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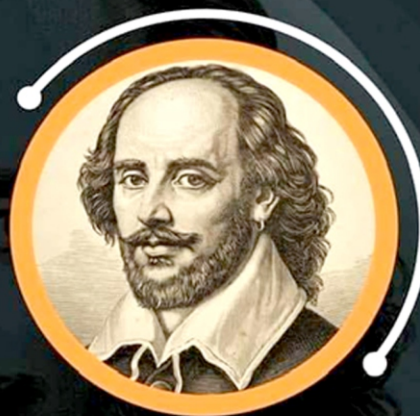
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“What a terrible era in which
idiots govern the blind.”

~ William Shakespeare

633



PANDIT JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

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CONTENTS :

Page No.

Editorial Notes:

- Britain's Obama Moment** 4
Women's Cricket in India
Vinod Jain

Articles and Features:

- Reaching for our Sun** 6
Natasha Rego

- Special article on 6th December,** 8
the anniversary of Babri Masjid demolition:
The Rubble What was lost in the Babri Masjid
demolition, thirty years ago, and what remains
Seema Chishti

- 'Can Victims Be Punished for Judicial Delay?':** 20
Petitioner in Bombay Riots Case
Sukanya Shantha

- Kashmir: Blatant Distortions of History,** 22
an obstacle to Peace
Ram Puniyani

- BJP signalling support for 2002 riots to win** 24
Gujarat polls is a dire sign for India
Shoaib Daniyal

- The Truth and the Lie** 26
M.G. Devasahayam

- Maximum Government, Minimum Governance** 28
Biju Negi

- 46 % of Indians perceive news coverage of** 30
PM Modi as biased
Syed Ali Mujtaba

- A decade after Nirbhaya, why does BJP think** 32
endorsing rapists will win votes?
Shoaib Daniyal

- Bilkis Bano and G N Saibaba: A tale of** 34
two injustices
Rekha Sharma

- Reader's Comments** 35

- No religious divide: 46% Hindus & Muslims** 36
feel 'Modi govt portrayed too favourably by
news media'
Anupriya Chatterjee

- The BJP is Promising a Uniform Civil Code,** 38
But How About a Uniform Moral Code First?
Badri Raina

- What India can learn from British politics** 41
Karan Thapar

Editorial Notes:

Britain's Obama Moment

Vinod Jain

Soon after Diwali the news came that , after the fall of Liz Truss's 44 day old govt. in Britain , the Indian origin Rishi Sunak has been invited by king Charles III to become prime minister .

Though born in England, Rishi is of Indian origin. His parents migrated to Britain from east Africa in the 1960's, is married to Akshata Murty , whose Father Narayan Murty is the founder of (India's) software giant Infosys Ltd. His parents had migrated to east Africa from that part of Punjab which is in Pakistan now . Rishi says he is a Hindu and a vegetarian. He is one of the richest members of British Parliament.

He is in British politics only for seven years now. At present he is only 42 years old, and is the youngest Prime Minister after over 200 years. Till a few weeks ago he was Chancellor of the Exchequer in the govt. headed by Premier Boris Johnson.

Britain is in the midst of financial crisis . The crisis began in 2016 with the Brexit referendum . Brexit meant a majority of Britons wanted to exit from the membership of the European Economic Union. Britains' present economic and financial difficulties will pose a huge challenge to PM Sunak.

Interestingly, Sunak who is of Indian origin and belongs to a minority there —Hindu minority— a war of words has been provoked in India between the opposition leaders and the BJP. Congress leaders P. Chidambaran and Shashi Tharoor targeted the BJP of indulging in Majoritarianism.

It may be recalled that in 2004 when Congress had won the national election in India, with Sonia Gandhi its President, there was a lot of hue and cry raised by the then opposition BJP about the Italian origin of Mrs Sonia Gandhi. This despite the fact that she was a legally wedded wife of late shri Rajiv Gandhi , and therefore an Indian.

This leads to the question as to where we stand today vis a vis the other modern countries like the United States which chose Barak Obama, a person of foreign origin, and a man of colour, as its President. And now the United Kingdom choosing a person of Indian origin, a minority Hindu.

It may be recalled that M. N. Roy, the Humanist philosopher, since before independence, stood for Cosmopolitanism, and had inspired many a young people with new ideas and values.

Women's Cricket in India

Inequality is basic to Indian thought and life. There is gender inequality; there is caste inequality, and economic inequality. In this background, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), it seems, decided to move against the current. They announced pay parity for men and women cricketers.

For playing Test matches the male cricketers were paid rupees 15 lakhs per match, whereas

female cricketers were paid rupees 2.5 lakhs per match.

For playing ODI's male cricketers were getting rupees 6 Lakhs per match, whereas female cricketers were getting rupees 1 Lakh per match. Similarly for playing T20s males were given rupees 3 lakh per match but females were given rupees one lakh per match only.

Surprisingly the BCCI has announced that

from now on women cricketers will be getting the same amount as the men cricketers were getting.

Mithali Raj, a pioneer of India's Women Cricket, welcoming the move said: "With this 'equal pay' policy, the confidence of our

women's team will be bolstered and they will thrive to bring even more laurels to our country.

Our cricket legend, Sachin Tendulkar said: "Cricket has been an equalizer in many ways. This is a welcome step towards gender equality in the game."

An Appeal For Donations

For Republishing books written by M.N. Roy & other Humanist Literature

Indian Renaissance Institute has embarked upon republishing/reprinting the large amount of books & other material written by M.N. Roy as most of them have gone out of print, though requests for these books continue to pour in into our office. Connected humanist literature will also be published. Following books, at the first instance, require immediate publication:

'New Humanism'; 'Beyond Communism'; 'Politics, Power and Parties'; 'Historical Role of Islam'; 'India's Message'; 'Men I Met'; 'New Orientation'; 'Materialism'; 'Science & Philosophy'; 'Revolution and Counter-revolution in China'; 'India in Transition; Reason, Romanticism and Revolution'; 'Russian Revolution'; Selected Works – Four Volumes (1917-1922), (1923-1927), (1927-1932) and (1932-1936); 'Memoirs' (Covers period 1915-1923).

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'The Radical Humanist' is now available at <http://www.lohiatoday.com/> on Periodicals page, thanks to Manohar Ravela who administers the site on Ram Manohar Lohia, the great socialist leader of India.

– Mahi Pal Singh

Articles and Features :

When we started this we said, "Let Us Save - Humanity, life forms, Planet Earth".

Planet Earth is part of the Solar System. Solar system is part of Our Galaxy "The Milky Way". All this comes to us from the knowledge gathered by the scientists of the world during the last few hundred years. Before this period human societies in various parts of the world observed animism etc., then thought in terms of gods and goddesses, and finally in terms either of Ishwar or God or Allah etc. Because the present knowledge was not available to them, this kind of knowledge finds no place in the scriptures of those times. What follows is about the effort to find out more about our Sun.

Vinod Jain, Chairman, Indian Renaissance Institute (IRI)

Reaching for our Sun

[Warm, bright, life-giving, familiar. Our sun holds secrets that date back millions of years. Now, telescopes and solar missions are bringing us closer to the star than ever before. One probe even hopes to land on the blazing surface. Take a tour in images, and see how India is joining the race.]

Natasha Rego

It's always been there. We can't do without it. It is the source of everything on Earth. Mankind's earliest gods were its personification. Countless songs have been composed about it. Yet, it has taken until now for us to get a closer look at the Sun.

As we peer closer, the view is dazzling. New probes and telescopes are capturing the dark hearts of sunspots, blasts of molten plasma, glints of magnetic fields.

The car-sized Parker probe sent out by NASA (the US's National Aeronautics and Space Administration) has travelled into the corona or outer atmosphere of Sun, and is expected to keep relaying images back from as little as 6 million km from the Sun's surface (for perspective, Earth is about 149 mn km from the star).

It isn't just the view; we are also beginning to understand the Sun—perhaps a little.

Advanced instruments on board the

European Space Agency's Solar Orbiter have revealed what are being called "campfires", tiny flares that could help solve the mystery of why the corona, with temperatures of over 1 million degrees Celsius, is so much hotter than the surface of the Sun, which averages 5,500 degrees Celsius.

"That's a mystery that has baffled scientists since the 1940s, since they first figured out just how hot the corona is," says Jagdev Singh, consulting scientist with the Indian Institute of Astrophysics in Bengaluru and former head of the Kodaikanal solar observatory in Tamil Nadu.

The view is about to get better from India too. The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) is readying to launch the Aditya L1 solar mission in 2023. While it will be stationed about 1.5 million km from Earth (crossing only 1% of the distance between Earth and the Sun), it will make ISRO only the fourth space agency in the world (after NASA, the European Space

Agency or ESA and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency or JAXA) to launch a solar mission.

The spacecraft's primary role will be to study solar activity and space weather. "Having indigenous data allows the Indian community to very quickly analyze and assess the impact of impending solar storms and solar activity," says Dibyendu Nandi, head of the Center of Excellence in Space Sciences India (CESSI) at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Kolkata, and chair of ISRO's Aditya-L1 Space Weather Monitoring and Prediction Plan Committee.

Of course, there will be pictures too, and for most onlookers that's the most exciting part. Because the Sun is essentially a massive nuclear fusion bomb, one that explodes every day, with a core temperature of 15 million degrees C (Earth's core, incidentally, is at about 6,000 degrees C), the hydrogen gas that makes up most of the Sun's mass is ionized, the electron stripped from the atom to form a superhot gaseous soup of charged particles called plasma.

As the plasma splashes to the surface, it generates magnetic fields so strong that they can prevent heat from escaping and light from entering. These are visible on the surface of the star as sunspots.

Sunspots spew plasma and radiation out into the solar system, in events called solar flares and coronal mass ejections (CMEs). The plasma can travel at up to 3,000 km per second, taking a few days to reach Earth. The radiation travels at the speed of light, and can reach Earth in less than 10 minutes.

"Really intense CMEs will travel faster than the solar wind, like a tsunami," says Nandi. "The stronger geomagnetic storms can impact high-frequency radio communication, GPS networks and satellite communications. They can damage satellite sensors and take down ground-based electric power grids."

Enter the dragon

In 1859, Earth was hit by the strongest geomagnetic storm on record. It damaged power grids and took down telegraph systems across Europe and North America. Auroras were seen in the night sky as far from the Poles as Cuba and Japan.

The opposite can also happen. One peculiar 70-year period, from 1645 to 1715, was a notably extended grand solar minimum. "This is a period when the Sun is said to have been asleep," says Chitradeep Saha, a space scientist with CESSI.

"It corresponds with a severe period called the Little Ice Age, when many lakes and rivers in the northern hemisphere, including the Thames in London, remained frozen for surprisingly long periods. Medieval artists have captured this in paintings of people skating on frozen water bodies."

Saha is among those still studying this period; he was lead author of a recent paper on it. Fresh clues could come from new instruments. ESA's Solar Orbiter, for instance, has 10 highly advanced instruments on board and one of these is the Extreme-Ultraviolet Imager that revealed the "campfires" or tiny flares.

Aditya L1 will have seven indigenously developed instruments on board. In a rare collaborative space mission, the most ambitious of these instruments—the Visible Emission Line Coronagraph—is being built at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru. Aditya L1 will have seven indigenously developed instruments on board. In a rare collaborative space mission, the most ambitious of these instruments - the Visible Emission Line Coronagraph - is being built at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru. It will examine the origins and behaviour of solar storms (essentially CMES). "The instrument has been designed to capture images from really close to the solar surface and up to the outer solar corona," says Nandi.

(To be Contd....on Page -19)

The Rubble What was lost in the Babri Masjid demolition, thirty years ago, and what remains

Seema Chishti

IN 1992, I worked as a correspondent for *Eyewitness*, a monthly video newsmagazine owned by Hindustan Times TV. The senior journalist Karan Thapar was the show's executive producer. Our team had been covering Uttar Pradesh regularly, and I had visited the Babri Masjid in July. Two years earlier, the Bharatiya Janata Party president LK Advani had led a nationwide rath yatra for months to proclaim that Hindus had a right over the site, stoking communal violence along its path. In the winter of 1992, the atmosphere in Ayodhya began to heat up. Volunteers associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, known as *karsevaks*, planned to congregate at the mosque on 6 December. Thapar decided to dispatch a group of four—three video crew members and me, the reporter—to Ayodhya. We expected the crowd to carry out a symbolic construction of the Ram Mandir around the mosque, which could be a story. Our team stationed itself in Faizabad and Ayodhya on 4 December. It had the makings of just another reporting trip.

Nothing could have prepared us for what happened. Beginning mid-morning, on 6 December, over nearly six hours, thousands of *karsevaks* dramatically razed the three-domed, 464-year-old mosque to the soundtrack of fiery speeches by BJP and Vishwa Hindu Parishad leaders. The Supreme Court had demarcated an area just outside the masjid for symbolic *karseva*. After walking around the area, Advani and his successor as BJP president, Murli Manohar Joshi, as well as the VHP's working president, Ashok Singhal, had settled into the Ram Katha Kunj, a makeshift meeting ground

situated a few metres away. Other Hindutva leaders, including Vinay Katiyar and Uma Bharti, made speeches, remarks and exhortations of various kinds to the assembled crowd, which cheered the vandalising mob. The *karsevaks* also attacked several journalists to prevent us from recording what was unfolding. They broke some of the journalists' equipment. My colleagues and I managed to record some damning footage before being shooed away.

The paramilitary personnel guarding the mosque had left the premises early, and no other central forces were in the vicinity. By noon, even the policemen had become bystanders. The district administration and the police had a perch on a building next to the nearby Sita Rasoi mandir, which served as a viewing gallery. Most of my journalist colleagues were taking shelter on the ground floor. I hid in a nearby sweet shop. In the afternoon, some of us managed to listen to the All-India Radio bulletin on our transistor sets. It spoke of "*chhut-put kshati*"—a bit of damage—to the domes of the mosque. In front of us, the mosque was being systematically smashed, unhindered by law enforcement. The BJP was in power in Uttar Pradesh, with Kalyan Singh as chief minister. PV Narasimha Rao of the Congress was the prime minister. Both leaders remained incommunicado, as the mobs eventually flattened the mosque down to the ground.

Around evening, the state armed constabulary packed journalists into trucks and escorted us to Faizabad, the district headquarters, where the only two large hotels of the town were situated. All along the evening skyline, we could see tunnels of smoke rising

from Muslim homes that had been set on fire by Hindu mobs almost as soon as the demolition began. There was a sense of uneasiness even among the supporters of the act, who, uncertain of how this would be received by the nation at large, held off on celebrations. Most, if not all, of Ajodhya's Muslims had simply fled their homes to nearby towns. The next day's media coverage was mostly dark and sombre. Though the Hindi papers in Uttar Pradesh did not reflect despondency, celebration was not a mainstream theme either.

Communal rioting claimed thousands of lives within hours of the demolition. Later that month, Bombay burned in the worst case of rioting and violence in decades, which continued until January 1993. The violence claimed at least nine hundred lives and injured over two thousand people, according to official records.

When a large structure is brought down, a lot of dust is kicked up. Sometimes, its ruins live on as important witnesses, telling its tales for millennia. Sometimes, there is only rubble.

The transformation of the Babri Masjid into the Ram Mandir can be told in multiple ways. How the courts, the Central Bureau of Investigation and the MS Liberhan inquiry commission—institutions that were said to constitute pillars of secular and modern India—dealt with the aftermath of the demolition is of great significance.

But the demolition is an episode in the story of India that is still unfolding. It is not always clear how much of its legacy—whether ruins or rubble—remains in our politics, our society and our consciousness. What the demolition foreshadowed about the country and its future were somehow minimised in the heat and light of a tumultuous decade.

The Toyota truck that was reshaped into an opulent “rath” for Advani brought religion and theatre into politics. Thirty years on, the spectacle has only become bigger. The echo of the mosque's fall is regularly discernible in the

blood-curdling cries during anti-Muslim pogroms, in the hate-filled noisy debates on popular news channels, in the cheering crowds that recently egged on the flogging of Muslims during Navratri and in the deafening public silence on the unlawful bulldozing of the homes of Muslims.

Jawaharlal Nehru famously termed India a “palimpsest,” where change was a constant but the past always lingered on, carried forward as a trace, a mark or at least a stain. What was lost forever in the lengthy process of configuring a large medieval mosque into a new temple, and what remains, concerns all Indians. Through this time, as we were on that pivotal day, journalists including myself have become eyewitnesses to an assault on the idea of India. It became the story that would never leave us, as much as it never let go of the nation.

THE BABRI MASJID STOOD in Ayodhya, in the erstwhile Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh, from 1528 to 1992. It was built by one Mir Baqi, just two years after the Mughal Empire was established in India, when Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi at the First Battle of Panipat. It is said to have been built on Babur's instructions, but there is no mention of this in *Baburnama*, the emperor's memoirs.

It remains unclear when the talk of there being a structure under the masjid began, when it was claimed to be a destroyed Hindu temple or when this spot became known as the Ram Janmabhoomi—birthplace of Ram. Even the 2019 Supreme Court judgment, which awarded the site to the Hindus, did not certify the claim that the mosque was built after destroying a Hindu temple. Still, the masjid was embroiled in this conflict for decades before and after it was destroyed.

The first recorded skirmish between Hindus and Muslims over the mosque took place in 1853. Six years later, British officials erected a fence to delineate areas within the complex,

allowing Muslims to use the inner court and Hindus the outer court. In 1885, a local priest, Raghubar Das, sought permission to build a canopy on what he called the “Ram Chabutra”—a platform close to the central dome of the mosque that was believed to be the birthplace of Ram. The Faizabad district court rejected his plea.

After Independence, the first dramatic and reality-altering moves in the masjid took place in December 1949, when local Hindus placed an idol of Ram inside it one night. In their 2012 book *Ayodhya: The Dark Night—The Secret History of Rama’s Appearance In Babri Masjid*, Krishna Jha and Dharendra K Jha write that a first-information report registered by the Ayodhya Police named Abhiram Das, the head of the Nirvani Akhara, as the prime accused. “In course of time, many Hindus in Ayodhya had started calling him Ramajanmabhoomi Uddharak”—saviour of Ram’s birthplace. The authors note that the communal frenzy unleashed during Partition had not yet died down; this act of subterfuge took place less than two years after MK Gandhi’s assassination. While that was a crime committed in broad daylight and this one in the dead of night, “neither the conspirators nor their underlying objectives were different,” they write. “In both instances, the conspirators belonged to the Hindu Mahasabha leadership—some of the prime movers of the planting of the idol had been the prime accused in the Gandhi murder case—and their objective this time too was to wrest the political centre stage from the Congress by provoking large-scale Hindu mobilization in the name of Lord Rama.”

The local administration locked the doors of the masjid complex after the idols appeared, sealing India’s fate for decades to come. It was clear that politicians were firmly in lockstep with the vandals. In 1949, large sections of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh shared the Hindu Mahasabha’s views on the primacy of Hindus

in India. Their support, as well as that of the state administration, such as the Faizabad district collector KKK Nayar, were as critical to altering the site. Nair was elected to parliament on a Bharatiya Jana Sangh ticket in 1967. His wife had won on a Hindu Mahasabha ticket in 1952.

In 1986, attempting a shrewd political manoeuvre, the Rajiv Gandhi government, reportedly on the advice of the prime minister’s cousin Arun Nehru, had the locks of the Babri Masjid complex opened, hoping to seal the Hindu vote in exchange. Instead, it opened a Pandora’s box. Once a proud exception in South Asia, where nations were formed along religious lines, secular India now appeared to be accelerating towards one where being Hindu would be seen as synonymous with national identity.

Litigation was always central to this metamorphosis. Four suits were filed between 1950 and 1989. In 1950, Gopal Singh Visharad asked the local court for the right to worship the idols that had been installed. The court restrained the removal of idols and allowed the worship to continue. In 1959, the Nirmohi Akhara filed for possession of the site, claiming to be the custodian of the spot at which Ram was believed to have been born. In 1961, the Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Board of Waqf claimed possession of the mosque and the adjoining land. In 1986, a district judge directed the gates to be unlocked to allow *darshan*—viewing—for Hindus. The following year, Muslims set up the Babri Masjid Action Committee, aimed at protecting the mosque. In 1989, the former VHP vice-president Deoki Nandan Agarwala filed the fourth suit in the name of Ram, for possession in its favour, at the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court.

In October 1989, all four suits were transferred to a special bench of the high court in Lucknow. The veteran journalist Ram Dutt Tripathi often describes how representatives of

opposing parties could be seen travelling together to Lucknow for the hearings in a Fiat. The long-drawn, complex court proceedings had a way of lulling those on the outside to the fact that this was a pressure cooker on the boil.

In 1990, Prime Minister VP Singh announced his decision to implement the Mandal Commission report, which would ensure 27 percent reservation for Other Backward Classes in government jobs and institutions. Protests by upper castes rocked the country. Sensing a chance to cement popular Hindu opinion, LK Advani began his rath yatra to garner support for the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, leaving a trail of blood in its wake. He was halted in Bihar by a young Lalu Prasad Yadav, but the yatra had done enough to make its mark on the nation's politics.

THE NARASIMHA RAO GOVERNMENT handed the matter of the demolition to the Central Bureau of Investigation on 13 December 1992. The investigation and the trial in the CBI court took almost three decades.

There were 49 FIRs on the incident, two of which were crucial to the demolition: FIR 197, accusing unnamed karsevaks, and FIR 198, involving Advani, Joshi, Bharti and Katiyar. The CBI first began looking into FIR 197 and later took charge of all 49 complaints. After various transfers and logistical issues, the CBI eventually clubbed FIRs 197 and 198. In 1993, it filed a combined supplementary charge sheet in all 49 cases. For over a decade, no witnesses were called and examined, no evidence was recorded, no charges were framed by the courts. The case remained stuck over procedural questions.

In an already sluggish system, extra inertia was introduced by rapid changes in the political fortunes of the BJP, whose leaders were directly implicated in the demolition, and of the Congress and others, who appeared to be interested only

in ensuring that the storm passed with minimal effort to confront culpability. Rao lost power in 1996 to Vajpayee, whose government lasted two weeks. Two coalition governments rose and fell between 1996 and 1998. After the next general election, the BJP and others formed the National Democratic Alliance, and Vajpayee was once again prime minister. His government fell again in 1999, but the NDA secured a comfortable win in the subsequent elections and Vajpayee was sworn in a third time. Meanwhile, in Uttar Pradesh, the late 1990s and early 2000s saw multiple changes of guard between the BJP, the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party.

Those whom the CBI was meant to be acting against were rewarded electorally and had begun to hold high political offices. During Vajpayee's second and third terms, Advani was appointed home minister and then deputy prime minister, while Joshi was the minister of human-resource development. These terms saw also the Kargil War and the nuclear tests in Pokhran—both crucial to a rise in nationalist sentiments.

The CBI's case took a long, complex and confusing route, reflecting who was in power in New Delhi and Lucknow. In February 2001, the Allahabad High Court noted a procedural "defect" in clubbing FIRs 197 and 198. It effectively stayed proceedings on the conspiracy charge and left it to the state government to rectify the error. The BJP government ruling the state at the time did not take any corrective measures.

A few months later, a special court in Lucknow dropped the charges against the accused in FIR 198. The CBI and the NDA government, under pressure from a noisy opposition, was forced to ensure that the agency appealed against the decision in the high court. The Supreme Court dismissed pleas against the high court's verdict and ordered a separate trial of FIR 198 in a special court at Rae Bareilly. When the CBI filed a

supplementary charge sheet in the Rae Bareilly court, on 31 May 2003, it avoided the conspiracy charge, invoking strong condemnation in parliament by the opposition.

My colleagues and I deposed before the CBI court—I appeared once in 2014 and thrice in 2019. Each time, the summons had taken ages to reach us. The agency had no fire in its belly. It seemed content with its bureaucratic processes and glacial pace, not bothering to secure even a basic authentication from any specialist to certify that the video footage had not been tampered with. Despite the ubiquitous cell phone, CBI officers would be heard grumbling about being unable to trace well-known journalists. The photographer Praveen Jain had valuable evidence of Hindutva activists rehearsing the demolition a day earlier, in Ayodhya, and I had detailed video footage, a rarity in 1992. Jain was particularly upset that the CBI appeared to not care much about the condition of the negatives of his very precious pictures, which were in its custody. In the time it took for the CBI to hear witnesses, the U-matic tapes we had shot on in 1992 became almost extinct. Our testimonies unsettled the CBI officials in court. In a rapidly transforming political scenario, enthusiastic witnesses only complicated the lives of the agency's officers. But all the CBI had to do to weather the storm was to let time take its toll, weakening memories, destroying evidence and letting witnesses die.

After the UPA government came to power, in May 2004, the CBI revived the challenge to the dropping of proceedings against BJP leaders before the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court. But the court dismissed this revision petition, six years later. In February 2011, the CBI moved the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court took another six years to hear the case. In April 2017, it said that it favoured a time-bound completion of the trial in the case. It restored the criminal conspiracy

charge against Advani and Joshi, who were now octogenarians, as well as Bharti and others, and clubbed together the trials in the matters involving both the VIPs and the karsevaks. It also ordered the trial court in Lucknow to complete the hearing within two years. But the zeitgeist has been starkly altered. The BJP was once again in power at the centre, this time with a majority of its own. The stakes felt different.

Daily hearings finally began in the special CBI court in Lucknow on 20 May 2017. The matter was termed “Ayodhya Prakaran”—the happenings in Ayodhya. The court heard and reviewed all those the CBI could manage to grab and get to testify, two and a half decades after the demolition.

The court could not meet the 2019 deadline set by the Supreme Court and was granted an extension until April 2020, and another until September. The ground had shifted even further by this time. In 2019, the BJP had been re-elected with an increased majority. During Narendra Modi's first term as prime minister, the politics, the media environment and the debates it spawned on the subject made the four-hundred-year existence of the masjid, not its destruction, seem like the crime. This feeling intensified quickly in his second term, like a knot tightening in the chest of the Indian polity.

Not even a third of the 1,026 witnesses cited by the CBI could be heard. Seventeen accused and around fifty witnesses had died. In the absence of formal authentication, the judge, SK Yadav, refused to accept into evidence photographs, newspaper cuttings and contemporary published accounts, saying that the originals were not produced. On 30 September, the court acquitted all the accused. The judge said that the CBI had been unable to produce any evidence of the likes of Advani, Joshi, Bharti and others working with the karsevaks who actually demolished the structure. “There is no conclusive proof against the accused,” he said.

THE LIBERHAN COMMISSION was set up ten days after the fall of the masjid, and three days after the centre asked the CBI to look into the matter. MS Liberhan, a former chief justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, was asked to probe the sequence of events that led to the demolition. The commission's tenure was intended to be three months, but it was granted 48 extensions, eventually submitting its report on 30 June 2009.

Along with fellow journalists, I deposed before the commission a few times, in the nineties. The Liberhan commission's office was located in Delhi's Vigyan Bhawan. In the first few hearings, Liberhan set a no-nonsense tone that seemed to have at least fired up the commission's member-secretary, the bureaucrat SK Pachauri. Journalists such as Rakesh Sinha of the *Indian Express*, Mrityunjay Kumar Jha of India Today's *Newstrack* show, the BBC's Mark Tully and Ram Dutt Tripathi, and the photographer Praveen Jain were among those who deposed. Each of us who had been present that day in Ayodhya had brought back notes, writings, photographs and recorded interviews—all of it evidence.

The atmosphere was like that of a trial court. Witnesses deposed and were cross-examined by representatives of the leaders and karsevaks accused of carrying out the demolition. Journalists testifying as eyewitnesses faced hostile questions from lawyers who did everything to shred our personal credibility. Our religions, our last names, our backgrounds and presumed affiliations were all brought up, even as Liberhan made a valiant attempt to keep the proceedings civil.

The initial enthusiasm soon wilted. Years dragged on, governments changed, and memories faded. Files and transcripts yellowed inside a steel almirah. The staff began to look tired, anxious to wrap things up.

When the report was released, it read like a difficult but obscure chapter of history. But the

thirteen years that followed have made the report seem much more significant. "A handful of malevolent leaders unabashedly invoked the name of the paragon of tolerance to turn peaceful communities into intolerant hordes," the report stated. There is "indisputable evidence," it argued, that, "lured by the prospect of power or wealth, a rank of leaders emerged within the BJP, RSS, VHP, Shiv Sena, Bajrang Dal etc. who were neither guided by any ideology nor imbued with any dogma nor restrained by any moral trepidation." It did not spare the top leadership of the BJP and Sangh affiliates, who "saw the 'Ayodhya Issue' as their road to success and sped down this highway mindless of the casualties they scattered about. These leaders were the executioners wielding the sword handed to them by the ideologues."

The Liberhan commission categorically rubbished the claims made by the Sangh Parivar that the demolition was a spontaneous outpouring of Hindu passion. It wrote that "the mobilisation of the kar sevaks and their convergence to Ayodhya and Faizabad was neither spontaneous nor voluntary. It was well orchestrated and planned." It recorded that "tens of crores of rupees" were used to fund the act. These vast resources were "a categorical pointer to the planning and preplanning carried out for the entire process of the movement commencing with mobilisation onwards right up till the very demolition itself." The commission indicted the former prime minister Vajpayee, Advani and Joshi, whom it termed "pseudo-moderates," for the demolition. It also named various Sangh Parivar leaders and outfits. "To support the prerequisites for such a movement, the finances required were channelled from the coffers of the various Sangh Parivar organisations through various banks to accounts held in the names of various organisations and individuals to carry out the innumerable acts needed for the movement," it stated. "Apart from the inflow of the cash from unidentifiable sources, cash

was also transferred and transacted through banks to the recipient organisations. The RSS, VHP, BJP and also the other members of the Sangh Parivar raised funds for conducting the movement from time to time.”

The commission, however, failed to examine the culpability of the Narasimha Rao government. Coincidentally, the report was submitted and made public when the Congress-led UPA government was in office. But for a scoop by the *Indian Express*’s Maneesh Chhibber, who got hold of portions of the report, the centre may never have made the report public.

It is quite a thing to realise that, despite its sixteen-year delay, the Liberhan commission was still faster than the CBI and the courts in discharging its duty on the matter. Moreover, its conclusions remain the strongest articulation of the crime and its scale, and the only indictment of the culprits. In his 2014 book *Ayodhya: Debacle, Divide, and Dividend*, Pachauri, who had a ringside view of the inquiry as member-secretary, wrote that the Babri Masjid dispute was the result of a collapse of both political and administrative wisdom. “Feelings and sentiments of national pride dormant for long were stoked to create a situation that became ... irreversible.”

Just when the Supreme Court was to start its day-to-day trials in the title suit for the 2.77 acres of disputed land upon which the Babri Masjid once stood, Liberhan told me in an interview, in December 2017, that the “Supreme Court should hear the demolition case first, then the title suit.” But that was not to be.

BETWEEN 1992 AND 2019, all levels of the judiciary had always viewed the title suit in Ayodhya—the legal case over the ownership of the land—as more than a regular land dispute. It was about long-held beliefs and a strong undercurrent of bitterness on both sides that only religion blended with politics could have inspired.

How the courts would resolve the case of the land was seen as critical to how much India stood by its constitutional promise of being a plural, non-denominational democracy. Was India larger than the sum of its parts?

The Allahabad High Court took eighteen years to come up with a somewhat clumsy answer, in 2010. It delivered a divided verdict, converting the title suit into a partition suit. It split the land into three, with three owners: the Sunni Waqf Board representing Muslims; the Ram Lalla Virajman, the infant Ram, who had been made into a juristic entity during the course of the case; and the Nirmohi Akhara. None of the sides were pleased, and appeals were filed in the Supreme Court.

After the political turmoil of the 1990s, the question of justice for the mosque was lost forever. Following the 2002 anti-Muslim pogroms in Gujarat, the NDA government dropped its dogged pursuit of the issue and raised it selectively. The UPA brought with it a sense of moving on, an anxiety to not allow questions around the Congress’s responsibility as far as Muslims were concerned and to desist from provoking the Hindutva sentiment. For the mass media and the public, this was a time when, under the shadow of 9/11 and the attack on parliament, terrorism was laid squarely at the door of Muslims.

After 2014, the political and social mood that prevailed demanded the construction of a Ram temple at the site. Media commentary and court proceedings focussed on the obduracy of the “Muslim” side. The political context made it appear as if the matter was about how and when to build the temple rather than how to judiciously decide the title suit or hold to account those responsible for demolishing the mosque.

On 9 November 2019, days before the chief justice of India, Ranjan Gogoi, was to demit office, the Supreme Court struck down the high court’s verdict. It delivered a unanimous and unprecedentedly unsigned verdict with an

addendum, running over a thousand pages in all. The court awarded the entire disputed site to Ram Lalla Virajman, legally clearing away the Babri Masjid. It set aside the Allahabad High Court ruling, saying that it “defies logic and is contrary to settled principles of law,” and describing the trifurcation as “legally unsustainable.” It held that “the high court was called upon to decide the question of title, particularly in the suits ... But the high court adopted a path not open to it.” It further directed that the Sunni Waqf Board be allotted five acres of land, far away from the site where the mosque once stood. The verdict assigned the job of temple construction to the union government, giving it three months to formulate a scheme to set up a temple trust and hand over the land to it.

The verdict, which was criticised for not being in consonance with the facts it cited, was evidently in tune with the times. The court found the demolition in 1992 to be “egregious” and spoke in detail of how Muslims had been denied their right to the Babri Masjid “through means which should not have been employed in a secular nation committed to the rule of law,” arguing that “justice cannot prevail” unless this was remedied.

“There was no abandonment of the mosque by the Muslims,” it added. “This Court in the exercise of its powers under Article 142 of the Constitution must ensure that a wrong committed must be remedied. ... The Constitution postulates the equality of all faiths. Tolerance and mutual co-existence nourish the secular commitment of our nation and its people.” But the court seems not to have used any such reflection in whom it chose to award the land to. It sided with those who had remorselessly carried out the demolition and displayed no remorse. By accepting their claim and banishing Muslims, it effectively ended up justifying the means adopted in 1992.

In his autobiography, *Justice for the Judge*,

Gogoi writes that, on the evening after the verdict, “I took the judges for dinner to Taj Mansingh Hotel ... We ate Chinese food and shared a bottle of wine, the best available there. I picked up the tab, being the eldest.” He included a photograph from the evening in his book. Its caption began: “Celebrating the landmark Ayodhya verdict.” Four months after Gogoi retired, on the behest of the Modi government, the president nominated Gogoi to the Rajya Sabha, a post he accepted gladly.

Another matter before the apex court was a plea seeking contempt proceedings against the BJP leader Kalyan Singh, who was the Uttar Pradesh chief minister in 1992. His government had submitted to the court that it would not allow the masjid to be harmed. The plea was filed in 1992, and the petitioner had filed multiple applications asking for it to be listed. Both the petitioner and the former chief minister died before it came up, in August 2022. The bench closed the matter, citing the passage of time and the 2019 verdict. “I appreciate your concern,” the court said. “But now nothing survives in this matter.” To keep the matter going would be like “flogging a dead horse.”

BUT THERE ARE SELDOM any dead horses in the life of a nation. India’s politics can neatly be divided into pre- and post-demolition eras. In the older scheme of things, the Hindutva elements were seen as “fringe.” The dominant opposition consisted of socialists and communists, who were not at variance with the ruling Congress on the essentials of what was India—the grand old party at least swore by a composite identity and was interested in securing votes across society. LK Advani’s blood-soaked yatra and the demolition firmly challenged this idea, immediately drawing a line in the sand and putting the BJP at the centre of the political alternative. By refusing to accept its culpability or correct its course, the Congress only made matters worse.

In February 1993, the Narasimha Rao government released a white paper on Ayodhya, in which it laid the blame squarely on the BJP's door. Despite its silent inaction, it refused to be held accountable, arguing that the demolition was "not a failure of the system as a whole." It said that the state government in Uttar Pradesh had "simply cast aside" its commitments to the Supreme Court and the Constitution. "Therein lay the failure, therein lay the betrayal." For his failure to halt the demolition, Rao earned the moniker of "the first BJP prime minister." The BJP's white paper, released the same year, said with candour that "it was because of Ayodhya and the people's perception of it that the BJP increased its voter support."

The BJP won 161 Lok Sabha seats in the 1996 general election. Vajpayee's 13-day government was the first time the party had come to power at the centre. The coalition governments that followed in the next couple of years were a direct result of the demolition, as political parties forged alignments with the simple aim of countering the BJP. In 1999, the BJP was only able to secure allies after it put the issue of the Ram temple on the backburner and turned down its Hindu nationalist credentials. The UPA government of 2004, led by the Congress and supported from the outside by the Left Front, would never have formed but for the shadow of the demolition creating a straightforward secular-versus-communal axis in politics.

Uttar Pradesh saw the maximum turmoil, being the state where the demolition was staged and where the BJP and its predecessor party, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, already had significant support since 1967. The sheer size of the state has always ensured that it has a decisive weight in India's political equation. Before the 1993 assembly election, the BSP and SP announced an alliance, securing 67 and 109 seats, respectively. The BJP managed 177 on its own. That it could not form the government—the SP

leader Mulayam Singh Yadav became chief minister with the support of the Congress and the Janata Dal—added ballast to the view that caste had trumped religious divides.

But now, nearly thirty years on, that seems like a hasty conclusion that avoided confronting the full impact of the cleavages Ayodhya had widened and cemented. The BJP had contested its first assembly election in 1980, the year it was founded, and won 11 seats. The Ram Mandir mobilisation pushed its vote share sharply up from 11.6 percent in 1989 to 31.5 percent in 1991. This share never really took a beating, despite opposition unity often trumping the party in terms of seats.

The BJP's political grip on UP is perhaps the single biggest reason of its ability to seize power at the centre. In this state, the BJP has never needed to sugar coat its Hindu nationalist agenda. Every time the BJP has formed the government at the centre, it has won more seats in Uttar Pradesh than any other party—only once failing to win a majority in the state. It is no surprise, then, that, in 2014, Modi abandoned Ahmedabad and picked Varanasi as his constituency of choice.

The demolition and its aftermath cleared the ground for a politics of impunity that finds regular and consistent expression. The OBC assertion following the implementation of reservations, in 1990, made it appear as if Mandal had bested the *kamandal*—a ceremonial pot used in Hindu rituals that came to be used as a metaphor for upper-caste politics. But, despite the rest being able to combine successfully against the BJP, the party managed to form a much larger support base across India that would carry it for years to come. That is 1992's biggest and most enduring imprint—the BJP's parliamentary seats vaulted upwards and have never slid below the three-figure mark since.

A metaphorical line runs also from the 1992 demolition all the way to the 2002 Gujarat violence—it was a train coming from Ayodhya,

the Sabarmati Express, that was set on fire in Godhra, killing 49 karsevaks and leading to anti-Muslim pogroms in the state. To note how the 2002 violence and his pursuit of the Ram Mandir solidified Modi's standing as a Hindu nationalist politician would, in 2022, be belabouring the point.

And so it was done. To create an internal enemy became successful politics. The veil over unhealed social divisions in India, already tattered, was cast aside.

THE 1990s HAD MARKED a clear break in what it meant to be Indian. Liberalisation inaugurated a journey towards a consumer-driven society and changed Indian aspirations. It is hard to recall this time as necessarily good or bad—a new sense of restlessness began to characterise India. The before and after was most visible in how the media operated and behaved.

Unlike the lynchings and other hate crimes that go viral today, the Babri Masjid demolition happened in the age of Doordarshan, when India was at the cusp of liberalisation. BBC World, having just launched satellite news broadcasting in India, managed to beam a couple of minutes of footage from the demolition into a small number of homes. Video newsmagazines such as *Eyewitness* and *Newstrack* had also begun building audiences. The launch of private cable television provided the Indians who could afford it a menu of choices previously thought impossible. People began to interpret the world through advertisements, which reflected the mood of the times, anxious to welcome consumer goods and the free market. A new crop of television serials helped nurture new values of loyalty to family and community.

New ideas of modernity were seeded, characterised by, as the journalist Mike Marqusee articulated in *War Minus the Shooting: A Journey Through South Asia During the 1996 Cricket World Cup*, more

aggression, more goods and more things as symbols of success. A nationalism centred around popular culture, such as Hindi cinema and cricket, combined with new ideas of globalisation to forever change what it meant to be “middle class.” The non-resident Indian was no longer frowned upon as causing a brain drain and was instead held up as an example worth emulating.

Even as the implementation of the Mandal commission's report threatened to loosen the tight grip of the upper castes over opportunities for social mobility, the media hit back. It had bought—and also decided to sell—the privatisation dream, which was decidedly anti-Mandal. This suited its upper-class, upper-caste owners, who were happy to brand affirmative action as a blow to “merit.” The Sangh Parivar's unapologetic claims to a muscular reclamation of Hindu India found validation and acceptance.

Still, on the Babri question, there was earlier a sense of shame in demonising and attacking Muslims, who form a seventh of the country's population. The “global” norms, or at least what may have been seen as acceptable in the West, meant that the storming of Babri Masjid was only secretly welcomed by media and business houses whose founders were long-term Sangh members or sympathisers. For the *Times of India* and the *Hindustan Times*, the headlines on the morning of 7 December 1992 projected the previous day as a dark one. “The scenes will return, like deranged ghosts, to haunt those of us who were at the graveside to witness the burial of a secular dream,” Dilip Awasthi wrote in *India Today*. “The screams of exultation with each blow of a pickaxe, each thrust of a rod, each dome that came crashing down.”

Cut to television channels run by the same business houses today and the transformation could not be starker. India Today's Hindi channel, Aaj Tak, recently hired Sudhir Chaudhary, who is known for regularly setting

new standards of hate speech and Islamophobia in his primetime shows. The *Times of India*'s television avatar, Times Now, gave us Arnab Goswami—the Modi government's loudest media cheerleader. In 2019, when the Supreme Court announced its decision to award the disputed land to the Hindus, few of these mainstream media organisations bothered to even mask their glee. As they celebrated the verdict, almost all of them omitted the violence that had preceded and followed the demolition. Even if this was not an ideological choice of the owners, it was what had to be done to retain eyeballs and advertisements, and to ensure safety under the ruling dispensation. At a Press Club event in Delhi, marking 25 years of the demolition, a younger journalist, who had cut her teeth reporting on Indian politics in the twenty-first century, smirked as she remarked to me, "Strange that you all had to be beaten up in 1992 to prevent [you] from reporting."

Meanwhile, in India, a generation has grown up after the Babri Masjid fell, well after the line was drawn in blood and Indian politics was transformed from a focus on the Constitution to one on faith. "Gen Z," those born after 1997, has become the most significant demographic in India, for political parties and businesses alike. In 2020, India's median age was expected to be 29, making it the youngest in the world.

MOST OF ALL, in these thirty years, being Hindu has now become central to being Indian. Modi's ascent has signalled the erasure of all that is Not Hindu, especially that which is Muslim. In 2021, the prime minister of this avowedly secular nation sat, saint-like, at the prayers laying the foundation of the Ram temple.

In June 2022, three UN special rapporteurs told the government that the arbitrary destruction of Muslim homes by bulldozers, sanctioned by the administrations in various BJP-ruled states, could be seen as "collective punishment" to

Muslims. To many, they carry the echo of the Babri Masjid, with destruction framed as retributive justice along religious fault lines.

One of the most significant outcomes of the frenzied mobilisation for the demolition was the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, which was passed and supported by all parties in parliament other than the BJP. It was as if a barter was sought between the mob and the rest of India, with Ayodhya being set aside in exchange for freezing the other places of worship across the nation as they were on 15 August 1947. But even this act is now under challenge, as Hindutva groups in Varanasi and Mathura carry out a replay of the Ram Mandir movement, bolstered by a far more favourable political scenario than the one in the early 1990s.

Consider the Gyanvapi Masjid, which stands in close proximity to the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Modi's constituency, Varanasi. Leaders from the Sangh Parivar have openly stated their demand for this mosque to be reclaimed as a temple, gleefully suggesting a direct contravention of the Places of Worship Act. The construction of the Kashi corridor, the prime minister's pet project, drew public attention to the masjid and coincided with the renewed demand among the Hindu Right for it to be taken down. The corridor casts Varanasi as a city of Hindus, airbrushing away its Muslims and their historic associations with the place. But, according to the prime minister, the project represents "*vikas aur virasat*"—progress and legacy. If 1992 was about muscular mobs clawing their way into the masjid and the system, the present day sees them installed in the inner sanctum.

A thrust towards a Hindu India is visible in political assertions and actions, in public records of history and archaeology, in school syllabi, in the mainstream and social media. The frequent crimes against Muslims have become public spectacles. Modi's tenure as prime minister has

seen the lynching of dozens of Muslims on unproven accusations of cow slaughter, communal violence in the national capital, the public flogging of Muslims during Hindu religious events and violent objections against Muslims praying in public, among countless other attacks. Much like the Babri Masjid, plural identities are being brazenly obliterated.

Meanwhile, a hunt is on for the rubble of the Babri Masjid. On 26 December 2019, the All-India Babri Masjid Action Committee, an organisation that was formed in 1987 to protect the mosque, told the media that it was deliberating filing a petition in the Supreme Court seeking custody of the rubble left behind after the destruction. "The pillars, stones and other remains of the demolished mosque should be handed over to Muslims," Zafaryab Jilani, the convenor of the committee, told the media. "As per Shariat law, remains of a masjid cannot be used in any other construction." But people familiar with the committee's proceedings told me the idea had been shelved. I asked MR Shamshad, the leading advocate in the matter, if he knew where the rubble was. "We don't

know where it went," he said.

Thirty years on, India remains deeply in thrall of the demolition. An honest reckoning of the damage the act did to India is still pending. Anti-Muslim cruelty is a feature, not a bug, of India's systems today. But, however marginalised those who do not agree with the idea of a narrow ethnic nation state may feel, they owe it to the imagination and courage of those that drew up the idea of an accommodative and forward-looking India to start the process of recovering India's soul. Like the rubble of the masjid, India must not be allowed to go missing.

Seema Chishti is a writer and journalist based in Delhi. She has worked in print, radio and television, in English and in Hindi, since 1990. She was the Delhi editor for BBC India and a deputy editor at the Indian Express. She is the co-author of *Note by Note: The India Story (1947-2017)*, a history of independent India told alongside the sound of Hindi film music for each of the years.

Courtesy **Caravanmagazine.in**,
3 November 2022. 

Reaching for our Sun...

Contd. from page - (7)

The Solar Ultraviolet Imaging Telescope, another key instrument, is being built at the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics, Pune, with institutes such as IISER Kolkata. It will study the flow of energy from the Sun's surface to the outer layers of its atmosphere.

Elsewhere, there is a plan for a National Large Solar Telescope (NLST) to be installed at Pangong Lake in Ladakh. With an aperture of 2 meters (the Daniel K Inouye Solar Telescope in Hawaii, the world's largest, has a 4.24-metre aperture), it is being designed to study the dynamics of the magnetic fields on the solar surface.

Along with Aditya L1 and MAST (the Multi Application Solar Telescope at the Udaipur observatory, currently India's largest, with an aperture of 50 cm), it could transform how India sees the Sun.

Together, they could also help unravel the mysteries of why the Sun and its corona behave as they do. Although, with an orb this inscrutable and hard to study, scientists are prepared for the implements to throw up all-new mysteries instead.

—Courtesy, *Hindustan Times*

Some used to call it Surya Dev (The Sun God). No more. 

‘Can Victims Be Punished for Judicial Delay?’: Petitioner in Bombay Riots Case

Lawyer-activist Shakil Ahmed has spent three decades helping Bombay riot victims go to court – and believes the courts are sending victims back ‘empty-handed’.

Sukanya Shantha

Mumbai: On Friday, November 4, when the Supreme Court delivered its judgment on one of the petitions filed in the Mumbai riots of 1992-93, the petitioner, Shakil Ahmed, was unaware of the outcome. A senior journalist in Mumbai made a phone call to Ahmed to inform him that his over-two-decade-long struggle for justice had abruptly ended.

“It didn’t come to me as a shock,” the 51-year-old lawyer-cum-activist told *The Wire*. The judiciary, he says, has dragged its feet for so long that he had lost hope of any positive outcome. But what disturbed him was the court’s grounds to dispose of his petition – “a long passage of time”.

In 2001, after waiting for three years for the Maharashtra state government to implement the Justice B.N. Srikrishna Commission report, Ahmed approached the Supreme Court. His primary prayers included action against over 30 policemen, whom the commission had recommended disciplinary action against for ordering or directly opening fire, leading to many deaths and causing injuries to innumerable men belonging to the Muslim community. Ahmed’s petition had also sought compensation for families of 168 persons who went “missing” after the riot.

The apex court after 21 years directed the state government to pay Rs 2 lakh with an additional 9% interest per annum since January 1999, when the state had passed the government resolution. The court has directed the state to form a committee to trace the families of missing persons who have been “deprived of compensation” and “complete the procedural

formalities”.

On the point of action against the erring policemen, however, the court has observed: “In view of a long passage of time, as far as the disciplinary action is concerned, now in the year 2022, it will be inappropriate to go into the question of the validity of the orders passed by the disciplinary authorities and the adequacy of the penalties imposed.”

The December 6, 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya caused widespread violence across different parts of Mumbai city. Several senior leaders of the Shiv Sena, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) were accused of mobilising mobs against Muslims in the city. At the end of the widespread riot which lasted for more than a month, over 900 persons – predominantly from the Muslim community – were killed. Among many leaders, the commission had held the then Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray responsible for provoking his party workers to “retaliate” by launching “organised attacks against Muslims”.

The voluminous report and its grave findings, however, were ignored by both the Congress and Shiv Sena-BJP governments over the past three decades. When the riots broke out, the Congress was in power in the state. Later, in 1995, when the Sena-BJP coalition government came into power, it tried to divert the commission’s primary focus from riots to the subsequent serial bomb blast in the state. And when Justice Srikrishna refused to cave in, this became a ground for rejecting the report in totality.



Shakil Ahmed. Photo: Special arrangement

From 1998 to 2001, Ahmed recalls, he and other citizen groups actively campaigned for action against the erring policemen. Their demand was consistent: take cognisance of the commission's findings and initiate action against the policemen responsible for killing so many innocent citizens of Mumbai. When the state failed, Ahmed moved the court. He insists that the victims and their lawyers have always been swift in asking for justice. "How can the (Supreme) Court then give delay as the reason for not dispensing justice?" he asks. "Can victims be punished for the judicial delay? If anything, the courts and the government are responsible for the delay."

In the past three decades, riot victims have made several attempts to seek justice. Several petitions were moved from time to time before the state administration and judiciary seeking compensation, demand for legal action, and reopening of cases. But each of these appeals has been ignored on flimsy grounds. Meanwhile, the state promoted most of those policemen accused of serious crimes like shooting at innocent members of the Muslim community, destruction of property, and slapping false cases. "It was as if the state was rewarding the policemen for killing innocent people," Ahmed says.

As an example, Ahmed, in his petition, cited outcomes in 253 cases. Among them, only six had ended in conviction. In as many as 114 cases, the accused persons were acquitted. Around 97 were put into cold storage as

"dormant cases". The Supreme Court has now directed the state government to provide details of these 97 cases to the Registrar General of the Bombay high court within a period of one month and take necessary steps to trace the absconding/missing accused and restart the trial.

The petition also stated that over 1,300 cases were closed by the police after being classified as "A Summary" cases, which in legal parlance means "true but undetected". In most of these cases, the victims had deposed before the commission and had provided ample evidence for the court to proceed with the trial. On the contrary, when the police sought to close the case, the trial court had mindlessly accepted their application, Ahmed points out.

Over the past three decades, Ahmed, first as a young rights activist and later as a lawyer, has helped several riot victims approach the court and receive compensation from the state. He recalls how several female victims were denied compensation because they chose to remarry after losing their respective husbands. Some victims, who were not able to produce adequate documents like ration cards or residential proof, were also turned down. Over the years, people just gave up.

Both lives and properties were lost in the violence. After the riots, many Muslim families were forced to abandon their property and belongings in Mumbai and look for safer refuge in the city's outskirts. This was the beginning of a systematic ghettoisation in Mumbai, permanently pushing them to the fringes.

Ahmed's was one of the very few petitions that were pending before the Supreme Court. His lawyer for over 20 years, Colin Gonsalves, had handled the case pro bono. Going to the apex court and fighting consistently for so long is not easy for victims, Ahmed says. "And the handful of us who pushed our way through and went knocking at the doors of the higher judiciary have also returned empty-handed now."

Courtesy **The Wire**, 7 November 2022. 🌈

Kashmir: Blatant Distortions of History, an obstacle to Peace

Ram Puniyani

The abrogation of Article 370 was done with the claims that this step will restore peace and give security for the hapless Kashmiri Pundit community. Three years down the line after the killings of over eight Kashmiri Pundits it is clear that the move was wrong to the core. Even earlier, while imposing demonetization on the nation, one of the claims was that this will curb the terrorist violence in Kashmir. As that also turned to be an ill thought move, the problems persist.

With such a situation now the favourite whipping boy of BJP, Nehru is being blamed for the situation in Kashmir. Kiran Rijju the Union minister states that Nehru's follies have created the Kashmir problem. Not to be left behind UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath claims that implementation of article 370 is at the root of terrorist violence. Nothing can be farther from truth. Countering Rijju's baseless presentation of the events of history, Congress General Secretary Jayram Ramesh calls Rijju as a 'distorian' and he is not off the mark.

Rijju says it is wrong to say the Maharaja of Kashmir was dilly dallying merging to India. He asserts that problem was created by Nehru! The truth is that as India became Independent the Princely states were given the choice of either merging with India or Pakistan or remaining independent. Maharaja Harising, ruler of Kashmir, chose to remain independent. In his stance of refusing to merge with India, he was duly supported Praja Parishd, the elements who later became part of Bharatiya Jansangh, previous avatar of BJP. Maharaja did not

want to give up his privileges and offered 'standstill' agreement (status quo) to both Pakistan and India. Pakistan accepted his offer, due to which Pakistan flags flew over the Post Offices of J&K. India refused this offer.

Later, Tribal and Pathan groups, supported by Pakistan army, launched an attack on Kashmir. They gave the reasons that since Muslims were being subjected to violence in Jammu, they need to counter it. Incidentally the Jammu anti Muslim violence was planned by Maharaja himself as he wanted at least one part of J&K to be Hindu majority. This Pakistan backed invasion forced Harising to seek India's help to send its army. The pre-condition of this was the treaty of accession which gave all the powers to state Assembly except defense, communication, currency and external affairs.

As far as Article 370 was concerned, it was on the insistence of Harisingh, who wanted special status for J&K. "...Both the Kashmir Govt. and the National Conference pressed us to accept this accession and to send troops by air, but made a condition that the accession would have to be considered by the people of Kashmir later when the peace and order were established..." (Jawaharlal Nehru, Collected Works, XVIII, p. 421) The matter was taken up by Constituent Assembly and Article 370 was brought in. Similarly, the decision of cease fire and taking the matter to United Nations were reflecting the mood of GOI as a whole and not merely of Jawaharlal Nehru. Sardar Patel in his letter to Nehru says

(23rd February Feb 1950). “As regards specific issues raised by Pakistan, as you have pointed out, the question of Kashmir is before the Security Council. Having invoked a forum of settlement of disputes open to both India and Pakistan as members of the United Nations Organization nothing further needs to be done in the way of settlement of disputes than to leave matters to be adjudicated through that forum.”


Actually, the problem lay somewhere else and that was the insistence of communal forces to forcibly merge the state with India. Here Nehru was for winning the hearts and minds of the people of Kashmir rather than forcibly merging J&K. This was in total synchrony with what Sardar Patel thought. This is revealed by his letter to Nehru (23rd February 1950). He had even gone to the extent of saying “Some people consider that a Muslim majority area must necessarily belong to Pakistan. They wonder why we are in Kashmir. The answer is plain and simple. We are in Kashmir because the people of Kashmir want us to be there. The moment we realize that the people of Kashmir do not want us to be there, we shall not be there even for a minute... We shall not let the Kashmir down”. (Hindustan Times, October 31, 1948)


What happened was something different. As the matters stand there was gradual erosion of autonomy of Kashmir leading to alienation of Kashmiri people and rise of dissidence. This alienation led to initial protests which intensified with time. There was no communal element in this to begin with. After intervention of Pakistan and its training of dissidents the violence started. This took communal colour with the Al Qaeda type elements entering Kashmir and started targeting the Kashmiri Pundits in

the decade of 1980s. The roots of terrorist violence do not lie in the implementation of Article 370; it lies in the gradual suppression of autonomy of Kashmir. The terrorist violence was planted by outside elements and the US supported radical Islamist groups, trained with US designed syllabus in few Pakistan Madarssas did lead the situation in adverse direction.

Mr. Adityanath has to realize that if article 370 was the cause of the unfortunate terrorist violence in Kashmir, it should have subsided with its abrogation three years ago! If removal of this article was panacea for the disturbances in J&K, Kashmiri pundits would have felt safe and secure after abrogation of this article. The Kashmiri pundits are living in fear even today as the root cause of the problem is alienation of Kashmiris and suppression of the democratic rights in the state.

Rijiju is totally off the mark when he blames Nehru for the Kashmir imbroglio. Maharaja Harisingh never wanted to accede to India. He was supported by some elements and pro-India elements were looked down as outlined by many writers, including the prominent journalist Balraj Puri in his book Kashmir: Insurgency and after.

The attempt of BJP leaders is to polarize the society by holding Nehru or Article 370 responsible to the whole situation. They also  dermine or deliberately ignore the international situation. The terrorism in the area, the promotion of extremist Islamist groups by America has contributed to worsening of situation in J&K. What we need today is to understand the issue with unprejudiced mind rather than blaming Nehru or Article 370 for the difficult situation there.

Courtesy **Countercurrents.org**,
11 November 2022. 

BJP signalling support for 2002 riots to win Gujarat polls is a dire sign for India

It will communicate to India's 200 million strong Muslim community that India's democracy has no place for even its physical safety, much less its aspirations.

Shoaib Daniyal



Convicts in the Bilkis Bano mass murder and gangrape case being greeted with sweets as they were released from jail in Godhra on August 15. | PTI

Even for India, where mass violence is unfortunately common, the recounting of the Naroda Patiya massacre is unusual for the intensity and planned nature of the attack. The violence took place on February 28, 2002 and involved a quasi-military style attack on the Ahmedabad neighbourhood of Naroda Patiya. LPG cylinders were used as explosive munitions to destroy buildings. Women and girls were gangraped before they were killed. Human Rights Watch

quoted a witness who saw attackers pour petrol into a child's mouth and then light it, so that he was blown apart.

Naroda Patiya took place without any police interference, as the mob was given full leeway to carry out one of India's largest massacres. Incredibly, two decades later, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the ruling party during the attack, is trying to utilise the memory of that horrific violence in a bid to attract votes for the upcoming 2022

Assembly elections. Rather than be contrite about how such horrific killings could take place under its watch, the party has nominated the daughter of one of the convicts, Manok Kukrani, as an MLA candidate.

Eyewitnesses say that Kukrani was part of a mob that burnt alive a Muslim woman. He was also part of a mob that first gangraped and then burnt a woman alive. As a result of his daughter's nomination, NDTV reports that the convicted mass murderer is now part of the BJP's Assembly campaign.

This is not all. The BJP has also nominated as its MLA candidate, CK Raulji, who had described the perpetrators of another massacre during the Gujarat riots as "Brahmins...with good values". Raulji was part of a committee which agreed to release the convicted mass murders and rapists from prison before they had completed their sentence. The people praised by Raulji were responsible for the murder of 14 Muslims, including smashing the head of an infant child, as well as gangrape. Bilkis Bano was one of the few that survived this brutal attack and had, since then, led a legal fight.

Communal polity

It is clear that the BJP wants to signal its support for the horrific violence of 2002 in a bid to polarise the upcoming state election. This is not a new strategy. In fact, the 2002 Gujarat Assembly elections itself had also largely been fought with on the issue of the riots and, rather than penalise the ruling party under which they took place, the Gujarati electorate had voted the BJP back to power with a near 50% vote share.

At that time, the Congress had tried to launch an anti-riot political platform and was severely penalised for it by Gujarati voters.

The image of Modi after the riots as a zealous proponent of Hindutva saw him rise to the post of prime minister, heading the most powerful Union government in decades.

As unfortunate as the BJP's election campaign of 2002 was, the 2022 endorsement of the Gujarat violence by politicians who now form India's dominant party is even more so. So strong is majoritarian sentiment that not only can the ruling party back people convicted during the 2002 violence, the Opposition is wary of attacking the BJP on this, lest the entire election gets reduced to a communal contest, in which case the BJP would gain an easy victory, being backed by the majority community.

Shadow election

While it is obvious, it is not just Gujarat's Muslims who have suffered immensely from this idea of reducing elections to an act of bullying a helpless minority. The state as a whole has suffered. As is well known, Gujarat is marked by serious development defects, with its children being significantly malnourished compared to even poor states like West Bengal. On government hospital beds, for example, Tamil Nadu has four times the number Gujarat has, although their populations are similar.

The BJP's move towards all but explicitly endorsing the 2002 riots will then have two worrying outcomes: it will communicate to India's 200-million-strong Muslim minority that India's democracy has no place for even its physical safety, much less its aspirations. And as we see with the poor state of human development in Gujarat, it will allow politicians to ignore discussing substantive issues during elections given that communal hate by itself is a winning formula.

Courtesy **Scroll.in**, 14 November 2022. 

The Truth and the Lie

*Anyone trying to breathe the fresh air of truth,
runs the risk of being detained under UAPA*

M.G. Devasahayam

Addressing the recent ‘Chintan Shivir’ of Home Ministers of States attended by Home Secretaries and Director General of Police (DGPs) of the States, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a few devastating statements. First, he said that “the Laws enacted by the central government displayed a will to strongly handle corruption, terrorism and Hawala. Laws like UAPA have given strength to the system in a decisive battle against terrorism.” The truth is that the conviction rate in UAPA cases is a dismal 3% and by no stretch of imagination this can be called a decisive battle against terrorism.

Then he dealt the knockout punch: “Every form of Naxalism, be it the one with guns or the one with pens, they have to be uprooted to prevent them from misleading the youth of the country.” The Prime Minister warned that such forces are increasing their intellectual sphere to pervert the minds of coming generations. “For the sake of the unity and integrity of the nation and with the inspiration of Sardar Patel, we cannot allow any such forces to flourish in our country,” he said.

The message is clear and is in line with the doctrine expounded by National Security Advisor Ajit Doval some months ago at the National Police Academy, Hyderabad, “the new frontiers of war, what you call the fourth-generation warfare, is the civil society.” Sum and substance of the Doval Doctrine and the Modi Diktat is that Indians should live by the lies and fake news of the official/party machinery and cannot breathe the fresh air of truth. Anyone trying to attempt this runs the risk of being branded Naxal and detained under UAPA.

The litmus test came within two days, on October 30, when an “Act of Terror by corruption and commission” befell on the 140-

year-old British-era swinging suspension bridge in Gujarat’s Morbi killing over 140 men, women and children and maiming many more. This was due to a series of lapses, such as no safety audit of the metal bridge, no audit of the structure’s load bearing capacity and the contractor (the clock making company OREVA) not qualified for the job.

Many of the cables of the bridge were rusty and yet not replaced, while the material used for the renovation was substandard, leaving the bridge vulnerable when it was hurriedly reopened without any approvals. Forensic experts believe that the main cable of the bridge snapped because of the weight of the new flooring. This horrific incident would not have happened had the cables been replaced and adequate safety measures taken. What is more, no life-saving equipment and evacuation plan were put in place when the bridge was reopened amid the festive season. The Morbi horror is a lethal combination of horrendous corruption and humongous human tragedy and in that sense could be among the worst in Indian history. Prime Minister Narendra Modi who visited the site two days later casually mentioned the need for a “detailed, impartial and extensive” inquiry to identify all aspects relating to the bridge collapse. The bare fact staring at everyone is that even the unqualified corporate-crony OREVA Group had time till December to complete the repairs and renovation, but it opened the bridge much earlier and loaded it with more than 500 tourists, like cattle. This was only to make some quick money treating the bridge as family property.

Despite this none of the owners of the OREVA Group are even mentioned in the FIR registered so far. As if to rub it in, the OREVA

name board displayed on the collapsed bridge was covered with a plastic sheet during Modi's site visit indicating that this will be the fate of the "detailed, impartial and extensive" inquiry! Another glaring fact is that while some 'loyal' TV channels were busy spinning lies that the bridge collapsed due to people resorting to swinging, the factual coverage of the catastrophe in the media has been unusually subdued and suppressed. As per a Wall Street Journal report even Facebook's Gujarat hashtag was pulled out on the day after the tragedy to prevent people from seeing the gory pictures. It was as if everyone was afraid of telling the truth. This brings us to the 'New India' reality that while peddling lies is kosher, and telling the truth is 'Naxal'! The race between lie and truth is eternal. Mark Twain had famously said: "A lie can travel around the world and back again while the truth is lacing up its boots." Yet, India adopted the opposite and almost impossible motto of "Satyameva Jayate" (Truth alone shall triumph). Now, things have come to such a pass that the mighty state may prevent the truth from even lacing up its boots by clamping UAPA or Sedition law! What is Truth? Dictionary meaning of truth is the actuality of things or events, fact, or spiritual reality. Other definitions of truth have to do with sincerity in action or character, while others literally refer to God.

The opposite of truth, then, is lies, falsity, fiction, and falsehood. No matter how it is viewed, truth bears the fruit of trust, and many of us spend our entire lives looking for it. In the Bhagavad-Gita, when Arjuna asks what impels us to act self-destructively (03.36), Krishna identifies our own desires for sensual indulgence as the culprits (03.37). If we are to liberate ourselves from self-destructive behaviour, we have to begin by acknowledging our vulnerability and gullibility. It is in this context that the Biblical dictum "the truth will set you free" becomes relevant. Such dictum notwithstanding, throughout human history truth has been a rarity. As noted by writer Rohit Kumar,

the 'Parable of the Sower' narrated by Jesus in the Bible describes this. A parable is a short story that teaches a lesson and the 'Parable of the Sower' is a case in point and this is how it goes: "A sower (farmer) went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the road, and the birds came and devoured it. "Other seed fell on rocky earth, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up, but since it had no depth of soil or roots, when the sun rose, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. But other seed fell into good soil and grew, yielding grain thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold." (Mark, Chapter 4, verses 3-9)

"Jesus goes on to explain that the four kinds of ground that the farmer sowed seeds in are symbolic of four kinds of people and their reactions to the truth that is shared with them. There are those who are like the road on which the seed fell. Like the birds, Satan immediately comes and takes away the truth that is presented in them. "Then there are those who are like the rocky earth: the ones who, when they hear the truth, receive it with joy, but because they don't have much depth, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the truth, immediately they fall away. "Then there are those who hear the truth, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in like thorns and choke the truth, and it proves unfruitful. But there are also those who, like fertile ground, when they hear the truth with a good and honest heart, accept it and the truth bears a great harvest in their lives." Moral of the story is that even in normal times penetration and adherence to truth among the people is minimal. In 'New India' even this is under assault to ensure that "Truth shall never Triumph." As the space for truth is shrinking, the infamous oracle of Adolf Hitler appears to be coming true: "The great masses of the people will more easily fall victim to a big lie than to a small one."

(To be Contd....on Page -29)

Maximum Government, Minimum Governance

Biju Negi

Do you remember 10 March 2022? What happened that day?

The results of the elections to the five state assemblies were declared wherein the BJP won in four of the five states, with the fifth, Punjab going to AAP.

What happened then?

Almost immediately, the Prime Minister flew to Gujarat, which was the next state slated for elections, though still eight-nine months away.

The Prime Minister has been known to prefer being in the election mode, which gets his adrenaline going, but this was the most definitive indication of his decisive priority of being in the election mode.

One might say, the Prime Minister has, for most parts of his premiership, been in that mode. Even when he is abroad (as he has been on over 150 occasions), he would rather have the Indian diaspora rallies organized by his supporting groups (including the Indian embassies) rather than meet with the people, press and intelligentsia of the host country. Later, he stopped holding press conferences there as well, to the extent of even having a formal request made that no questions be asked by the Press at the formal joint declaration ceremonies. For him, these press conferences or interviews (both there or here) stopped being of any concern or importance. His target audience everywhere, wherever he went, was the Indian diaspora and the people back home, all with an eye on the next elections.

But his 10 March visit to Gujarat, was a clear sign of the Prime Minister shifting into higher gear, and in the State to which his umbilical cord remained still tied and was his lifeline.

However, with this election mode, whatever happened to the Prime Minister's governance mode? When the BJP won in 2014, among the plethora of statements and promises the Prime

Minister made to the country was that his will be "minimum government, maximum governance".

Now, eight years on, we can see and speculate on almost unlimited variations in the fulfilment of that promise.

Minimum government? Yes, of course. Minimum and limited to the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, both who had taken the Constitutional oath, plus the PMO and his two brothers in arms who didn't need to take the oath. The other names that took oath while getting aboard the Government's cabinet are there, at best, as masquerades or robots. Indeed, it might be a good IQ test for us to name the ministers and their respective ministries, without looking at GK notes or seeking the google guru!

Maximum governance? Well, yes, in terms of absolute control over the governing institutions, machineries and treasuries.

In April 2019, the Prime Minister stated that the country still doesn't know the real meaning of minimum government and maximum governance. And as the country awaited the new definition with bated breath – it rapidly emerged that in real-time situation, the terms actually meant "maximum government" and "minimum governance".

That is exactly what we are facing and experiencing – a maximum government, maximum through exercising total control and practicing minimum governance. One can site any number of examples as evidence and proof but when all institutions that matter and actually execute governance lie shattered, in despair and in virtual chain and fear, what is left to govern? All that the government has to do is to govern the police, the CBI, the ED, and they in turn then execute governance for it. Likewise, simply govern the judiciary, the election commission, the media *et.al.*, not forgetting the foot soldiers, and

they do all the governing as per your specific wishes. With minimum to actually govern, throws open for the party in power the ground where it can happily remain in election mode 24x7. Thus, when there are no elections, we have a government already thinking of and preparing assiduously for the next elections, weakening its own partner political parties in the states and decimating those in opposition or having its think-tanks scheme how through cajoling, threatening or buying, whatever that works, to have adequate opposition MLAs and MPs on its side and topple the Opposition ruled state governments. You could say, “BJP forms the government in a state after winning the election; BJP forms the government in a state even after losing the election!”

Is it any surprise then that there is no policy or plan worked out, no action taken, no work in progress on issues that are troubling the country most – and are, in fact, snowballing as a result of the apathy – from the Chinese two-steps-forward-one-step-back presence on the country’s borders to the spiralling cost of living and unemployment, the concerns on the education and health fronts, the ills that beset the farmers, not to talk of the threat to the country’s Constitution. And so, we see, sharply deteriorating indices on virtually all fronts, the troubling rise in the state of hunger, the increasing sense of helplessness, insecurity and fear, gathering over the people the people at large and the minorities and the women, in particular.

At the same time, it isn’t any surprise either that the Opposition parties have fallen into the trap and have themselves joined the election mode race – decimated and scattered as they are yet biting at one another. There are some Opposition strongholds in several States, but these too are forever wary and distrusting of the other Opposition parties alongside or in other States.

However, what is worse or more worrying, since 10th March, is that even media has been mainly catering to the election mode. One is not

expecting anything from the Godi media, but even the social and the alternative media (including the many news portals that have come up in the last couple of years) does not discuss governance, no longer thread-baring the foul, immoral or illegal means being practiced, no longer measuring their distressing impacts on the various fronts – but more discussing the “excellent election machinery” of the BJP. And even where they are discussing the issues that matter, it is largely from the point of view of what that would mean in terms of the next elections and the prospects for the various political parties. It is, as if, the question of TRP is upfront for them as well.

Amidst all this, though a bit too early to state definitely, the *Bharat Jodo Yatra* seems to have opened the window a bit. In its breath of fresh air, those who thus far were fearful, are beginning to show signs of emerging from that suffocation and finding their voice. Still, it would be foolishly naive to hope and expect that the current problems and situation are going to upturn anytime soon. That would largely depend on the people, the people and the people!

Biju Negi, *Hind Swaraj Manch & Beej Bachao Andolan*


Courtesy **Countercurrents**, 24/10/2022 

Contd. from page - (27)

The Truth and the Lie

Recently the Ashoka Lions in the National Emblem were severely distorted by making them look ferocious. It is time that the national motto inscribed on the emblem is altered to “Asatyameva Jayate” (Untruth alone shall triumph). This will benefit “New India” and would at least save us from the brazen hypocrisy that is being practiced.

M.G.Devasahayam retired from the Indian Administrative Service. He also served in the Indian Army.

Courtesy **The Citizen**, 5 November 2022. 

46 % of Indians perceive news coverage of PM Modi as biased

Syed Ali Mujtaba

New Delhi: A report by Delhi-based think tank Lokniti-CSDS and Germany's Konrad Adenauer Stiftung finds that 46 % of Hindus and Muslims who follow various media sources perceive news coverage of PM Modi as biased. They also believe that the Modi government is portrayed too favorably in the Indian news media.

Only about one in five news consumers responded that the media in India gives balanced political coverage and said, neither is it too favorable towards the government/opposition nor is it too unfavorable.

The report is released on October 20, 2022, and is titled 'Media in India: Access, Practices, Concerns, and Effects.' The report used data to show how different communities are consuming news and how the media landscape is transforming in India.

Media Trust Deficit

"Muslim news consumers are less trusting of the news media than Hindu news consumers says the report. It adds, their trust levels in private news channels and AIR news is quite low and both communities trust the online news websites the least.

'But people have bestowed trust on government services and websites for information and Doordarshan news channels and media still remain the most-trusted, among the religious communities' says the report.

The extent of the trust deficit also depends on political leanings. "Those leaning towards Congress and regional parties are less trusting of all types of media, compared to those inclined towards the BJP. Congress supporters are, on average, the least trusting the news media reports," finds the report.

The findings of the report are based on a sample survey of 7,463 Indian citizens aged 15 years and above, carried out in January this year across 19 states and union territories, excluding parts of the Northeast and Kashmir.

Television vs Smart Phones

Television, by and large, remains the most popular medium for accessing news across the country. The report found that social media, though the game changer in the media landscape because of access to information, has come with its own baggage, as it heavily depends on smartphone ownership.

Regional vs National news

"News consumers in the cities stand out in their preference for nonlocal news. They consume national news more compared to news consumers in towns and villages. Those residing in villages take the least interest in national news. The report also highlighted how people in cities were more interested in national news than what is happening locally. The report sums up that as urbanity increases; interest in national news also increases.

The strongest preference for national news was found among news consumers of Delhi and Haryana. Rajasthan too leaned more toward national news. In northwest India, the survey found consumers prefer national news more than local news. As far as state news is concerned, it was most strongly preferred in Assam, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh. In south India consumers are inclined towards hyper-local and international news, says the report.

Supporters of Political Parties and News Consumption

There is a stark gap in trust among supporters

of political parties in news outlets. Patterns of news consumption differed among supporters of the ruling BJP and opposition parties. The report claimed that most readers of English newspapers supported the Congress, while consumers of Hindi news seemed to incline towards the BJP. "The proportion of individuals that mostly read the newspaper in English is around 3% but among this tiny segment, the Congress enjoys the most support. This is not the case among readers who read newspapers in other languages," says the report.

Surveillance Issue

The respondents have divided the issue of the "ethicality/morality" aspect of government surveillance of content on social media. "45% of social media users believe there is nothing wrong with surveillance and 40% believe it is wrong. Active users of Facebook and 'Whats App' is the most likely to be concerned about their privacy being compromised. Single active users appear to be the least concerned about their privacy being compromised while using these apps.

Google and Yahoo enjoy trust when it comes to privacy-related matters. Social media companies on the other hand are divided on the trust for privacy issues. Those who trust are 37% and those who do not are 38%.

The perception that the government monitors

people's online and phone activities is strongest among active internet users of North West and North India. Many in South India gave a qualified answer that the government monitors only some people, not all," says the report.

Fake news Issue

The report also looks at the dissemination of fake news. Participants of the survey accepted that they received and forwarded news items and messages that may not have been entirely true.

"Nearly half of active internet users and social media and messenger platform users admitted to having been misled by fake news or information online at some point."

"Around two-fifths of active internet users and social media users admitted to having shared/forwarded misinformation at some point of time; i.e. they unknowingly and unintentionally shared/forwarded fake news and realized later that it was false."

The more educated respondents were "more likely" to admit to having been misled by fake news than the ones who weren't, simply because they remained unaware of what they shared being fake," reads the report.

Syed Ali Mujtaba is a journalist based in Chennai. He can be contacted at [syedalimujtaba2007@gmail.com](mailto:syedalinujtaba2007@gmail.com)

Courtesy **Countercurrents**, 23/10/2022. 

Articles/Reports for The Radical Humanist

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Please mail your articles/reports for publication in the RH to:- theradicalhumanist@gmail.com or mahipalsinghrh@gmail.com or post them to:- Mahi Pal Singh, Raghav Vihar Phase-3, Prem Nagar, Dehradun, 248007 (Uttarakhand)

Please send your digital passport size photograph and your brief resume if it is being sent for the first time to the RH.

A note whether it has also been published elsewhere or is being sent exclusively for the RH should also be attached with it.

- Mahi Pal Singh, Editor, The Radical Humanist

A decade after Nirbhaya, why does BJP think endorsing rapists will win votes?

Shoaib Daniyal

December 2012 saw vigorous protests, mostly in the city of Delhi, centred around women's safety. The trigger was the brutal gangrape and murder of a 22-year-old woman who had been labelled "Nirbhaya" or Fearless to conform to Indian law that rape victims should not be identified.

Politically, much of this anger hit the Congress, which at the time was ruling in both Delhi as well as the Centre. It is unclear if the protests directly swung many votes, but like the allegations of ministerial corruption at the time, they helped to delegitimise the Congress government in the public conversation. Later, an angry Sheila Dixit, the Congress chief minister of Delhi during the assault, blamed the media for blowing the incident "out of proportion" in order to create a "political scandal". Unsurprisingly, one of the Bharatiya Janata Party's major attacks against the Congress in its successful campaign for the 2014 Lok Sabha polls was lack of women's safety.

U-turn?

Fast forward a decade back and the political economy of women's safety seems to have taken a drastic turn. In August, 11 men convicted for rape and murder during the 2002 Gujarat riots were released from prison. On their release, they were felicitated by a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the parent organisation of the Bharatiya Janata Party. The Union government as well as the Gujarat government, both controlled by the BJP, pushed for the release of the convicts, endorsing their "good behaviour" in prison.

This official backing for convicted rapists and murderers is especially surprising

considering the brutality of the crime. The incident involved the mass murder of 14 people in Dahod district during the 2002 riots along with sexual assault of women, including Bilkis Bano, who survived the attack. The trial determined that the attackers had smacked the head of Bano's infant daughter.

That wasn't all. On October 15, Gurmeet Ram Rahim, the leader of an influential religious sect, was granted a 40-day parole by the Haryana government. Rahim has been convicted of raping two of his female followers, murdering a journalist as well as one of his employees. To make the politics of the parole clear, a religious event he held after his release saw BJP leaders in attendance, including the mayor of Karnal town.

Notably, the release of the convicts in Gujarat as well as Haryana parole coincide with elections in the state. Gujarat will see Assembly polls soon and Haryana will conduct panchayat elections. While the Nirbhaya protests resulted in the Congress losing ground, with the explicit backing of rapists in these two cases, the BJP actually hopes to gain votes.

Communal identity vs women's safety

The contrast underlines the incredibly powerful role of religious identity in Indian politics. In both cases, the BJP has been successful in linking the rape-murder convicted to communal identities. In the case of Gujarat, it related to Hindu nationalism. For Rahim, it is connect to his Dera Sacha Sauda sect, which has lakhs of followers who are extremely zealous (his rape conviction in 2017 saw widespread rioting, with 30 people killed). In both cases, the BJP hopes that any criticism about the release of the convicts will backfire,

given that they will be seen by voters not as criminals but as representatives of their communities.

Notably, opposition to the release of the convicts has also largely been mediated by identity, with Muslims in Gujarat and Sikhs in Haryana angry at the BJP's actions. However, since these minorities don't vote BJP anyway, it does not matter electorally.

Remarkably, at least the BJP's initial gambit has been proven correct. Both the Aam Aadmi Party and the Gujarat Congress have studiously avoided mentioning the release of Bano's rapists, afraid that centering communalism in the election would only solidify the BJP's vote bank.


The power of religious identity in Indian politics means that while women's safety should certainly be an issue on its own, it can easily be overwhelmed if politicians successfully manage to portray the criminals as being linked to a community.

To some extent this has always been true. It is the reason widespread sexual assault documented during bouts of communal violence such as Gujarat in 2002 or Delhi in 1984 produced no political reactions centred around women's safety. However, the change that

Modi's BJP has brought about with its radical Hindutva ideology has been to incorporate this into official policy, with even the Union government being unafraid to endorse the convicts in the Bilkis Bano case.

Though the Modi government came to power in 2014 on a largely economic mandate, it has struggled to deliver on its promises, given faltering gross domestic product growth and lack of job creation. Instead the government has concentrated its efforts principally on the emotive issue of Hindutva (with a supporting role being played by welfare). That this now involves even endorsing convicted rapists shows just how strong this politics is and how much the BJP now depends on it for winning elections.

The fact that the BJP's opponents cannot directly challenge the party on this issue marks this out as a major shift in Indian politics during the Modi age. The result: identity politics will continue to be supreme for the near future. At best, the Opposition could try and corner the BJP on other forms of identity, as is already being done on language. But any attempt to make economic issues as the central point of Indian politics in place of identity seems unlikely.

Courtesy **Scroll.in**, 24 October 2022. 

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Editor, The Radical Humanist

Bilkis Bano and G N Saibaba: A tale of two injustices

Rekha Sharma writes: While convicts in the Bilkis Bano case roam free after their premature release, wheelchair-bound Saibaba has been denied release after acquittal by raising the spectre of national security

Rekha Sharma

The Supreme Court order suspending the operation of the judgment of the Bombay High Court's Nagpur bench, which had acquitted **former Delhi University professor, G N Saibaba**, and four others in a case under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) over alleged Maoist links, shows a disturbing trend. The High Court judgment was delivered on October 14. On the same day, the state rushed to seek a stay on it. The matter was taken up by a bench headed by Justice D Y Chandrachud, but it declined to stay the judgment. The state then approached the Chief Justice for immediate urgent listing of the case. The Chief Justice found the matter so grave, and the likely release of Saibaba from jail so serious a threat to the sovereignty and integrity of the nation, that he constituted a special bench, and directed the matter to be heard on the following day, which was a Saturday, a non-working day of the court. The desperation with which the state moved to stall Saibaba's release was unprecedented. It was as though, on his release from jail, he would have vanished in thin air. Equally unprecedented was the alacrity with which the Chief Justice ordered the matter to be listed.

In the past, the Supreme Court has held special sittings, even at midnight, but these were cases where the accused were on death row. The only recent exception that comes to mind is of Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi, who held a sitting on a Saturday in a case in which he himself was accused of sexual harassment

by a staffer. But Saibaba's was a case of acquittal. The heavens would not have fallen if the matter had waited for two more days. The question is not about the power of the Chief Justice to order the listing of a matter before any bench at any time. It is about the unhealthy precedent that has been set. It is only in the rarest of rare cases that special sittings were held in the past, where the life and liberty of an individual was at stake. Never, perhaps, have they been held to take away the liberty of an individual who had secured the same through the process of the court, and not by executive fiat.

In contrast to Saibaba's case, we have before us the case of Bilkis Bano who was gang-raped during the communal violence that followed the Godhra train burning. She was 21 years old and five months pregnant at the time and 11 were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. However, the Gujarat government, as an act of state benevolence, **granted remission to all 11 on Independence Day**, and they were prematurely released from jail. On their release, they were greeted with garlands at the office of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

The incident led to public outcry, and many eminent persons petitioned the Supreme Court, urging it to revoke the early release of 11 convicts. But in this case the governments, both at the Centre and in the state, have maintained a studied silence, with no one standing up in the Supreme Court saying that the convicts'

release has led to grave miscarriage of justice. Now it has come to light that the Centre was also party to the 11 convicts' early release. It was, therefore, futile to expect anything from the system. While the tormentors of Bilkis Bano are roaming free, she is once again condemned to live a life under the shadow of fear and uncertainty.

On the other hand, 59-year-old Saibaba is wheelchair-bound, and suffering from partial paralysis of his upper limbs with 90 per cent disability. He has been in custody since 2017, and was earlier twice granted bail on medical grounds. All these facts were brought to the notice of the bench by Saibaba's counsel who pleaded, that if nothing else, he be ordered to be kept under house arrest, and all his telephone connections be disabled, but the judges were unmoved. Not very long ago, 84-year-old Stan Swamy, who was suffering from Parkinson's disease, and who too was facing trial under UAPA, died in judicial custody. Such was the insensitivity of the jail authorities that he was not even given a sipper and straw, and the courts did not find time to hear his bail petition. His death caused public outrage, with many calling it judicial murder. One only hopes that Saibaba's case does not go the same way.

It is nobody's case that a person suspected of involvement in terrorist activities should not be dealt with a heavy hand, but once acquitted

he has every right to breathe free unless his acquittal is reversed into conviction by a higher court. UAPA is a stringent and draconian law. It is difficult — perhaps even impossible — for a person prosecuted under the said Act to obtain bail. That is why procedural safeguards, such as obtaining sanction from a competent authority appointed by the central or state government, as the case may be, before launching prosecution have been provided. It is against this background that the Bombay High Court made the salutary observation that “the fight against terrorism was important, but procedural safeguards cannot be sacrificed at the altar of perceived peril to national security.” The high-pitched arguments by the learned Solicitor General, raising every now and then the spectre of national security, cannot take away the fact that as of now the accused stands acquitted.

We are living in times for which hyper-nationalism is the byword. Nationalism is not the preserve of one political party, nor can it be said that those who think, or act differently are necessarily anti-national. Let us hope and pray that our faith in the judicial system is not hurt when it is needed most.

The writer is a former judge of the Delhi High Court

Courtesy **The Indian Express**, October 22, 2022 

Reader's Comments

In the editorial note, The Radical Humanist Vol 86 No.7, you have asked what would it have required Bilkis Bano case to qualify as the rarest of rare case. The answer in present day context is that if instead of Bilkis it was Bimla and the perpetrators were Muslims, it would have become the rarest of rare cases and the convicts would have been awarded death sentence. Sadly and most shockingly this did not happen in the case of Bilkis. A substantial majority of Indians' conscience was not shaken when the convicts in the case were released. The Apex Court judgments do not inspire confidence that they would be sent back to jail.

Madhu Kohli, 24.10.2022

No religious divide: 46% Hindus & Muslims feel ‘Modi govt portrayed too favourably by news media’

A report by Delhi-based think tank Lokniti-CSDS & Germany’s Konrad Adenauer Stiftung uses data to show how different communities are consuming news & how the media landscape is changing.

Anupriya Chatterjee

New Delhi: Both Hindus and Muslims perceive news coverage of PM Modi as biased and there is a stark gap in trust among supporters of opposition political parties on news outlets, said a report by Delhi-based think tank Lokniti-CSDS and Germany’s Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

“Both Hindus and Muslims who consume news through various media sources are equally likely to believe that the Modi government is portrayed too favourably by the news media (46%). Only around one in five news consumers said that the media in India gives balanced political coverage — neither is it too favourable towards the government/opposition nor is it too unfavourable,” stated the report.

Titled ‘Media in India: Access, Practices, Concerns and Effects’, the report used data to show how different communities are consuming news and how the media landscape is transforming.

According to the data shared in the report, “Muslim news consumers are less trusting of the news media (all types of it) than Hindu news consumers are, even though the order of trust among both the communities is the same. Both Hindus and Muslims are least trusting of online news websites. Their trust levels in private news channels and AIR news is quite low too.”

And when it comes to media coverage of

PM Modi, both communities largely seem to be on the same page about the perceived media bias.

The extent of trust-deficit also depends on political leanings, stated the report which was released Thursday.

“Those leaning towards Congress and regional parties are less trusting of all types of media compared to those inclined towards the BJP. Congress supporters are, on average, the least trusting,” the report shared.

All Doordarshan news channels and media still remain the most-trusted.

The findings of the report are based on a sample survey of 7,463 Indian citizens aged 15 years and above, carried out in January this year across 19 states and union territories, excluding parts of the North-East and Kashmir.

Patterns of news consumption also differed among supporters of the ruling BJP and opposition parties. The report claimed that most readers of English newspapers supported the Congress, while consumers of Hindi news seemed to incline more towards the BJP.

“The proportion of individuals that mostly read the newspaper in English is around 3% only. However, among this tiny segment the Congress enjoys the most support. English newspaper readers were a tad more likely to support the Congress than the BJP. This is not the case among readers who read newspapers in other languages,” the study noted.

The respondents of the survey were, interestingly, quite divided on the “ethicality/morality” aspect of government surveillance of content on social media, revealed the report.

“45% of social media users believe there is nothing wrong with it (surveillance) and 40% believe it is wrong. Active users of Facebook and Whatsapp are the most likely to be concerned about their privacy being compromised while using the two platforms. Signal’s active users appear to be the least concerned about their privacy being compromised while using the app,” the report stated.

People have also bestowed trust on government services and websites for information, while Google and Yahoo also enjoy trust when it comes to privacy-related matters. Social media companies on the other hand are the “least trusted” for privacy issues.

“Social media companies are the least trusted. In fact, they are more likely to be not trusted (38%) than be trusted (37%). The perception that the government monitors people’s online and phone activities is strongest among active internet users of North West and North India. Many in South India gave a qualified answer that the government monitors only some people, not all,” said the report.

Navigating fake news

Social media, though the game changer in the media landscape because of access to information, has come with its own baggage, as it heavily depends on smartphone ownership.

Television, by-and-large remains the most popular medium for accessing news across the country, found the report.

The report also looks at the dissemination — knowingly and unknowingly — of fake news. Participants of the survey accepted that they received and forwarded news items and messages that may not have been

entirely true.

“Nearly half of active internet users and social media and messenger platform users admitted to having been misled by fake news or information online at some point. Around two-fifths of active internet users and social media users admitted to have shared/forwarded misinformation at some point of time; i.e. they unknowingly and unintentionally shared/forwarded fake news and realised later that it was false. ,” the report read.

However, the admission also depended upon whether the consumer was at all aware of the fake news menace. The more educated respondents were “more likely” to admit to having been misled by fake news than the ones who weren’t, simply because they remained unaware of what they shared being fake.

The city-village divide

The report also highlighted how people in cities were more interested in national news than what is happening locally.


“News consumers in the cities stand out in their preference for nonlocal news. They are most likely to consume national news compared to news consumers in towns and villages. Those residing in villages are the least likely to take interest in national news; as urbanity increases, interest in national news also increases,” the report stated.

In north-west India, the survey found consumers prefer national news more than local news.

“The strongest preference for national news was found among news consumers of Delhi and Haryana. Rajasthan too leaned more towards national news. As far as state news is concerned, it was most strongly preferred in Assam, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh,” the report said.

In south India too consumers are inclined towards hyper-local and international news.

(Edited by Poulomi Banerjee)

Courtesy **The Print**, 22 October, 2022. 

The BJP is Promising a Uniform Civil Code, But How About a Uniform Moral Code First?

The BJP's purpose behind promising a uniform civil code is to win elections in Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh by causing a Hindu-Muslim divide.

Badri Raina

One of the most cherry-picked (especially by the right-wing) segments of the Indian constitution is Part IV. This sets out what is called the 'Directive Principles of State Policy'.

Although not enforceable by any court, the various clauses of this part encapsulate the egalitarian vision of its drafters, enunciated with the purpose to obtain full "economic, social, and political justice" for every citizen of the republic-to-be.

From the standpoint of economic justice envisioned in the Directive Principles, the heart of the constitution lies in provisions inscribed in Articles 38 and 39.

As can be seen from the text, the ideals of equity enshrined in these Articles are indeed breath-taking.

They speak of all material resources belonging fundamentally to the people; of the injunction to the state that its objective "shall" be to ensure that concentration of wealth in a few hands does not happen; that inequalities of income shall be reduced to the minimum; that measures shall be taken to make a dignified livelihood available to all men and women; that there shall be equal pay for equal work; that citizens shall have the right to food, to work, and to health, and indeed, a great deal more.

Read that and look around you at the economic philosophy of the right-wing now ruling the stipulated republic – characterised by the rampant transfer of public resources to private hands, yawning disparity in incomes and purchasing power, centralisation of wealth to an obscene degree, denial of the fundamental rights of livelihood as set out in these Articles as mere calls to "freebies", etc.

This is the reason why Articles 38 and 39 of the Directive Principles of State Policy are never invoked by the right wing especially, or indeed have not been invoked by any governments post the declaration of the Washington Consensus of 1990 which, in effect let loose the reign of hot money worldwide in a "neo-liberal" package that made national boundaries secondary to the prerogatives of global finance.

The Articles that, however, are invoked by the right wing are 46 which speaks to the desirability of proscribing the slaughter of cows and calves, and, you guessed it, Article 44, which contemplates a "Uniform Civil Code".

Although the Article does not provide any elaboration whatsoever about what that code should be like, or how it might be arrived at, the idea was that just as all Indian citizens, regardless of religion, class, caste, gender, or any other form of

discrete identity is subject equally to the provisions of the Criminal Code, so also a uniformity might be achieved in the civil aspects of all community living, such as those that pertain to marriage, divorce, property rights, rights of inheritance, rights of married or unmarried women thereof, matters affecting joint family structures, etc.

The common perception has been that the right-wing insistence on enforcing through legislation this idea of a UCC is primarily yet another ploy to polarise the polity and target Indian Muslims, besides seeking, at the bottom, to obtain the suggested uniformity on principles practised by (caste) Hindus.

Those that see some merit in Article 44 have often proposed that the government of the day, if it wishes to activate this Article, had best formulate a draft that could be circulated and debated by Indians of all denominations; and that, perhaps, the most rational and equitable practices of various religions could be then put together as an agreed text, although how that may then be enforced on India's Scheduled Tribe communities will still remain an intractable conundrum.

But, no, this is not what any right-wing government wishes to do; to a point where most recently the ruling party has declared that it will put in place a UCC if it wins the Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh assembly elections.

Never mind that such powers rest only in the Union government via parliament and not in any state government. But who is listening?

The purpose straightforwardly is to win these states by causing a Hindu-Muslim divide. Given this backdrop, one wonders how about a uniform political and moral code first?

While the best constitutional and community minds may well deliberate on how a common civil code may be achieved, albeit with the best cosmopolitan intentions, would it not be first more desirable to strive to arrive at a uniform political and moral code for the nation's public agents?

What might that entail?

That all political forces who participate in Indian democracy have a level playing field in terms of funds commensurate with their voting strength; that similarly commensurate media time is available to them; that excesses committed allegedly by political agents in differently ruled states are named and prosecuted uniformly; that hate speech uttered by one is the same as hate speech by another; that when bridges collapse in two different states run by two different political parties, one is not called an act of god and the other an act of fraud; that the investigative agencies of the state do not discriminate between one accused and another based on their political affiliations; that when parliament is in session, motions moved by the opposition on genuine grounds under legitimate provisions are not rejected one hundred percent; that if it is made known to the voting public as to who is buying electoral bonds and for whose benefit; that the numero uno of the executive does not uniformly castigate state governments run by opposition parties on visits to states and uniformly praise governments run by his own party; that the unconstitutional slogan "double engine ki sarkar" implying that states run by the party ruling at the Centre will receive special favours as against those run by opposition parties, be jettisoned forthwith; that a covenant is reached among parties

that never shall any ducks and drakes be played with data of any kind bearing on the performance of the state or of individuals, no matter who they be; that just as Article 44 of the Directive Principles is sought to be invoked, all, but all, stipulations of the constitution of India shall be honoured by any and all governments and their agencies with transparent accountability to public scrutiny.

Indeed, the desirable list of uniformities here is far more extended than may be codified in a column.

But can there be any disagreement that were such desirable political/moral uniformities to be codified and practised, the need for resistance to a Uniform Civil Code might of its own gradually wither.

Any provision of the constitution is only

as credible to the public mind as the quality of the men and women charged with the responsibility to operate the same.

Thus, any demand for uniformity in one sector must remain a matter of dissension should other more urgently required uniformities not only not be envisaged but positively discouraged by rulers who aim brazenly to rule not in uniform but in sectarian ways.

Unless sauce for the goose is seen to be sauce for the gander as well in all matters of governance, the motivated call for a Uniform Civil Code cannot but only lead to further fracturing of the national psyche, rather than obtaining any uniformity.

Courtesy **The Wire**, 7 November 2022. 

An Appeal for Donation for the Court Case – 13 Mohini Road, Dehradun

Dear Friends,

As you are aware, a court case is in progress for the eviction of Humanist House, 13 Mohini Road, Dehradun for the last 37 years from the illegal occupant of the house where M.N. Roy and Mrs. Ellen Roy lived and breathed their last. As Indian Renaissance Institute needs fund to pursue the case diligently, you are requested to donate liberally for the cause.

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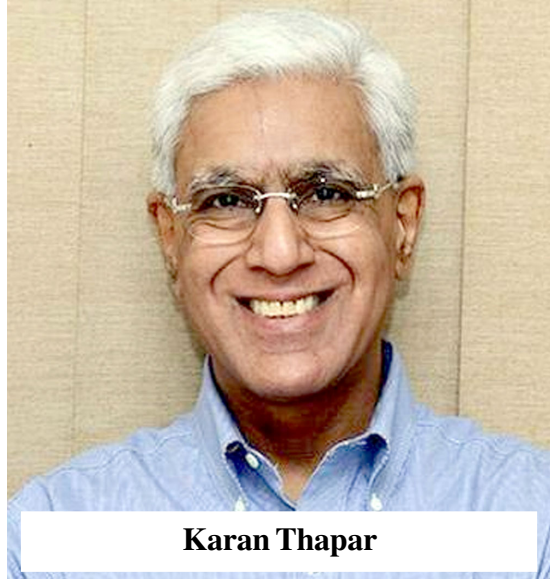
What India can learn from British politics

In the end it was a coronation. That it happened on Diwali would have mattered personally to the 42-year old devout Hindu. However, I want to make a different point. Rishi Sunak's uncontested election as the leader of Britain's Conservative Party and, therefore, the country's new prime minister (PM), the youngest in over 200 years, makes me very proud of my second favourite country. It also raises a poignant question about our own. Will India learn the obvious lesson from Britain?

Consider for a moment what the United Kingdom (UK) has done: 6.8% of its population is of various Asian origins. 2.3% of the country is of Indian parentage. This is a miniscule minority. Yet, the Conservatives have made the son of first generation immigrants of Indian origin, who only came to the country in the 1960s, the country's 57th PM. The reaction in our own country is proof of both our disbelief this could happen and our delight it has.

Although Sunak's elevation may be the most striking development, it's by no means the full story. 20% of Boris Johnson's first cabinet was of Black or Asian origin. The previous four chancellors, the last two home secretaries and the most recent foreign secretary came from immigrant families. These are considered great offices of State. Perhaps most tellingly of all, by some counts, over 200 of the Conservative Party's 357 MP's supported Sunak. None of the white contenders could even make it to the starting point.

Now, let's turn to India. Muslims are 14.3% of our population. So, in proportionate terms, they should have 78 seats in the Lok Sabha. They have only 27. India does not have a sitting Muslim chief minister in any



Karan Thapar

of its 28 states, in 15 there's no Muslim minister, and in 10 there's just one, usually in-charge of minority affairs. Today, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) doesn't have a single Muslim MP in either house of Parliament. In Uttar Pradesh, with nearly 20% Muslim population the party doesn't have a single Muslim member of the legislative assembly (MLA). This was also true in 2017. In Gujarat, it hasn't fielded a Muslim candidate in any Lok Sabha or Vidhan Sabha election since 1998. That's 24 years of deliberate distancing although 9% of the population is of the Islamic faith.

The facts I'm quoting are from Aakar Patel's book "Our Hindu Rashtra". It reveals even more disturbing details. The book says Muslims are only 4.9% of state and central government employees. 4.6% of the paramilitary services, 3.2% of Indian Administrative Service, Indian Foreign Service and Indian Police Service officers, and perhaps as low as 1% of the Army. This should embarrass us.

Let us cite the media in Britain to illustrate the contrast. Look at the BBC and you will be stunned by the profusion of Asian origin faces. Here are some you are bound to have seen: Matthew Amroliwala, Geeta Gurumurthy, James Coomaraswamy, George Alagiah, Nomia Iqbal, Sameera Hussain, Amol Rajan, Rajini Vaidyanathan, Yogita Limaye, Secunder Kermani, Kamal Ahmed, Faisal Islam, Dharshini David.

So, now, can you see why I hope India will learn the obvious lesson from Britain? We have perhaps 200 million Muslims but they have been effectively invisibilised. We call them termites and 'Babar ki aulad', taunt them with references to 'abba jaan', reduce them to comparisons between 'shamshan ghat' and 'kabristan' and

repeatedly tell them to go to Pakistan. So, today, when we take pride in Sunak's meteoric rise, why don't we also look at ourselves and ask : Could a Muslim PM be possible in India?

There's an even stranger paradox that most people fail to notice. Those of us who least understand Britain are often the first to claim the British are racist. Long before Sunak's ascension, they were terribly wrong. But they're also usually the last to criticise, or, indeed, even acknowledge, the treatment of Muslims at home. Instead, they prefer to talk of appeasement.

I pray the Sunak story might be an inspiration for us. I fear I will be proven wrong.

Courtesy. **Hindustan Times** 🌈

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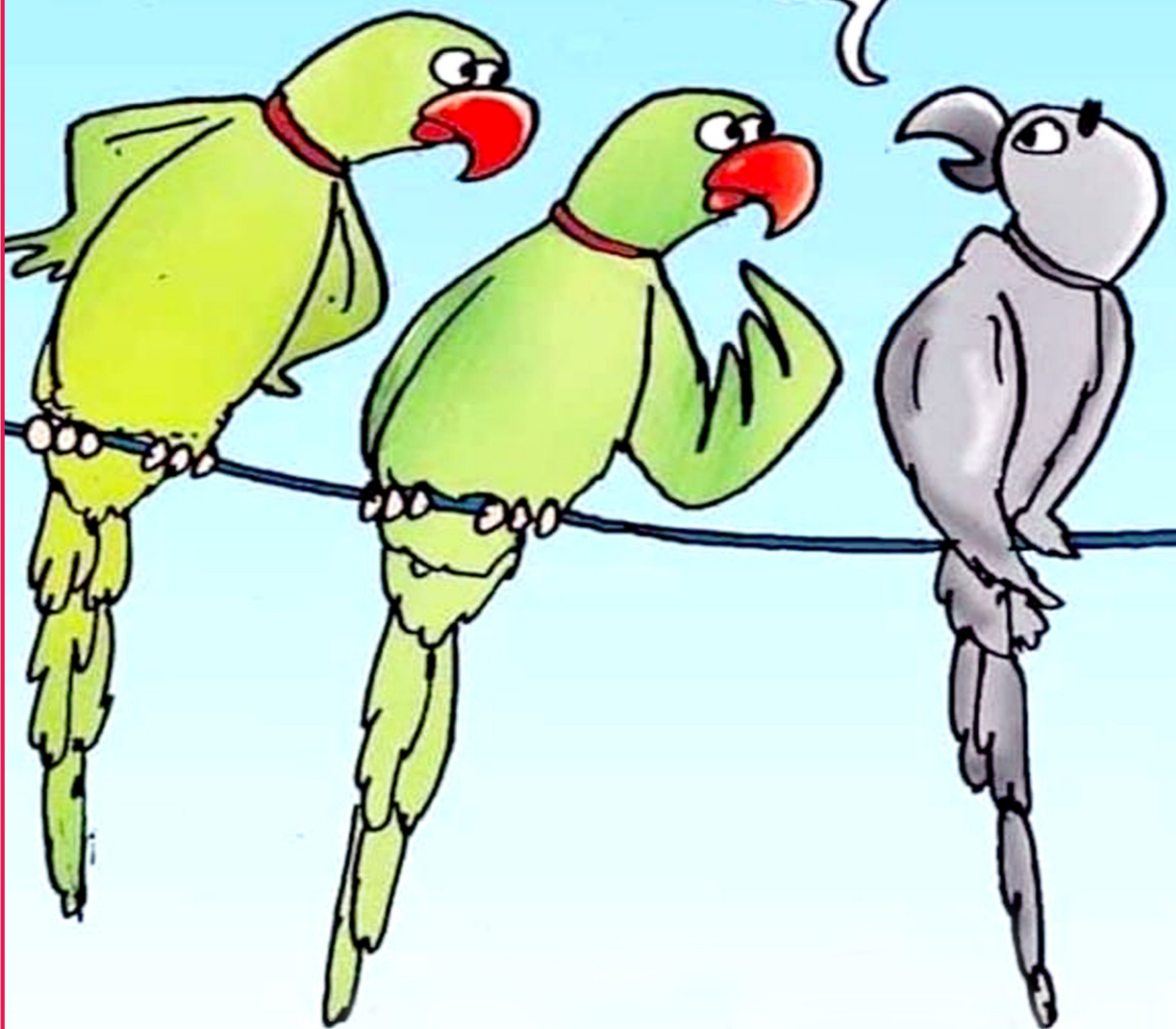
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I'm not a crow.
I just arrived from
Delhi!*



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