who was a disciple of al-Muhasibi. "Sufism", said al-Junaid, "means that God makes thee to die to thyself and to become alive in Him. It is to purify the heart from the recurrence of creaturely temptations, to bid farewell to all natural inclinations, to subdue the qualities which belong to human nature, to keep far from the claims of the senses, to adhere the spiritual qualities, to ascend by means of Divine knowledge, to be occupied with that which is eternally the best, to give wise counsel to all people, faithfully to observe the Truth, and to follow the Prophet in respect of the

religious law” This is quite a comprehensive definition of Sufism and lays bare almost all its dimensions.

It would be seen from the above definition that a Sufi is supposed to give up all worldly temptations, bid farewell to all natural urges and subdue them. In this respect the Sufis were closer to Indian yogis. This control of sensual lust made them popular among the masses. The masses lived under the tyrannical and exploitative rule of kings and feudal lords and anyone who resisted the temptation to be drawn near to these rulers became quite popular amongst them. Most of the Sufis resorted to this passive resistance against the exploitative rule of their time. But there was also an activist Sufi like Enayatullah Shah of Sind, who actively fought with arms against the exploitative Mughal rule in the 17th century, though he was defeated in the end. But he fought with such dauntless courage that his enemies had to resort to guile to defeat him.

Many Sufis, like Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya, doggedly refused to pay court to the most powerful kings of their times. These Sufis opted out of the system and thought it fit to lead an emotionally and spiritually rich life. Even if they had wanted to, they could not have changed the system. The Sufis could at best establish communes outside the system, and they did this by establishing shrines where people of all faiths and classes ate *langar* without any distinction. Some Sufis accepted *jagirs* for their *langar* expenses while others refused even this and depended mainly on unsolicited *futuh* (contributions). They made it a point never to ask for any contribution and yet people flocked to donate generously and the *langars* ran smoothly.

The Sufis, it is important to note from our viewpoint, never hesitated to adopt and assimilate spiritual practices from sources other than Islam. They had, in this respect, a liberal, universalist approach. It is quite possible that the famous Sufi doctrine of *fana fillah* (i.e., dying to oneself and living in Him, as Hazrat Junaid Baghdadi said in his definition of a Sufi) might have been borrowed from Hinduism.

The Sufis laid stress on spiritualism rather than on theologizing and being dogmatic. They were hardly interested in either rational or dogmatic theology like the *ulama* and *mullas*. The masses were never attracted towards the *ulama* and *mullas*, for unlike the Sufis, they emphasized theology (an elite, speculative, rational activity) rather than spiritual practices. They also coveted *darbar* positions and thus

appeared to be on the side of the exploiters, whereas the Sufis kept their distance from the rulers.

One also has to keep in mind that Islam, to begin with, was a religion of city dwellers, mostly small traders and artisans, not of peasants. To traders and city dwellers, what appeals most is pragmatic rationalism. However, the peasant psychology is quite different. Pragmatic rationalism does not serve the needs of the peasantry. Their psychology and state of mind are reflected, on the other hand, in elaborate ritualism, music and dance. When large sections of their peasantry were converted to Islam outside urban Arabia, they brought their own psychology and mental equipment with them.

The *ulama* belonged to the urban elite and hence were attracted to speculative theology and this left the rural peasantry cold. They needed a ritualistic and emotionally satisfying religion. Many Sufi *dervishes* (mendicants) adopted music (*sama*) and dance (*raqs*) with other elaborate rituals. *Sama* and *raqs* were strongly denounced by the *ulama* who considered these practices as *bida* (un-Islamic innovations). They undoubtedly were un-Islamic, but for the peasantry, and those sections of it which migrated to urban areas, the real question was not dogmatic theology, but their own emotional needs. They found their fulfilment in Sufi practices.

Moreover, the Sufis never hesitated to assimilate spiritual insights from other faiths. They were more akin to the Quranic verse, "And for every people we pointed way of worshipping that they might mention the name of Allah on what he has given them of the cattle quadrupeds. So your God is one God, therefore, to Him should you submit, And give news to the humble" (The Quran, 22:34). And also, "for every one there is direction to which one turns, so vie with each in good deeds" (The Quran, 2:148).

Thus these verses make it abundantly clear that the form of worship is not very material, each person has his or her own form. What is necessary is to excel each other in good works and to be good to the humble (*mukhbiin*). The Sufis were truthful to both these teachings of the Quran; they never disputed anyone's form of worship and they always had deep sympathy for the humble. When Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya went on a morning walk in Delhi along the river Jamuna, he saw

some Hindu women bathing and worshipping the morning sun. Upon seeing these women in the act of worship, he told his poet-disciple, "*har qaum ra dini wa qiblaghahi*" (for every people there is a religion and a direction to which they turn to worship). These words were a literal translation of the Quranic verses quoted above and deeply reflected Hazrat Nizamuddin's approach towards other religions.

III

Lastly, we would like to draw attention to the famous doctrine of Mahiuddin Ibn Arabi known as *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being). It was quite a revolutionary doctrine as far as harmony between peoples of different faiths is concerned. This doctrine implies that it is His existence which pervades through the whole universe. The universe is a manifestation of His glory and hence there should not be any distinction between one object and the other, let alone between one faith and the other. This doctrine was, in a way, progressive in its time. Again, it was this doctrine which drew the Sufi saints close to the people of all faiths. A true *muwahhid* (believer in the unity of being) was one who made no distinction between one creature and another creature of God. The noted urdu poet, Ghalib, who was a believer in the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* goes further and says: "We are believers in the doctrines of Unity of Being and our creed is to renounce all formalities (of faith); the (different) communities, when obliterated, became ingredients of (my) faith."

Thus the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* was instrumental in promoting communal harmony by eliminating all formal differences of faith. Naturally, it did not go unchallenged by the theologians who strongly believed in formalism. They vehemently opposed the Sufis who believed in *wahdat al-wujud*. Abul Fazl and Faizi, who deeply influenced Akbar's religious outlook and made him tolerant towards other faiths, were also opposed by the prominent contemporary theologians. Mujaddid Alf Thani Sirhindi was one among them. He refuted the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* and instead propounded that of *wahdat al-shuhud* (unity of perception). What was implied was that though we witness such unity, it does not, in fact, exist. Existence is not emanation from God. God is beyond and transcendent. However, it must be said that the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* remained most popular and that of *wahdat al-shuhud*

could never compete successfully with it. Shah Waliyulla tried to work out a synthesis of the two, but even this synthesis did not find many takers. It remained confined to Shah Saheb's followers.

Of course, we must understand the fact that Sufism was a product of a feudal society. It was, so to say, feudal humanism. The contemporary social structure is not congenial to the Sufi practices and hence it has nearly disappeared from our socio-religious scene. But it is part of our socio-cultural and religious heritage and must be valued as such. The Sufi values, though not all the practices, are still quite relevant for us as we are being torn apart by communal conflict today.

Inter-religious Dialogue and Communal Harmony

South Asia, which includes the Indian sub-continent as well as Sri Lanka, has been dogged by religious and communal conflict for some time. The conflict is religious inasmuch as it involves conflicting religious perspectives or a lack of proper understanding of one another's religions or even one's own religion, for that matter. However, religion is often only an instrument, and the real conflict is over purely secular matters like sharing of power and similar other questions. Such a conflict is, therefore, rightly referred to, in the Indian sub-continent, as a communal rather than a religious conflict. It is communal inasmuch as it involves a conflict of secular interests between two or more communities. In India the conflict is between the Hindus and the Muslims and now, to a limited extent, between the Sikhs and the Hindus too.

In Pakistan, on the other hand, the conflict is mainly ethnic, for ethnic communities like the Sindhis, Muhajirs and Punjabis are embroiled with each other on the questions of sharing power and economic resources. These ethnic communities in Pakistan follow the same religion, Islam. There are sectarian differences between the Shias and Sunnis — the two major sects of Islam — on the one hand, and between the Deobandi and Barelvi Muslims and Ahl-e-Hadith and Ahl-e-Quran, on the other. At times, conflict between the Shias and Sunnis assumes serious proportions. In Bangladesh, the major conflict is between Muslims and Hindus. Muslims are the majority community unlike India, where Muslims are in the minority. Unlike Pakistan, there is no major ethnic conflict in Bangladesh as there are no ethnic communities there. The Chakmas, in the hill tracts of

Chittagong, are both ethnically and religiously different. Thus the only serious ethnic conflict in Bangladesh is between the Bengali Muslims and the Buddhist Chakmas. But in the case of the Chakmas it is the ethnic dimension which is more pronounced.

In Sri Lanka, the nature of the conflict is more ethnic than religious. The Sinhalese and the Tamils are fighting against each other; the former are Buddhists and the latter Hindus. Unlike Hindus and Muslims in India, however, religion does not play a significant role in this conflict, probably because both the religions — Buddhism and Hinduism — are of Indian origin and draw upon Indian mythology. However, it cannot be said that religion does not play any role whatsoever in the conflict between the Sinhala Buddhists and Tamil Hindus. It does, but it is not a very pronounced and sharply recognizable role. Thus the scenario in South Asia is quite complex and one needs a comprehensive understanding of the problem in order to resolve it.

II

As one chapter cannot cover the expanse and the complexities of the South Asian religious and ethnic conflict, this paper will restrict itself to India, and in India, to the conflict between Hindus and Muslims. As pointed out earlier, between Hindus and Muslims too, the conflict is both of a communal and religious nature, though it is more communal than religious in nature today. The communal conflict originated in the nineteenth century with the coming of the British in India and with a shift from feudal to colonial polity and economy. The feudal polity is mainly based on personal loyalty to the monarch and the feudal economy too hardly admits of competition between one and the other community. The colonial polity as well as economy, on the other hand, are based, to a large extent, on competition between the elites of various communities and essentially it is this competition for jobs as well as elected positions that leads to communal conflict. In this conflict, religion does not play a central causative role, though it might play a peripheral instrumental role.

In medieval times, there was no communal conflict between Hindus and Muslims. A section of the Hindu community collaborated with the Muslim ruling class and thus shared power with it as a junior partner. There were, of course, conflicts between a section of the Hindu and

Muslim rulers. Though the conflict was for political hegemony between rulers belonging to two different communities, it is interpreted today by some historians as religious conflict between Hindus and Muslims. This position does not seem to be very plausible if carefully scrutinized. However, this aspect of the problem should not detain us longer in this paper. Suffice it to say that it is an attempt to project the present conflict into the past, to draw legitimacy from history. History should be read in the light of the motives of its own actors.

This, however, does not mean that there was total absence of religious conflict in the past. It would be too simplistic to maintain that. This conflict existed mostly at a theological level. The *ulama*, with their sectarian approach, put pressure on the Muslim rulers to enforce *shariah* in its strict sense and assign a secondary position to the Hindus. The Hindus, they demanded, should be treated as *kafirs*, with the attendant consequences. The rulers often ignored these sectarian demands as they were not practicable politically. These controversies, at times, generated some tension and conflict. But there were many instances of religious dialogues and synthesis too.

The great emperor Akbar had constructed a special hall where he used to hold inter-religious dialogues with theologians of different persuasions. He tried to devise a syncretistic religion called *Din-e-Ilahi*, but failed. However, the attempt was quite praiseworthy. The Sufis too adopted a non-sectarian and liberal approach to Hinduism. Many Sufis adopted the local dialect, Hindu rituals and theological idiom. Some of them stressed common spiritual aims. Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya, a great Sufi saint of the 14th century A.D. greatly enjoyed *bhajans* (the Hindu devotional songs) with *qawwalis* (a typical Islamic devotional singing evolved by the singers in attendance with the Sufi saints). Thus we see that the Sufi saints believed in commonality of spiritual ends.

Prince Dara Shikoh, heir apparent of Shah Jahan, the fifth Mughal emperor, studied Hindu scriptures with great enthusiasm and called it *Sirr-e-Akbar* (The Great Mystery). He also wrote a book called *Majam al-Bahrayn* (meeting of two oceans, Hinduism and Islam). Thus Dara Shikoh followed in the footsteps of his great grandfather Akbar. He befriended many eminent yogis and often consulted them on spiritual matters. He was thus trying to create a new synthesis between Hinduism and Islam. What is important is that it was attempted at the highest

political level. Had it succeeded, it would have given a new turn to Hindu-Muslim relations in India. However, fate willed otherwise.

III

The Hindu-Muslim conflict, as pointed out earlier, intensified with the coming of the British and the introduction of colonial economy and polity. The conflict arose on the political as well as the religious level. While the former was caused by the competition for power and economic resources between the elites of the two principal communities of India, the latter was mainly due to differences in theologizing between Hinduism and Islam, and also due to the process of each community eulogizing its past. To minimize the humiliation of both the communities at the hands of the colonial rulers, the Hindu and Muslim elites began to glorify and take pride in their respective pasts. Thus, the religious conflict surfaced to some extent.

However, it was not as if this religious and communal conflict pervaded all the sections of Hindus and Muslims. Even the elites were divided. There were those among Hindus and Muslims who were staunch secular nationalists. They were totally opposed to stressing religious differences and communal interests. They accorded top priority to driving out the British from this country. There were even religious leaders among them. In nineteenth century India, some *ulama*, led by Maulana Rashid Ahmed Gangohi took a nationalist stand and urged Muslims to fight the British colonialists shoulder to shoulder with their Hindu brethren. They even obtained *fatwas* (religious edicts) from the hundred most prominent *ulama* in India to that end and published them under the title *Nusrat al-Ahrar* (help for the freedom fighters). Bal Gangadhar Tilak, a conservative Hindu, took a staunchly rationalist stand and Maulana Hasrat Mohani, an eminent Urdu poet and an *alim*, greatly eulogized him for his nationalist commitment and for giving Indians the slogan "freedom is my birth-right." His many verses were full of praise for Tilak.

Throughout the freedom struggle, all Hindus and Muslims were divided between those who supported nationalism and those who endorsed communal demands. Eminent religious figures like Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad remained staunch nationalists throughout, and firmly opposed the creation of

Pakistan. They described Pakistan's creation as 'un-Islamic'. Maulana Azad argued that to call a country 'Pakistan' (holy land) is ridiculous, inasmuch as it implies that the rest of the land is not holy. How can a portion of the earth created by Allah be holy while the other is unholy? Maulana Madani, an eminent Muslim divine, argued that one must make a distinction between *qaum* (nation) and *millat* (religious community). *Qaum* can comprise different religious groups which can live in harmony with each other in a common territory, for *qaum* is a territorial and not a religious concept. He pointed out that according to the holy Quran, the *kuffar* (unbelievers) shared the same territory with the prophets of Allah. Thus there was no religious need to carve out a separate nation for the Muslims, as demanded by the Muslim League. All religious groups in general, and Hindus and Muslims in particular, could live together, sharing the same territory. Maulana Madani and other Muslim divines also pointed out that when the Prophet of Islam migrated to Medina from Mecca, he drew up a pact among the Jews, Pagans and Muslims and accorded to each group equal civil and religious rights. All were given full freedom to profess and practise their respective religions.

However, despite convincing religious arguments to the contrary, a section of the Hindu and Muslim elite could not reconcile their secular interests and India was territorially divided into India and Pakistan. But it should be clear from what is discussed above that it would not be wholly correct to argue that India was divided for religious reasons. It is more convincing to maintain that religion played a peripheral part in the whole controversy which revolved around communal demands – share in power and economic resources by Muslims – rather than religious incompatibility. Jinnah did emphasize the arguments about religious incompatibility between the Hindus and Muslims, but this incompatibility was more apparent than real. Had the communal demands been accepted, religious incompatibility would have hardly mattered. But people continue to believe that Islam is responsible for the division of the country. Jinnah's rhetoric has become reality for many people.

IV

There are serious problems between Hindus and Muslims in India today. Communal violence continues to recur. It is estimated that more than

15,000 big and small riots have taken place since independence. The wounds of partition have not healed; nor have other inter-religious controversies died down. Some of these controversies owe their origin to serious inter-religious misunderstandings. Communal stereotypes continue to persist. This is mainly for two reasons: complete absence of inter-faith dialogue, and the exploitation of people's ignorance about each other's religion by the politicians who base their victory in elections on communal propaganda and religious fanaticism. Both sides do it – Hindus as well as Muslims – with the Hindus, perhaps, overdoing it in Indian conditions. It is, therefore, very necessary to promote inter-religious dialogue between the two principal communities.

Here, we would like to throw some light on the most misunderstood aspects of these two religions, which can be the beginning of an inter-faith dialogue and a better appreciation of each other's religions. We would like to stress that a religion is nothing if not an ennobling experience. Though religion can – and does – degenerate into sectarian, narrow and blind faith, its foundational values – at least in the case of all the great religions – remain justice, mercy, compassion, non-violence and love. Different religions stress these values in different degrees, depending on the situation within which each religion arose. No religion – if by religion we mean higher spiritual ennobling experience – can promote hatred against others, except perhaps hatred against the wrong values, all those evils which harm or destroy life.

We should also learn to distinguish between the spiritual and philosophical aspects of religion and the empirical aspects involved with our worldly interests. If one examines the conflict carefully, it would be seen that the real clash is not with regard to the spiritual and philosophical aspects, but revolves around the empirical aspects involving worldly interests. There are differences among various religions, but these differences are more apparent than real; more empirical than spiritual. The empirical differences arise on account of different circumstances and different periods within which these religions took birth. Differences in ritual systems do not owe their origin to differences in higher spiritual experiences, but to empirical circumstances. The holy Quran also stresses this fact in a number of ways.

In verse 2:148 it is stressed that, "To each is a direction in which God turns him; then (rather than disputing about it) excel each other in

good deeds." The implication of this verse is clear; it is not the direction or way of prayer that matters; it is the race towards the good which is important in life. Commenting on this verse, Abdullah Yousuf Ali says, "The simile of life being a race in which we all zealously run forward to the one goal, viz., the goal of good, may be applied individually and nationally. This supplies another argument of Kaba Quibla, viz., the unity of goal, with diversity of races, traditions and temperaments."¹

The holy Quran also stresses the fact that the Prophet Muhammad has not come to preach any new truth but has come to confirm the truth which already exists. There are a number verses to this effect (2:41, 2:91, 2:97, 3:3, 3:50, 4:47, 5:46, 5:48, etc). It is thus clear that the Quran does not reject the religions which existed before Islam but confirms their truth. It also stresses the fact that if you follow your respective religions (Judaism, Christianity and others) truthfully, you are a true Muslim.

Further, as pointed out by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, "God is one: His truth is one: and this has been conveyed to man in different languages. But you accept one prophet and reject another. You accept the basic message in one place and reject the same message in another. In other words, you accept and reject one and same thing".² The Quran puts it in these words: "The apostle believeth in that which hath been sent down from his Lord, as do the faithful also. They all believe in God and His angels, and His books, and His apostles: we make no distinction between any of His apostles. And they say, 'We have heard and obey.....' "(2:285)

Thus it would be seen that Islam does not, as is often believed, preach monopoly of truth and the falsehood of other religions. In fact, it requires all humankind to show equal respect to all the prophets. All these prophets have brought the message of truth in the language spoken by the people among whom each one has been sent. Making it even more clear, the Quran says, "Verily We have revealed to thee as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him, and as We revealed to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and Jesus, and Job and Jonah, Aaron and Solomon; and to David gave We Psalms." (4:163)

All these prophets are the bearers of truth from Allah and thus deserve equal respect and no distinction should be made among them. It is true that the Quran has named only Semitic prophets and there is

no mention of (non-Semitic) prophets in general, and the Indian religious thinkers and sages, in particular. But not mentioning Indian prophets is for empirical rather than ideological reasons. The Quran was addressed to the semitic locals. They knew only about the prophets of Semitic origin. The idea was to illustrate a principle rather than mention all the prophets — Semitic and non-Semitic. Even all the Semitic prophets have not been mentioned. Muslims believe that there have been in all 1,24,000 prophets, of whom only a few have been mentioned by name in the Quran.

The *ulama* adopted a rather constricted view of religion. It must be remembered that sectarianism and fanaticism are psychological rather than religious phenomena. Fanaticism depends on one's psychological dispensation rather than religious need. Also, the belief in the monopoly of religious truth is more often a result of leadership interests. It is these interests which often induce a person to adopt a narrow sectarian approach. These observations are as much true of secular as of religious ideologies. Sectarianism and fanaticism should not be ascribed to religion. Many rationalists make this mistake.

The *ulama* were connected with religious establishments and wanted to be in command of these establishments. These interests led them to adopt a more sectarian approach. They often urged the Muslim masses to follow 'pure' Islam, divested of all Indian and Hindu influences. They do so even today. However, the Sufi saints, not aspiring to be in command of any religious establishment, adopted a more tolerant and liberal attitude. They showed great respect for Hindu rituals and concepts. The *ulama* generally condemned Hindus as polytheists, idol worshippers and *kafirs*. *Kafir* – disbeliever — was considered a humiliating term by the Hindus. However, the Sufi saints did not describe the Hindus as *kafirs*. Idol worship was not considered by them to be an essential part of the Hindu religion. It was thought to be a popular manifestation of that great religion which gave the world the Vedas, Vedanta and the Upanishads.

The Sufis also believed the Vedas to be revealed books. The eighteenth century Sufi, Jani Janan, compared Brahma with Adam, the first prophet of Islam. He also held that Ram and Krishna, the highly venerated religious personalities from India, might have been prophets of God, as God has sent Prophets among all the people and in their own

languages. The Sufis generally did not condemn idol worship. They — at least some of them — rationalized it by maintaining that it was not the idol which was being worshipped but God, the idol being merely a medium. They also pointed out that certain schools of Hindu religious thought hold God to be *nirgun* and *nirakar* (without attributes and shape). How could they then be condemned as *kafirs*?

Maulana Hasrat Mohani, a Sufi poet of the twentieth century, and a freedom fighter, was a great admirer of Lord Krishna. He religiously visited Brindaban every year on Janmashtami (the birth anniversary of Lord Krishna). Hasrat Mohani was a fastidious Muslim, offering Islamic prayers regularly, fasting and performing *hajj* — he was also quite amenable to having a dialogue with Hinduism. It is this model of Islam which must be encouraged. The *ulama* model is more formal and legalistic. It demands imposition of *shariah* in a mechanical rather than a spiritual sense. The Sufis also followed *shairah* but in the spiritual sense.

The *ulama* model of Islam is rather closed and tends to be sectarian, whereas the Sufi model of Islam is open, tolerant and admits of diversity in theological traditions. Most of the Sufis in India subscribed to the doctrine of *wahdat al-wajud* (unity of being) which was, in many ways, a revolutionary doctrine. According to this doctrine, the Real Being is one and we are His manifestations. Thus, all human beings, irrespective of race, caste or creed, are His manifestations, and no distinction can be made between people on these grounds. This doctrine thus led to development of liberal theology. This liberal Sufi theology is dialogic, unlike the *ulamas'* theology which is intolerant and monologic. What is needed in the Indian situation today is to promote dialogical theology which appreciates pluralism and variety, that believes that though truth is one, its manifestations could be many.

Muslims are neither rulers nor subjects in India today. They live in a democratic secular set-up. The traditional theology cannot respond to such a situation. A creative approach is the only answer to this need. No theology, if it is to be realistically understood, can be divested of its context. Also, theology, if it is to be relevant, has to be a judicious mixture of the transcendental and the contextual. This applies to Quranic pronouncements also. The traditional theology was partly, if not wholly, contextual, and needs to be seen in the new context in India. If this approach is adopted, ways will be found for more harmonious

coexistence with other religious communities, particularly the Hindus. The traditional *ulama* may not respond to the new situation easily. This task will have to be undertaken by the modern intellectuals among Muslims.

But the difficulty here is that these intellectuals do not wield as much influence as the *ulama* do among the poor and illiterate Muslim masses. However difficult the task may be, it will have to be undertaken in the interest of religious peace and harmony. India should not be treated only as a land of problems for Muslims; it is also a land of opportunities and new challenges. The challenge posed by Allah in the Quran – to live in peace and harmony in a pluralist context as it is not Allah's desire to create only one religious community (5:48) – has to be taken seriously by Indian Muslims and this cannot be done without rethinking traditional theology. Even Sufi theology may not be the final answer, as many new challenges have emerged in the present context. It is the Sufi *approach*, rather than the Sufi *theology*, that we must learn to adopt.

India and Religious Culture Today – A Critical View

It is almost commonplace to suggest that religion and religious culture form the core of Indian society. No one can dispense with them. Rationalists and atheists, whatever their significance, are a minuscule minority in India. They are, in fact, an insignificant minority anywhere in the world, except perhaps in some of the erstwhile socialist countries.

Religion in India undoubtedly plays an important role, not only in the social but also in the political sphere. Religion, in fact, is all-pervasive as far as India is concerned. It was believed that religion would play a progressively less significant role – at least in public life – with the spread of scientific and technological education. But this has not happened. Also, our commitment to secularism required that religion be confined to one's private sphere and that public life remain uninfluenced by it. This, too, has not come to be. Not only that, religion has been acquiring an increasingly greater role in public life, if we honestly and critically examine the political vicissitudes in India. Can we, therefore, conclude that the Nehruvian vision has come to naught and that the country has surrendered to obscurantist forces? In my opinion, this would be a rather hasty conclusion.

Religion and Society

India is a multi-religious and multi-cultural society and religion is a fact of life. Rationalists and atheists reject religion. This rejection is a personal and ideological fact, not a social fact conforming to objective reality. Secularists and rationalists often confuse ideological fact with social fact. These are, however, two different categories and must not be mixed up. Religion is not only a force to be reckoned with, but it is

going to remain all-pervasive for quite some time to come. This should not cause despair – what should be a cause for despair is the political use and abuse of religion.

It should also be remembered that when religion is socially so pervasive it is bound to influence our political life too. Politicians do not – and cannot be expected to – stop short of using any means which can help them come to power or acquire greater influence with the people. It would be political naivete to believe otherwise. The Nehruvian vision is, of course, quite valid and valuable, but as pointed out earlier, in an ideological sense. We also have to bear in mind that in Indian conditions, religion has to be seen in a secular perspective. The latter proposition, though difficult to swallow, has much greater social validity in India today.

Religion, in Indian conditions, has been an ally of the status quo, an active agent to make life passive, a forceful command to demand submissiveness, a spiritual solace in times of inner unsettlement, an ecstasy to overcome the agonies of life. This role of religion cannot be reversed unless the objective conditions are rapidly restructured. In fact, going by the present political and socio-economic trends, the prevailing conditions are being reinforced, and religion and religious forces are being used with even greater vigour to strengthen the status quo. Religion, therefore, tends to be more superstitious and obscurantist.

Religion and Ideology

I would like to stress here – and it is more important from the viewpoint of our subject – that religion *by itself* is neither superstitious nor obscurantist; it is social conditions which make it so. For this, one needs to study both the sociology and politics of religion. The understanding and function of religion depend on the social class as also on political interests. The lower a class in the social hierarchy, the more superstitious and obscurantist religion tends to be. For the poorer peasantry, religion tends to be purely ritualistic and superstitious. For the urban working classes, its understanding, on the other hand, would vary with their class consciousness. Also, for the urban middle class, religion tends to be less 'religious' and more 'ideological', it is accepted not so much in the spiritual and ethical sense, but in a political, ideological sense. The best examples of this are organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Jamat-e-Islami, Akali Dal. Except the

Akali Dal, which draws its support mainly from the rich Jat Sikh peasantry in Punjab, these organizations draw their strength from the urban middle classes or petty urban merchants.

The cadres and the supporters of these organizations are neither spiritual nor religious in the sense of following their respective religious or spiritual practices. Many of them may not have even visited places of worship for the purpose of worshipping; yet they seem to be determined to protect their secular interests through religious means, i.e., religion is used as a political ideology. Pakistan was not conceived to be a theocratic state by Jinnah, who was a secular person and could not care less for religion. Yet he used religion as a powerful ideology to create the separate state of Pakistan. And, as pointed out by a noted Pakistani sociologist, Hamza Alavi, Jinnah drew full support in his endeavour from the urban Muslim *salarial* classes. The movement for Khalistan too, hardly differs from this in its genesis. The movement's leadership is partly drawn from the rich peasantry but its main support comes from the urban middle class youth of Punjab.

The RSS and the VHP too aspire to establish the Hindu *rashtra* in India. The ideology of the Hindu *rashtra* has powerful appeal for the urban Hindu middle classes and petty merchants. The leadership also is derived mostly from the classes. The leadership, I would like to emphasize, hardly tends to be superstitious or obscurantist. Veer Savarkar, the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, was as secular and modernist as Jinnah. This close parallel between Savarkar and Jinnah is not without significance. Both advocated modern reforms which fulfilled the aspirations of the modern urban middle classes which came into existence with the introduction of British rule. They hardly bothered to improve the lot of the downtrodden sections of their co-religionists. Savarkar was not bothered about the lot of the Dalits, nor was Jinnah concerned about the *ajlaf* (low caste Muslims).

Religion and the Upper Castes

In the Indian situation, religion and religious culture cannot be understood without reference to the caste system, whether it is the Hindu, Sikh, Christian or Muslim religion. The main problem in this regard lies, of course, with the Hindu religion and culture. Caste is all-pervasive as far as the Hindu religion and Hindu culture are concerned. It was Mahatma Phule and B.R. Ambedkar who strongly protested against

upper caste religious, cultural and social hegemony and tried to create a counter-culture. However, they had little hope of succeeding within the framework of Hinduism. Hence the former opted for the secular alternative and the latter for the Buddhist one.

No doubt, Phule and Ambedkar provided an intellectual and ideological perspective for the fight against upper caste domination. Caste consciousness and awareness among the Dalits is increasing. They are forming their own political parties like the Bahujan Samaj Party or Bhartiya Shoshit Party. Apart from this, numerous Dalit groups are active and Dalit literature in different Indian languages is being created. It is no longer possible to ignore their literary and political protests. The upper caste hegemony is being most effectively challenged. Brahminical cultural domination is facing a real crisis of unprecedented dimensions.

Religion as Legitimizing the Ideology of Domination

Religion in contemporary India is being used, and has always been used, as an ideology for legitimizing domination. The upper caste domination in a religious cultural milieu is part of this process. When protest movements by the oppressed and the dominated thrive, religion is increasingly used as a legitimizing tool. A new religio-cultural ethos is sought to be generated. The surging revival of religion and of fundamentalist movements must be seen in this light. The dominant classes use religion to delegitimize the protest.

The process of change creates its own strains and stresses, as the old dominant classes are replaced by the new dominant classes and new traditions take the place of the old. Needless to say, the old dominant classes will not give up without a fight and in this fight religion becomes the most powerful instrument, as the upper caste try to revive religion to retain or regain their hegemony.

However, the development process in a developing country has complexities of its own. It is not only a threat to the traditional leadership, it also causes problems to the emerging hegemony of the capitalist class. In a developing country like India, the capitalist class finds it difficult to fully consolidate its position. It faces a constant threat to its own leadership from the oppressed, for they cannot be co-opted into the system. The bourgeoisie therefore does not feel safe, and resorts, like the traditional leadership, to revival of religion to protect its interests.

The transitional period thus throws challenges of its own, and both

the old as well as the new leadership have to resort to fundamentalism for reasons of their own. Religion finds political sustenance of its own, as each category of leadership needs it for legitimation of its domination. In this developing situation, there is one more factor which tends to strengthen the role of religious revival. In many cases, the protest against domination also tends to assume a religious form. The oppressed too seek to realize their ambitions through the mediation of religion. A significant section of the oppressed, if not the class as a whole, seeks upward mobilization through religion. This further strengthens fundamentalist tendencies in the society, as both the oppressed as well as the oppressor use it as a legitimizing source of their own position.

This is what lends strength to fundamentalism or religious revivalism. All use the same idiom as a source of legitimation; the oppressor – including the traditional as well as the newly emergent leadership – as much as the oppressed. Fundamentalism thus gets triply reinforced in the given social situation. No section of society, the dominant as well as the dominated, the oppressor as well as the oppressed, can ignore religion.

Religion as an Effective Instrument of the Oppressed

As far as the oppressed are concerned, religion has so far been nothing more than a source of solace and reconciliation with their fate. If, however, religion is to be transformed from a source of mere solace to an inspirer of struggle, from tears of despair to the sparks of hope, there will have to be a rethinking of the traditional theology. Each religion will have to be brought nearer to the primordial experience of its founder, be it the Buddha, Christ, Muhammad or Nanak. Religion will have to be transformed from a stabilizer to a subversive force and that is what it was in its primordial form. Moses challenged and subverted the Pharaoh's powerful establishment; Christ fought against the Pharisees and supporters of the rich; the Buddha challenged the supremacy of Brahmins; Muhammad threw the gauntlet to the rich merchants of Mecca and demolished their domination over society; Nanak struggled against the hypocritical outward piety of the elites.

In other words, the founders of these great religions threw their lot with the oppressed and the poor, and struggled and suffered for them. However, the 'official theologies' of these religions came into existence when they were turned into powerful Establishments, or became allies

of the Establishment, and hence these theologies were totally oblivious of their primordial subversive element. These theologies thus gave birth to cultures of the elite, cultures which glorified 'excellence' at the cost of others' toil. Such a culture was naturally a culture of domination, not of humanization. The humanizing elements of religion were lost in the darkness of the oppressive cultures which thus came into existence.

It is therefore necessary to reemphasize these humanizing elements which were an integral part of the original religious experience of the founders, in order to bring a new, more humane and more creative culture into existence. Today's religious revival is completely devoid of these humanizing elements in religion. What is being revived instead, is its hollow formalism, the rituals and rules which have long since lost their relevance.

Religion as Dialogue

Religion has been monologic, as it has been the religion of the oppressors, or of theologians who have lost the transcendental dimension. A religion, in order to be humane and creative, has to be dialogic. It must enter into dialogue with other religions. A monologic theology is more likely to express itself through an elitist culture, rather than through the people's culture. People at the grassroots are integrated, despite being followers of different religions. They share the same cultural values and ethos. An elitist culture tends to become moribund after its initial creative and dynamic phase. The values of the elitist culture soon lose their relevance and hence tend to degenerate, whereas the values of people's culture remain ever alive as they draw sustenance from their unceasing struggle.

A monologic religion is based, more often than not, on speculative theologizing, whereas the religion which is in dialogue with others never divorces itself from the realities of life and remains ever prepared for learning from others' religious experience. Its theologizing takes cognizance of religio-cultural pluralism.

Religion and Communalism

It is fundamentalist and monologic religion which provides sustenance to communalism. Fundamentalism is always monologic and hates dialogue. It is for this reason that religions in India today have ignored dialogue, which is so essential in a pluralistic society. Harmony in a

pluralistic society depends on an ongoing dialogue between various religions and cultures. It is therefore highly necessary in contemporary India to encourage, as much as possible, the process of inter-religious dialogue.

Communalism has emerged as a great menace, not only to pluralism and diversity, but to the very existence of our country. The country cannot remain united if pluralism and diversity are threatened. And, it must be clearly understood, pluralism and diversity cannot be sustained without inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. Also, it is not only theologians who should enter into dialogue, but people at the grassroots also. This is necessary to counter the rise of fundamentalism which is unfortunately breeding more exclusiveness and creating the feeling of 'we' and 'they' among different sections of people. A creative religion or culture draws sustenance from the vitality of the people. Powerful vested interests are working hard to promote mutual exclusiveness as it greatly benefits them. This exclusiveness, which ultimately results in communal hatred, can be broken only through mutual dialogue.

Education and Culture

Much can be achieved through the process of education. However, education — as Herbert Marcuse, the noted American radical philosopher, has so aptly put it — should encourage cognition, not recognition, knowledge and not acknowledgement. It is a regrettable fact that our universities, colleges and schools have become centres of 'recognition and acknowledgement' and hardly encourage either the process of cognition or the acquisition of real knowledge.

This happens when education is controlled by the supporters of the status quo. They only desire recognition of their power and hegemony. Any process of knowledge which threatens this hegemony is put down as a serious heresy and strongly denounced. There are several examples of this. The controversy over Dr. Ambedkar's *Riddles of Hinduism* is a good example. Ambedkar refused to recognize Ram and Krishna as traditional Hindu theology projects them, but took a critical view of them on the basis of the texts of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. However, there was a great furore over this in Maharashtra and the Maratha Mahasangh and the Shiv Sena compelled the state government to withdraw the book or delete the controversial portion from it. This was because it threatened the hegemony of the upper castes and of Brahminic culture.

Real education and promotion of intellectual faculties is not possible so long as education remains merely recognition. Knowledge cannot thrive until it becomes subversive of the status quo, and creative culture cannot thrive under the shadow of domination. Our education will have to change its orientation and encourage the critical and creative faculties. The vitality of the system depends on these faculties. The new education policy recently discussed in the media is far from achieving these objectives. It is hardly conducive to promotion of critical and creative thinking.

For our education to succeed, firstly, it must encourage liberalism and tolerance. Our textbooks today, far from doing this, encourage intolerance and bigotry. All those who wish to promote modern and secular values must fight against these utterly harmful textbooks and get them removed from the course at various levels. Distortion of history is the result of communal bigotry. Efforts will have to be made to design textbooks on history, on comparative religion and similar other subjects, which would be conducive to the creation of a liberal and secular climate in our society.

Secondly, the education system should be such as to encourage critical evaluation of the prevailing traditions and values. We generally imbibe what is, but refrain, under social pressure, from positing what *ought to be*. Most of us feel shy of resisting social pressures and succumb to such pressures, more often than not. Many of us have the conviction, but most of us lack the courage of our conviction. The education system should, therefore encourage 'courage'. Though courage is an inborn quality, it can at least be promoted as a value, if not as a personal trait.

Thirdly, the education system should be designed to promote respect for other religions and religious beliefs. It has been said at the beginning of this paper that one can see religion in a secular perspective or secularism in a religious perspective. In Indian conditions, one will have to adopt – tactically, if not ideologically – the latter perspective. This perspective encourages equal respect for all religions, rather than rejection of religion. Secularism as an ideology may not be acceptable to all, but most would tend to accept it as a *modus vivendi* in a pluralist society like India. I should make it clear here that equal respect for all religions should also include respect for a strictly secular viewpoint.

India today is passing through a very critical phase. It is facing an

acute socio-economic crisis, on the one hand, and a grave political crisis on the other. However, one should neither be panicky nor despondent about this. Nations do pass through such phases. What is needed in these circumstances, is intellectual honesty and moral courage. Given these qualities, the rot can certainly be stopped. These sterling qualities can be effectively promoted only through the education system. It is true that the education system today is controlled by those who are responsible for the rot. But theoretically speaking, our universities are fairly autonomous. If the academics themselves assert this autonomy and resist pressures from the powers that be, much can be achieved. It is therefore equally necessary to critically evaluate the role of academics themselves before we lift our fingers towards politicians.

The very architects of the education system must practise the virtues they wish to preach through it.

As far as my knowledge and experience go, our education system has an important role to play in combating communalism. However, the present system is quite ill-equipped to carry out this task. There are two factors to be considered here. First, the calibre of the teachers, specially at the primary and secondary levels, and second, the quality of the reading material itself. Both these factors are quite important.

The teachers at the primary and secondary levels themselves have a conservative outlook and are of poor calibre. There are many reasons for this. Also, the government does hardly anything to train them thoroughly in developing a secular outlook and secular values once they are recruited. It is highly necessary to impart such training to them, specially because our primary and secondary level teachers generally come from lower middle class backgrounds and the milieu in lower middle class families tends to be highly conservative, and what is worse, completely deprived of liberal values. Tolerance towards other religions or of other points of view is hardly admired in such a milieu.

In my opinion, it is as important to impart thorough training in the liberal secular outlook to teachers at the primary and secondary levels, as it is to prepare good textbooks incorporating these values. There is some talk among liberals about preparation of good textbooks, but there is hardly any emphasis on imparting training to teachers on secular and liberal lines. Presently, the training imparted to teachers is merely along professional lines, which is quite inadequate. Even if we have good

textbooks, it would not help if teachers remain conservative and orthodox. After all, the textbooks are cold letters in print. It is a teacher who makes these letters come alive with her approach.

It is highly regrettable that this is not being seriously considered by those in charge of the education system. It is high time those of us who are conscious of all this started mounting pressure on state governments for arranging such training for teachers and giving them suitable incentives for acquiring this training. Education, after all, is the lifeline for the reconstruction of Indian society.

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Chapter 1

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6. See Asghar Ali Engineer, ed., *Ethnic Conflict in South Asia* (Delhi, 1987), section on Pakistan.

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
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5. See *Constitution of India* (as modified up to 1 February 1977), (Delhi, 1984), p. 11.
6. See The Supreme Court Judgement of Criminal Appellate Jurisdiction, Criminal Appeal no. 103 of 1981, New Delhi, 23 April 1985.
7. For a detailed account of the movement, see Asghar Ali Engineer, ed., *The Shah Bano Controversy* (Bombay, 1987).
8. *The Shah Bano Controversy*, pp. 85-88; also see *Indian Express*, 7 May 1986.
9. For details of this controversy, see Asghar Ali Engineer, ed., *The Babri Masjid-Ramjanambhoomi Controversy* (Delhi, 1990).
10. See Asghar Ali Engineer, ed., *Delhi-Meerut Riots* (Delhi, 1988).
11. The PAC has been notorious for its anti-Muslim bias, which it displays in every riot situation in Uttar Pradesh. Its counterpart in Bihar, the BMP (Bihar Military Police) displays a similar anti-Muslim bias.

12. See Press Release issued by Amnesty International, no. AI index ASA, 20 August 1987.
13. For details of these riots, see Asghar Ali Engineer, ed., *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India* (Bombay, 1984).
14. Asghar Ali Engineer, *Bhiwandi-Bombay Riots* (Bombay, 1984).
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16. For further analysis, see Asghar Ali Engineer, *Communalism and Communal Violence in India – An Analytical Approach to Hindu-Muslim Conflict* (Delhi, 1989) pp. 60-87.
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19. See Judgement of District Judge, Faizabad, as quoted in Syed Shahabuddin, ed., *Muslim India*, March 1986.
20. See *The Times of India*, Bombay, 9 January 1987.
21. *The Times of India*, Bombay, 25 January 1987.
22. See Asghar Ali Engineer, ed., *Delhi – Meerut Riots* (Delhi, 1987).

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RAMJANAMBHOOMI, KARSEVA AND COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

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2. See *The Times of India*, Bombay, 18 December 1990.

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