

janata

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Way to Socialism through Socialist Unity

Prem Singh

This comment is about the situation that has arisen after the split in Janata Dal (United). The comment is made by me as a citizen with a socialist background, and not as a member of the Socialist Party (India). The National Election Commission of India has decided in favour of Nitish Kumar's faction on the party symbol dispute. The Sharad faction, however, has petitioned the High Court challenging the decision of NECI but is simultaneously engaged in an exercise of forming a new party. It is very likely that soon another 'Janata' outfit will be born from this exercise.

After the split in the Janata Party in 1979, most political outfits formed from time to time by various socialist leaders of mainstream politics retained the word *janata* while naming or renaming their parties. This includes Chandra Shekhar [Samajwadi Janata Party (Rashtriya)] and Surendra Mohan (Socialist Janata Party). The only exception was Samajwadi Party (SP) formed by Mulayam Singh Yadav in UP in 1992.

The Socialist Party was merged into the Janata Party in 1977, and thus lost its original glory and national image. It would be interesting to analyse why and how the word *janata* still continues to haunt socialists! When Surendra Mohan parted ways with JDS, I had a discussion with him about the name of the new party he was planning to form. I tried to convince him that the word *janata* should be avoided and the original name of the Socialist Party of 1977 should be revived and strengthened. That would have certainly helped in regaining the lost glory and national status of the original party in the long run. But he was not convinced with my arguments and named his new Janata Party with the prefix 'socialist'.

Recently M.P. Veerendra Kumar, who resigned from the Rajya Sabha a few days ago, has given indications of reviving his old party, the Socialist Janata (Democratic) Party.

In this connection I would like to forward a suggestion to the Sharad faction, M.P. Veerendra Kumar

particularly, and individual socialists in general. Forming another leader-based state-level 'janata party/dal' with a 'samajwadi' prefix or suffix will contribute little in the direction of much needed socialism and socialist unity. It will be more appropriate if they join the Socialist Party (India) and take up its leadership. The Socialist Party was revived as Socialist Party (India) in 2011 in Hyderabad in a two-day foundation conference by several senior and young socialist groups/leaders after holding country-wide meetings/discussions at the initiative of Surendra Mohan and Justice Rajindar Sachar. The foundation conference was attended by around 600 delegates from 19 states. The SPI was formed to creatively carry forward the inheritance of the Indian socialist movement and ideology propagated by its leaders and thinkers such as Acharya Narendra Dev, Jai Prakash Narayan, Dr. Rammanohar Lohia, S.M. Joshi, Yusuf Meharally, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya, Kishan Patnayak and other genuine socialist leaders. The Samajwadi Yuvjan Sabha (SYS), youth wing of the Socialist Party, was also formed simultaneously as Socialist Yuvjan Sabha.

The sole aim of the SPI and SYS is to provide an elaborate alternative political ideology to counter and replace the nexus of neoliberal and communal forces. The party, through its varied programs, is trying to create a space for socialist politics at the national level with its limited resources. This uphill task/responsibility should be shared by all those socialists who really believe in the socialist legacy. If the Sharad

faction and M.P. Veerendra Kumar decide to join Socialist Party (India), several socialist individuals/groups will also join. Workers and leaders who feel suffocated in dynasty-based state-level parties may then also come forward to join the SPI. The party can be renamed as Indian National Socialist Party (Bharatiya Rashtriya Socialist Party) or Socialist Party of India (Bharatiya Socialist Party).

I would further suggest that persons like Dr. G.G. Parikh, H. Hanumanthappa, Kuldip Nayar, S.P. Shukla, Michel Fernandez, Dr. Sunilam, Subhash Ware, Suresh Khairnar, Dr. Raj Kumar Jain, Qurban Ali, Dr. D. Sreekumar, Ravikiran Jain, Surendra Kumar,

Vijay Pratap, Subhash Bhatnagar and many other concerned socialists should take initiatives in this direction. Friends of small parties, who participated in the unity meeting held at Tara, Mumbai and later in SPI's national executive committee meeting held at Delhi, should also speed up their efforts. They are Prabodh C. Sinha (Socialist Democratic Party), Brajkishore Tripathi (Samata Kranti Dal), Arun Kumar Srivastav (JDU) and Manju Mohan (Socialist Janata Party), as well as representatives of Socialist Party (Lohia) and Loktantrik Samajwadi Party. Incidentally, senior SPI leaders Bhai Vaidya, Pannalal Surana and Justice Rajindar Sachar have already started dialogue with leaders of the Sharad faction and M.P. Veerendra Kumar.

Prof Shyam Dutt Paliwal

Socialists and activists associated with JP movement of the 1970s condoled the death of veteran socialist leader and thinker Prof Shyam Dutt Paliwal, who died in a Noida hospital on Wednesday. He was 87.

Paliwal was arrested during the 1975 emergency and was an accused in the Baroda Dynamite case (in which George Fernandes was allegedly involved in overthrowing the then Indira Gandhi government).

He won the 1977 Vidhan Sabha election and represented the Agra rural (Dayalbagh constituency) on Janata Party ticket. Former minister in the Chandra Shekhar government Ram ji Lal Suman, said "Paliwal inspired a whole generation of young leaders in the 1970s.

Janata
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BJP Routed in Uttar Pradesh Urban Local Body Elections

Sandeep Pandey

On 2nd December 2017 most newspapers flashed a front page story that Bhartiya Janata Party had swept the urban local bodies' elections. It was accompanied with pictures of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath offering sweets to one of his deputy CMs or the state BJP President and all of them displaying victory signs.

Nothing could be farther from truth. BJP has actually been routed in these elections, having managed to win mere 18.7% of the seats, whereas the opposition, especially independent candidates, has come out with flying colours. In fact if independents were considered a party, they have got a thumping majority in these elections.

The only category in which BJP has done well is the post of the Mayor. Out of 16 Mayoral positions they have captured 14. But that is the beginning and end of their success story. There is nothing unusual about the BJP winning a majority of the Mayoral posts. Big cities have been BJP strongholds for a long time now. It would have been surprising if they would not have won so many seats. But in every other category of elected positions other than Mayor's post, the opposition has decimated the BJP. The details are revealing.

For the post of Corporators in 16 Municipal Corporations, BJP has won 596 seats while the opposition has taken away 703. The Samajwadi Party (SP) has got 202 seats whereas the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has won 147 seats.

For the post of Chairperson of Nagar Palika Parishad, while BJP has managed to win 70 posts, the combined opposition has won 128 posts. SP has 45 and BSP 29 chairpersons of NPP. When it comes to members for Nagar Palika Parishads, BJP with merely 922 seats stands nowhere close to 3,380 independents. The combined opposition has got 4,338 members. The SP has 477 members and BSP 262. Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has managed to win 17 seats in this category.

There are more independent Chairpersons of Nagar Panchayats than belonging to any single party. Their number is 182. The BJP has managed to win 100 positions, but more than three times this number, 338 positions, are occupied by the opposition. SP is not very far behind BJP with 83 positions, while BSP has about half that of BJP, 45 positions. Even AAP will have 2 persons chairing the Nagar Panchayats. If we look at members of Nagar Panchayats, again 3,875 independents clearly represent the people's mood. BJP could manage merely 664 seats. SP with 453 seats closely follows behind.

Thus out of a total of 12,644 positions, non-BJP representatives hold 10,278!

If anybody can claim to have swept the elections, it is the Independents who have a whopping share of 61% of all seats.

So, the question is why is the

media gung-ho about an imagined BJP victory? What are its compulsions? Has it been managed so that UP urban local bodies election results don't have an adverse impact on the forthcoming Gujarat elections? Except for the Mayor's post in big cities, people have decisively rejected the BJP as a party in spite of it spending many times more money than all the other parties. The BJP Chief Minister himself led the BJP election campaign from the front, addressing numerous election meetings. On the other hand, Akhilesh Yadav and Mayawati chose to keep themselves out of campaigning, leaving it to local leaders and workers.

Quite clearly the charisma of Narendra Modi and Yogi Adityanath failed to fetch votes, contrary to what is being claimed. The economy has been badly hit and the mood among people is that of despair. Common people are quite badly hurt by the decision of BJP government to implement demonetisation and Goods and Services Tax; businesses have suffered greatly. People have lost jobs and income levels have dropped. Whether it is the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan for which everybody has to pay extra cess, or the Ujjawala scheme where the connection is free but there is no subsidy for the poor on gas cylinders for cooking, people are feeling the pinch. With no demonstrable benefits, people have a feeling of having been taken for a ride or being treated like culprits with authorities breathing down their necks. In such a situation it would have been really surprising had the

people handed over a convincing victory to the BJP.

BJP rode to power on the basis of a high profile media and advertisement campaign, and it continues to use the same tool to hoodwink people. The media has been made to fall in line; it has given up its role of being an independent agency and holding the government accountable for its lapses, and instead meekly toes the government line, or worse, toes the ruling party's line. This is dangerous for democracy.

The media is part of the conspiracy to keep an unpopular anti-people party in power by swaying the public opinion. It is a great disservice to the people. All the people cannot be fooled all the time. The sheen of the government created by media is now beginning to fade. Government is finding hard to maintain its credibility, nationally and internationally. Contrary to media stories, international standing of India has gone down under the Modi regime in spite of him having made numerous foreign forays. India's relationships with bigger countries like the United States, China and Pakistan have worsened, while the smaller neighbours like Nepal and Maldives don't trust India.

While not taking any concrete steps to control deaths of children in Gorakhpur Medical College hospital, the CM Yogi Adityanath has been giving more time and importance to religious issues. Ayodhya is back in focus although it is not clear how a grand temple in Ayodhya is going to help common people overcome their sufferings. When the government doesn't have anything concrete to offer to people, it relies on politics of symbolism and media blitzkrieg.

No Alternative to Dynastic Rule

Kuldip Nayar

THERE is no surprise. It was well known that the Congress Party is hopelessly dependent on the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. Elevation of Rahul Gandhi to the post of Congress president was along the expected lines. But Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar has given another dimension to the happening. He has likened Rahul's succession to the Mughal dynasty. He says that the king's son would always be the king.

Whatever be the declaration of the party, it is essentially nothing but a dynastic show. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru groomed his daughter Indira Gandhi to the position. At the Congress Working Committee where the then party president U.N. Dhebar proposed Indira Gandhi's name, Home Minister G.B. Pant had stated that she should not be bothered as she did not enjoy good health. Nehru objected to his remark and said that Indira was far better in health than he and Pant were. Indira was then elected as the party president.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi did not even need to argue. She straightaway put her son, Rahul Gandhi, in the chair. There was a rumour that she would name her daughter, Priyanka Vadra, because Rahul Gandhi was not selling in any way. But then the Italians, like Indians, prefer the son to daughter for inheritance.

Celebrating Rahul Gandhi's elevation, Congress leader Jyotiraditya Scindia said that it was the beginning of a new era. Senior

Congress leader Digvijay Singh said that the issue of Rahul's elevation had to be decided by party president Sonia Gandhi and the Congress Working Committee. Even otherwise, he said, the grassroots Congress workers wanted the elevation to happen: "Yes, this is the common feeling among grassroots workers." But one could read Digvijay Singh's disappointment.

In fact, the party would now run from 10 Janpath as it was done from the Teen Murti or Safdarjung residences of Nehru and Indira Gandhi during their tenure. Even otherwise, it was Sonia Gandhi who was reigning when Dr Manmohan Singh was installed as Prime Minister. I was a witness to the drama at the central hall of parliament when members of the party wept that Sonia Gandhi should be the Prime Minister. But she kept quiet because Sonia had her son in mind. And if she were to become Prime Minister at that time, it would have looked like a stage-managed drama.

Even Dr Manmohan Singh had on occasions said that he would be too happy to vacate the chair for Rahul Gandhi as and when he was ready to take over and that he was keeping the chair warm for him. Though it was coming for quite a while, particularly with Sonia Gandhi keeping an indifferent health, Rahul taking over the party reign was inevitable.

Rahul Gandhi has already made secularism as the Congress plank.

The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) may not own Hindutva in public but it is all clear that the party would fight the next election in 2019 on the slogan of Hindutva alone. Prime Minister Narendra Modi makes no secret of the fact that he visits Nagpur, the RSS headquarters, and seeks guidance from leaders like Mohan Bhagwat. His slogan of *sab ka saath, sab ka vikas* has proved to be a mere slogan.

One can see that Muslims do not count in his scheme of things. The landslide victory in the Uttar Pradesh assembly polls is proof of how the BJP captured power in the state. It was clear that the party wanted the people to know that it was not in any way dependent on the Muslim electorate.

This is bound to be underlined yet again in Gujarat, where the state is going to polls later this month. And Modi is making it clear that the one who wins Gujarat would win India in the next general election. The whirlwind campaigning by Modi is already raising the question whether he is staking too much in the Gujarat assembly polls. Maybe it is because of the Patidars joining hands with the Congress in the state to fight the BJP, with the youth who want a change supporting them.

So far the record of Rahul Gandhi has not been impressive from any point of view. He has fought many elections, including UP, where he aligned with Akhilesh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party. But this did not help and the Congress lost miserably, reduced to the fourth position. Now he has to prove his popularity in the coming Gujarat election. If he fails, it would come to be known that he cannot win on his own.

It is surprising that Rahul Gandhi is defending the dynasty factor. He says that all parties are dependent on it, citing the examples of Punjab, UP, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. But what he forgets is that in all these states the parties have been coming to power alternatively. Can he, or for that matter the Congress, win a majority to form the government at the Centre? He will have to work hard if he wants the Congress to be in power. At present he doesn't seem to have the pulling power. But the scene can change.

We have witnessed Indira Gandhi, who was called a *goonghi gudia* (mute doll), becoming the

Prime Minister and within a short time period taking on the entire opposition. Even her son, Rajiv Gandhi, who was foisted upon the nation by President Gyani Zail Singh, was accepted. There is no reason why Rahul Gandhi would not come to be acknowledged.

But then it will depend on how he is able to lead and help the party win elections. At this time it looks difficult because secularism has been pushed into the background. A kind of soft-Hindutva has spread all over the country. It is a pity that a country which fought for freedom on the plank of pluralism has not been able to follow the ethos of independence.

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Demolition

Demolition of Babri Masjid on 6th December 1992

Qurban Ali

quite evident that they were on their way to demolish the disputed mosque. After all, they had been feverishly practicing and rehearsing the demolition for days. The *Kar Sewaks* came prepared and equipped with all the logistics needed to demolish the enduring 460-year-old structure of the Mughal era.

Revisiting decisive moments of your life is always a cathartic experience. Even then, I have always avoided writing about the day of 6th December 1992, which brings back a series of haunting memories that I would rather not revisit. However, recently when some of my journalist friends asked me to write down my memories of that tragic day and asked me how I felt as a journalist at that time, I decided to share the story as I had witnessed it 25 years ago.

I was working for the Hindi *Sunday Observer* at that time and was also a stringer for the BBC. BBC Hindi and Urdu services often had telephonic interviews with me those days and that were called 'Phono' or 'two ways'. On the 5th of December, I reached Ayodhya and checked-in at the journalists' favourite accommodation, Hotel Shan-e-Awadh. Anticipation and excitement ran high in the hotel lobby that evening. The Sangh Parivar, especially one of its wings Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), had announced *Kar Sewa* that day. It was

On the morning of 6th December, Ayodhya was caught up in a buzz. Journalists positioned themselves on an elevated platform near the Babri Masjid. At exactly 10am, *Kar Sewaks* started gathering near the mosque and made their way towards the barbed wiring of the security cordon. Within minutes, there was commotion; the storming into the mosque had begun. The *Kar Sewaks* could be seen climbing the walls and holding fort on top of the tombs. At that time, the then South Asia Chief of BBC, Mark Tully, decided to go to Faizabad so that he could file the news of the storming of Babri Masjid. At that time there were no mobile phones and the only place to connect to the BBC headquarters in London was through the Central Telegraph Office, Faizabad. Mark's colleague Gillian Wright, Ramdutt Tripathi, a Lucknow-based journalist and I reached Faizabad around noon where Mark filed his first report. By 1pm, we were on our way back to Ayodhya where the demolition of Babri Masjid was on full swing, but were stopped by the crowd at the outskirts of the city. We went back

to Faizabad and decided to follow the para military forces, that is, the RAF & CRPF when they began to move to Ayodhya. However, the forces were stopped as well at a railway crossing between the two towns.

When all our efforts to reach Ayodhya were exhausted, a journalist friend Vinod Shukla, then resident editor of *Dainik Jagran*, suggested a way out. He told us that he knew a way through the city cantonment area and offered us a lift in his personal car along with his wife and his local correspondent Saral Gyapte. In half an hour, we managed to reach the Babri Masjid to see all three domes of the mosque demolished. As soon as we got down from our car, a group of violent *Kar Sewaks* armed with trident lathis charged at us. Most of them were local residents and were angry to see Mark Tully with us. They knew Mark was a journalist working with BBC and were quiet unhappy with his reportage on Ayodhya. As the mob gathered to beat us, perhaps even kill us, one of the agitated *Kar Sewaks* suggested that killing us would perhaps disturb the ongoing demolition. He prescribed that it would be better if they locked us for the time being and killed us later. The five of us were locked in a room in a nearby building. For the next two hours, we were in a state of shock, waiting to be killed when demolition was over.

Saral Gyapte managed to free himself and rushed to the Mahant of Bada Sthan or Badi Haveli, a respectable figure in Ayodhya. When he came to know that the editor of *Jagran* along with some other journalists were being held hostage, he immediately came to our rescue and on his assurance and guarantees, we were freed at around 7pm. We were then taken to the local office of the VHP where prominent VHP leaders including Ashok Singhal, Praveen Togadia and some BJP leaders were celebrating the demolition. The statue of 'Ram Lala' was recovered from the mosque and was now at the VHP office where the leaders were performing 'darshan'.

Saral Gyapte asked them for cover so that we could be escorted safely to our hotel at Faizabad. The Mahant of Bada Sthan gave his shawl to Mark Tully so he could hide under it and we were all asked to tie a sort of headgear with the words *Kar Sewak* written on it. We were put in a UP Police truck and dropped at the Shan-e-Awadh at 8pm.

When we reached Faizabad, the government controlled media, All India Radio and Doordarshan broadcasted the news that "Ayodhya main vivadspad Dhanchey ko kuch nuqsan Pahuncha hai" (the disputed structure in Ayodhya has been damaged)

My last sight of the Babri Masjid was at twilight. It wasn't just damaged, it in fact had been razed to the ground with the *Kar Sewaks* taking away its rubble as souvenir. At 11pm IST, I broke the news on BBC Urdu service's news bulletin that the Babri Masjid has been demolished completely.

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Babri Masjid Demolition: 25 Years On...

Irfan Engineer

but the implications it would have on the polity and future of democracy in our country.

I shared the news with all the 8 to 10 other Adivasi inmates in my cell. They were arrested for various petty crimes like consumption of alcohol when there was prohibition. They would not believe me. One of them said, why would anybody demolish the house of the Supreme Being? I had to show the photograph published on the front page of the newspaper with people dancing on the dome of the mosque with saffron flags in hand. They too were horrified. Then I heard something that sounded like a victory procession and bursting of crackers outside the jail. After a few days I was bailed out. Bhikubhai advised me not to go towards the market where police station was located as the cops were preparing to arrest me in another false case. I hitch hiked and went to Adv. Paresh Chaudhary's home in Vedchhi (Dist. Surat). In the Adivasi dominated areas of the Dang and Surat districts, Babri Masjid was a non-issue, although *Ramshila puja* processions—where consecrated bricks meant for construction of the proposed Ram Janmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya were accompanied with DJ to attract people—had been taken out there too largely consisting of non-Adivasi people.

For the Adivasis, their main issues were their right to forest land and forest produce; access to quality education and health care and

cultural space to sustain their way of life and their identity. Temple-Mosque conflict was for the *ujaliat* (non-Adivasis). Most of them were unaware of the existence of Babri Masjid or the proposal to build a Ram Janmabhoomi temple. A few who were never discussed it. Their world was totally insulated from the outside world, even from the rest of Gujarat! For the Adivasis, Dang was not a part of Gujarat, and they only travelled outside Dang to Gujarat when they needed to access health care or markets, both of which were instruments of oppression. All temples belonged to the *ujaliat* who were by and large seen as oppressors, and if some of them were not oppressors, they had a condescending attitude towards them.

In the second week of January 1993, I headed towards my home in Mumbai. As I disembarked at Dadar Station, I learnt about the riots in city. I managed to reach Anand Patwardhan's residence and learnt that a Hindu friend living in Andheri (West) feared an attack on her. Preeti had a running dispute with her landlord and she feared that the landlord would take advantage of the riots to get her to vacate her home. I decided to be with her and confront the Muslim mob that she feared would come to attack her.

I called my father to inform him that I was safe and in Mumbai and would be going to Preeti's home. My father pleaded with me to come back home. It was not usual for him to

On 6th December 1992, I was in judicial custody in Vansda (Gujarat) jail. We were struggling for the rights of Adivasis on forests and forest produce which often led to friction with the state and a couple of times I had to face false cases lodged on me and my comrades in the struggle. I must have been in judicial custody for about a week. Eager to read the daily newspaper, I would ask the night duty prison guard, who was from an Adivasi community, to buy one for me while he went to the market for a cup of tea and he would oblige me. On 7th December I did not ask Bhikubhai to buy the newspaper for me but he nevertheless got one for me. I protested and told him that I had no money to pay him for the newspaper. With a smile on his face he told me not to worry about the price of the newspaper and to read it. It is only when I opened the newspaper that I understood why he wanted me to read the paper that day. The paper carried the news of demolition of Babri Masjid. I was horrified, not because a mosque was demolished,

plead in this manner as I was going to help a Hindu friend. But the times were not usual as well. I went to Preeti's residence assuring my father that I would come home soon and wouldn't take unnecessary risks. When I reached her home, some other friends too were there. The next day, when I returned home, we were getting frantic calls from survivors of communal violence for help. All we could do was contact police officers known to us for their integrity and the fire brigade, only to learn that they too were inundated with calls.

Communal violence in Mumbai drew me to work for communal harmony—an issue to which I had not paid much attention so far as I was working among Adivasis since 1989. My father, Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer, was heading a coalition of organizations—*Ekta*—which worked for communal harmony and included trade unions, women's organisations and civil liberty organisations. *Ekta* had campaigned for peace in Mumbai and other riot prone towns by organising peace marches, public meetings and street corner meetings, bringing out publications countering demonisation of minorities and organising perspective building camps for peace workers. *Ekta* had opposed *kar seva* and had called upon religious Hindus not to join it, as the campaign for demolition of Babri Masjid and construction of Ram Janmabhoomi Temple was being carried out with a political motive. However, *Ekta's* outreach was limited on account of limited resources. Communal violence immediately after the demolition of Babri Masjid was on a limited scale and the casualties were mainly from the police firing on Muslim mobs protesting demolition of Babri Masjid.

Shiv Sena was not satisfied and bayed for violence on a larger scale with the *sainiks* controlling and participating in street violence. Only deeper communal polarisation would ensure electoral benefits they aimed at. The daily newspaper published by Shiv Sena—*Saamna*—started hyping up the January 6 incident of arson in Gandhi Chawl (which killed an entire Hindu family) in Jogeshwari and the murder of two Mathadi workers in South Mumbai, both of which they blamed on the Muslim community. They organised a series of Maha-artis to arouse communal hatred against Muslim community on these two issues, and the crowds dispersing after the Maha-artis indulged in violence against minorities. These efforts of Shiv Sena resulted in the second phase of rioting which began from 9th January.

Helplessness and Hope

The riots in this second phase were very destructive in terms of lives and properties. While police had opened fire on the mobs protesting demolition of Babri Masjid killing several people, they remained by and large bystanders when the mobs mobilised by Shiv Sena were rioting on the streets. Even the middle class was scared, and the city came to a standstill for days. The leaders of industry and finance were greatly disturbed due to huge economic losses and future of investments in the metropolis which then appeared to be chaotic and lawless. Some of them took the initiative to meet the then CM Sudhakar Rao Naik, but even he appeared to be utterly helpless; control over the administration seemed to have slipped out of his hands.

Concerned activists flooded the

office in Santacruz East where *Ekta* called for a meeting. We had intense discussions on what we could possibly do. All that we were able to organise was relief for the survivors. When organised lynch mobs are on the streets filled with fear and hatred for the 'other', and at times armed with deadly weapons, it is impossible to reason with them. Only state security forces could have dispersed them, if they so willed. But in most cases, the security forces and their commanders did not seem to have any such will.

There were shining examples of citizens cutting across religions coming together to defend their neighbourhood from communal mobs wanting to target members of the 'other' community living in their locality. This was the only way to save the city from communal madness. Let me recall one such example in Sakinaka, where *Ekta* had organised meetings for communal harmony along with Kashtakari Sanghatana, an organisation that had mobilised slum dwellers on their local problems. Sakinaka is inhabited by Hindus speaking Oriya, Telugu, Marathi and Hindi as well as Muslims. Here, in the past, Muslims had provided space for installation of an electric sub-station, enabling inhabitants of Sakinaka to register for electric meters. Before the installation of this sub-station, BSES, the electric supply company, would not install meters and the local residents had to buy electric connections from contractors who charged them ten times more.

The Muslims of Sakinaka were receiving threats from the Shiv Sena Shakhha and were fearing an attack on them. The Hindu residents told them not to worry and sleep

peacefully as they would protect them from the Hindu mobs. Muslims were told not to react to any rumours and not to prepare for their defence as their houses would be defended by the Hindu residents. The Hindu residents with sticks in their hands stayed awake several nights with Muslims providing them tea so that they could remain awake. When the Shiv Sainiks saw the locality protected by Hindus, they did not dare to attack the Muslims in the area. There were other areas too where citizens took matters in their hands and protected their neighbours while the state appeared to be collapsing.

Peace March

Ekta gave a call for a peace march from Khodad Circle, Dadar in Central Mumbai to Azad Maidan in South Mumbai. I do not remember the date but prohibitory orders u/s 144 of Cr.P.C. restraining gathering of more than four people were still in force. We were mentally prepared that only a few would turn up. However, over a thousand people reached Khodad Circle, including Asghar Ali Engineer, Anand Patwardhan, academicians from TISS and Mumbai University, journalists, trade unionists and peace activists. As we all gathered, police asked us to disperse as prohibitory orders were in force. We defied the police, assured them of our intention to promote peace and harmony, and proceeded to march carrying white flags and placards with slogans of peace and love in our hands, and songs of peace on our lips. We passed through areas where rioting had taken place. People witnessing the procession from their balconies waved their hands expressing support. Communal tensions melted as people saw Hindus and Muslims

marching together and appealing for peace through songs and placards. The procession converted into a public meeting at Azad Maidan. Police officers thanked us.

Gradually Mumbai limped back to normalcy as this commercial city does after every disaster—human-made or natural. Yet it has never been normal again. Among the things that changed irreversibly is ghettoisation. Muslim survivors from many areas where they had suffered human and property losses during the riots sold their dwellings or shops to move to areas which had large Muslim populations. Mumbra, Mira Road and other such suburbs witnessed a huge increase in Muslim population. Similarly in many localities where Hindus were in minority, the Hindus shifted to Hindu majority localities where they felt more safe. Most survivors of riots are today economically worse off than before. Only a few received compensation, which too was very inadequate; most did not even get this meagre compensation, let alone rehabilitation. The perpetrators of the riots have by and large gone scot-free due to laxity in police investigation and lack of political will to secure justice for the riot survivors.

In response to the riots in Mumbai in 1993, we established the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS) under the leadership and vision of Dr. Asghar Ali Engineer with the support of peace loving citizens of Mumbai. Since then, CSSS has been organising peace workshops to create an army of peace workers. CSSS also brings out a journal—*Indian Journal of Secularism*, which it has been publishing for two decades now. This year, it has brought out a special

issue of this journal, entitled “*Babri Masjid, 25 Years On...*”. The issue is a collection of essays written by journalists, artists and activists going down the memory lane and examining what went wrong and what has changed since. CSSS also organises lectures, seminars and peace activities through peace centres in communally sensitive towns. Through these peace centres, CSSS reaches out to colleges and schools to inculcate values of peace, harmony, secularism, diversity and respect for human rights. With limited resources we have been able to bring about significant change and promote peace. However we need to do much more and need the support and solidarity of more and more people and institutions. Peace loving people need to be more organised and committed than they are at present. We need to multiply our ranks if we wish to see peaceful, secular India which respects freedom of expression and works for social justice.

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Babri Masjid demolition: ‘I was there’

Sharat Pradhan

Two decades after the fateful day, the question was fired at me by none other than former deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani’s legal counsel Mahipal Aluwalia, during the course of my cross-examination in a dingy Rae Bareilly court, holding trial of Advani and others charged of criminal conspiracy behind demolition of the 16th century mosque.

My reply was plain and simple — “Well, if I knew that you would pose this question to me 19 years later; I would have carried a measuring tape and a compass to know the exact distance and the direction.”

Not amused by my reply, the lawyer threw a fresh volley of questions — “What was the name of the building from where I watched the entire demolition scene?; whether the building was a single-storeyed one or double-storeyed; whether there was a Vishva Hindu Parishad office in the building; what route did I take to reach the Babri Mosque on that day; the names of buildings that I passed; how many security gates did I have to pass; whether the *karsewak* wore some identification badges... so on and so forth.”

The cross-examination that ran for days (and the recorded text running into as many as 88 pages) seemed more like a test of my memory rather than any confirmation of how the mosque was pulled down. But when I embarked upon spelling this out by drawing the court’s attention to the fact that the lawyer and his team were only testing my memory, he

screamed his lungs out — “now this is contempt of court.”

All I had done was to raise a pertinent question — where was the equity in law when lawyers on both sides remained armed with documents, files and anything else under the sun, while the witness was expected to have a super-human memory to remember every distinct detail of whatever he had seen two decades ago.

Unmindful of the threat, I declared that I was ready to face the music if speaking the truth was seen as contempt.

What I could not understand was why every witness was seen as a liar and the whole idea behind his cross-examination was to prove him as one. I could not resist telling the open court that from the proceedings it was quite apparent that lawyers were probably more used to dealing with tutored and fake witnesses. No wonder, therefore, they found it difficult to come to terms with a true “chashmadeedgawah” (eye-witness).

Later, I was advised not only by the lawyers but even by the presiding officer to bear with the way things were as that was how the practice had been for decades and decades. And since law does not discriminate, the legal procedures and practices remained the same irrespective of the nature of the crime — be it a theft in the neighbourhood, a murder on the street, a trespass into the property of a neighbour or the demolition of a historic mosque that

Must read for everyone concerned with the well-being of India and her future. The Babri Masjid demolition case has made a mockery of our judiciary. This is, in fact, an explosive case in which the Supreme Court should order that it will be left untouched for the next 50 years. That is the only way to avoid unprecedented bloodshed that is the intention of the Hindutva forces in their game plan of establishing a Hindu Rashtra — a deathknell for the unique largest democracy of the world. At best, the court may consider allowing these forces to build a Ram temple at the Karsewak Nagar where they have already assembled the components of the temple. They should be clearly told that they may take it or reject it but they shall not be allowed to play with the lives of thousands of innocent Indians. They may or may not, but as a concerned citizen of India.

—C. B. Tripathi

“How far were you standing from the Babri mosque on December 6, 1992, and what was your position viz a viz the mosque.”

had changed the communal destiny of the world's largest democracy.

About the pace of the process, less said the better. Nineteen years after the demolition of the mosque, the trial court was far from nailing down the culprits to book. In fact, trial was yet to commence against some of the key accused persons including then Uttar Pradesh Chief minister Kalyan Singh, who was otherwise known as the prime culprit.

His matter was pending before the country's apex court which is to decide whether Kalyan Singh should be tried for conspiracy or for inciting communal hatred.

Even the cases against 49 key accused persons was going on in two separate special courts — one in Rae Bareilly and the other in Lucknow, hackneyed procedures and processes had eaten up all the time and no one knows how many more years it would take the courts to take the case to its logical conclusion.

The court in Rae Bareilly was holding the trial against Advani and seven others prominent Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) leaders — Murlimanohar Joshi, Uma Bharti, Vinay Katiyar, Sadhvi Rithambara, Ashok Singhal, Acharya Giriraj Kishore and Vishnu Hari Dalmia — for “inciting communal hatred in the name of the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue.”

The Lucknow special court was hearing cases against smaller fries of the saffron brigade, who were charged of hatching the conspiracy for demolition.

But even as the court in Lucknow appeared more firm and stern, yet there could be no denying that the

slow pace of judicial process was equally visible in both places. The lethargic procedures and the hackneyed approach of lawyers who take professional pride lingering the judicial process see no need for expeditious disposal of the case that has clearly lost the appeal it once commanded on the masses of this country.

I have spent hours standing in both the courts — answering mundane and irrelevant queries raised by the counsels who seemed to be more interested in displaying and proving their professional skills rather than in taking the case to an expeditious logical end.

The queries have never gone beyond memory test with the sole intent of establishing that my story was just a concoction. What was worse that even the courts do not apparently believe in looking out of the box. When I reacted sharply to what is described as “suggestion” by the lawyer fraternity, I was advised by the court to simply remain cool and take it in the stride — something any forthright person would find it difficult to do.

After all, how can you remain quiet and docile when you are told that whatever you have stated under oath before the court was simply all bunk? No matter how much I controlled my emotions on being publicly labeled as a liar, I could not help retorting, “How would you react if I were to tell you that even though you had grabbed a black coat, your law degree was fake.” The advocates look horrified and were ready to get me sent to the gallows for what they termed as a big “contempt of court”.

To me, the whole court exercise looked like a ritual for the benefit of counsels. I never could see any

other purpose being served.

When the special court was set up for taking up the demolition case, no one had in his wildest of dreams imagined that the exercise would go on and on endlessly.

In the beginning, when prominent political personalities were summoned to court, they were swarmed by thousands of people who were clearly passionate about the Ayodhya issue. As years went by, their numbers started falling. Today, when I go to the courts, I find no one other than the battery of lawyers engaged in the case to be present.

The crowds have lost interest, a generation has passed and demolition appears to be story of an era gone by. The BJP and its allies have seen the faded electoral futility of the Ayodhya issue. All it continues to spin is perhaps to hold BJP's hardcore Hindutva vote bank together, just as it continues to incite anger and vengeance among a section of Muslims, who use it as fodder for arousing Islamic militancy.

Considering that I was just the 12th witness out of Central Bureau of Investigation's long list of nearly 100, the judicial exercise was bound to take very many years to complete — even if CBI chose to limit its witnesses by avoiding testimony of the entire lot.

The face of the Ayodhya site where Babri Masjid stood until this day 19 years ago is already transformed beyond recognition. The finalisation of the trial proceedings alone may see yet another generation. After all, the trial court was just the first step in the judicial process.

Courtesy : The Wire

Freedom Of Speech For Whom - III

Some constitutional and philosophical underpinnings

Justice B. Sudershan Reddy

Writing in late 1990s and early 2000s, sociologist Prof Manuel Castells talked about the impact of neo-liberal agenda on the social and psychological aspects of the persona of those being left behind. As the voices that normatively prioritise the well being of the rich and the powerful – including the voices in the press – dominate, even the scope for articulation about the full extent of the problems of those who have been historically marginalized, those who continue to be marginalized, and the new ones being made to join the ranks of marginalised would be systematically squelched. Prof Castells then posited that, as uncertainty about economic welfare sweeps across an economy that is constructed on a network of the global elites, the social reality would be that the ones being left behind and/or marginalized would fall prey to the seduction of identities provided by cults and hate groups.

Notwithstanding such warnings, there has been much glibness in the elite frameworks that posited that the only purpose of collective power and action is the allowance of free play of individual economic interests – almost as if humans could only be epistemic and ethical monads, with no space for value systems based on the deep potential of human beings to construct a consciousness that was concerned by welfare of others in a shared world. That glibness is now coming home to roost, as identity politics and politics of deep hatred for the others have emerged with a rapidity that

proponents of neo-liberal order have completely missed and/or were unprepared to countenance as definitive possibilities.

That is what we are increasingly facing – all across the world aren't we? As Edward Luce¹ points out, no fewer than 25 democracies have failed in the past two decades. After examining the implications of growing inequalities, the threat of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence on top of a technological paradigm that makes rapid obsolescence of skills a necessary fact of life, and massive interdependence implying inability or disinclination to protect those inside national boundaries from uncontrollable economic and social forces, Edward Luce goes on to analyse the resulting degeneration of Western politics:

“We are taught to think our democracies are held together by values. Our faith in history fuels this myth. But liberal democracy's strongest glue is economic growth.... When those fruits disappear, or are monopolised by a fortunate few, things turn nasty. History should have taught us that. The losers seek scapegoats. The politics of interest group management turn into a zero-sum battle over declining resources. The past also tells us to beware of Times of stark and growing inequality. It rarely ends well.”²

Nearly a century ago, John Maynard Keynes had proposed that

while inflation is bad, unemployment is worse. Paraphrasing him, he basically said unemployment makes the young of the country feel unwanted, and unloved. That is a dangerous proposition for a country like India. The Supreme Court of India, in the context adjudicating the legality of using tribal youngsters as SPOs with guns to fight the Maoists, recognized that demographic promise could turn into a demographic curse and observed: “Tax breaks for the rich, and guns for the poor isn't a political economy that our constitution mandates.”

In response to the above, one of your brethren threateningly proposed that maybe it is time to pack the Supreme Court with “committed judges” – i.e., the judges who will kow-tow to the executive that is hell bent on delivering a neo-liberal order.

It is against the foregoing background, that one needs to analyse the brutal assassination of Gauri Lankesh. By all accounts she wasn't a “successful” journalist in the sense of one who is a prima donna at the national or state level. Working with limited budgets, and at times starved for funds she ran a regional publication whose circulation was barely 10,000 or so. But the power of her ideas was of far greater purport. Her voice threatened an established political economy that was increasingly choosing to elide out of reckoning the poor, the marginalized, the exploited and the oppressed. Her voice was for social justice, and its articulation

a matter of moral urgency, and constitutional means, and their assertion a matter of moral necessity. And that voice was brutally silenced. And like so many times before, the spirit of the Constitution of India and the soul of this nation was yet again brutalised.

The optics of her killing are no less chilling. In front of her own house, a woman who was just opening the gate to park her car is brutally killed by an assassin emerging from the dark. The message was clear: those who will speak about constitutional means, assert an innate right to freedom of speech, and will speak on behalf of the marginalized and against those who will loot the nation for the benefits of the few – even your homes would not be safe.

What are we to do? How are we to go ahead with fearless journalism in a world such as this? Where the first principle of journalism – of speaking the truth to power – is seen as being anti-national? There could of course be many, many answers. But here is a small submission: if journalism, and its underlying value - freedom of speech as an essential element to construct human dignity – are to be in service of “speaking truth to power” – then speak that truth fully. Especially about the degradation of human dignity of the masses. That is the singular truth that stares at us in the face, and which we refuse to acknowledge and speak about it – to ourselves, and to those who wield power in our name, and on our behalf.

In any nation, and more so in a democracy, the moral force of institutions is intimately linked to whether the masses – especially the vast numbers in our country – continue to believe that the State, and

the elites, are thinking about them – at least in some small but meaningful measure. When the hope that empathy of fellow human beings may be aroused to action, to ensure greater justice, is lost we end up losing the greatest protection we have when we speak truth to power. Unless the powerful, and the groups their control are made to believe that the people will punish them if those who speak truth to power are not protected, all of us may face what GauriLankesh and SantanuBhowmik have. A retreat cannot be an option. For we could be attacked for something else. Until, every aspect of our human dignity is ground afoot. If GauriLankesh’s death is to mean anything, then we need to relearn to speak the truth to power, and that too about the truth of what is happening with and what is being done to the disempowered masses.

I end with the the hope that each one of you will assert the moral foundations of “speaking truth to power”.

(concluded)

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⁴ *S. Rangarajan v P Jagjivan Ram (1989) 2 SCC 574*

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Love, Marriage and Religion

J. L. Jawahar

“Love in Times of Fundamental Politics” seems to have become an issue these days. (Janata, 19-11-2017) Why has it become a problem? Love should never create problems. At the most basic level, what is love? It is affection between two persons, ultimately leading to a desire to live together, share their lives and if possible, create a family. Not all love connections result in establishing a family. Some may be more ephemeral, perhaps as a result of youthful emotions. But when two adults who love each other want to spend their life together, they should be able to do so without the consent of any other person. That is what happens in the liberal western societies.

Whether it is good or bad is a different matter. Leave that problem aside for the present. That tendency is intruding into the Indian society now. Unfortunately, neither the lovers involved nor the society around them is mature enough to understand and accept the consequences of such a relationship. After leading a joint life for some time, one of the parties asks for marriage while the other party hesitates or refuses whatever the reasons might be. It becomes a problem and the police are asked to take charge of the situation, whether it is legitimate or not. The fact is, both of them are adults and living together voluntarily. Either of them can claim to have no intention of marriage, while the other party (usually the girl) can say that the relationship is being maintained with expectation of marriage finally. Intention is of no consequence unless it is expressed and specifically

accepted by the other party. In the absence of such an acceptance, the party cannot be compelled to enter into marriage.

Consensual cohabitation is based on mutual consent and the law is not concerned with it. But marriage means creation of certain legal relationships. It is to establish that relationship that one party wants to get married. That is why gays and lesbians struggled to get the right to marry. Otherwise nobody bothered how they lived. (The provision against unnatural relationship in the Penal Code is being diluted). Statute has provided Special Marriages Act to enable adult persons to marry irrespective of their religion or caste and in disregard of any other person.

The problem comes when one of the parties wants to bring in some extraneous consideration into the marriage. It may be caste or religion or consent of elders that was not raised till then. The position of parents is always precarious. They bring up their children with the hope, in fact, expectation that they will be respectful of them. They want that respect to be shown in a particular way – either by bestowing wealth on them or being bound by their wishes in life, particularly in regard to selection of life partners. Parents want their children to settle happily in a married life. But that is not in their hands exclusively. They cannot get the children married when they are minors so that they will not resist. Even after the child becomes a major, parents still expect to exercise their choice in the life partner for the child. But times have changed. The children are getting educated and not

conforming. They tend to form their own opinions about their own life. When the son or daughter makes an independent choice of life partner, parents get offended that they did not have an opportunity to decide. They are afraid that the choice of the child could be wrong as they have less experience of life. Some parents swallow their pride and agree. But some take it as an offence and betrayal and try their best to prevent that relationship. They consider it a matter of personal or family prestige as in tribal communities of earlier days. The social situation encourages it. They go to the extent of killing the daughter and also her husband. It is true that they took all the trouble to bring up the children. But children are not like pets. They are individuals with their own individual preferences unlike pets. More over law also recognizes them as separate and independent individuals and give some rights to them as citizens. If the child makes a choice after becoming an adult, the parents have an opportunity, not a right, to argue and persuade but not to object. If the parents really love their children, they should excuse the folly of independent decision and leave them to their fate. If the choice happens to be wrong, it is for the child to suffer the consequences. That is the privilege or burden of being an adult. You are responsible for your decisions. Even the courts do not have any right to find fault with the decision unless some fraud is played on the person to ensure a particular decision. It means it was not an independent decision and so need not be upheld.

(To be concluded)



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