THE HINDU CENTRE
for
Politics and Public Policy

Essay

From Emergency to Now: The Wide Arc of a Hack's Ideological Journey

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Jul 25, 2015

THE HINDU
India's National Newspaper

President Proclaims National Emergency

"Security of India Threatened by Internal Disturbances"

Preventive Arrests and Press Censorship

Life Normal in Delhi

PM Explains Action

Power Cut in Karnataka to be Reduced

676 Persons Detained All Over Country

6 Cong. Dissidents Suspended

As the Indian political landscape changed post the Internal Emergency between 1975 and 1977, so did a journalist's understanding of the real dangers for a nation built on the ideals of secularism and economic and social equity. In this essay, ***Vidya Subrahmaniam*** *explains how she outgrew her obsessive anti-Congressism, became more empathetic to Dalit and backward caste aspirations, and simultaneously came to view Hindutva as a threat to India's social and emotional well-being.*

It was just before noon on June 26, 1975, and a friend and I were out exploring the bustling by-lanes of Delhi's Karol Bagh, unaware that the Emergency had been declared, and that it would change our lives in ways we could have never anticipated.

Though Indira Gandhi had herself announced the Emergency in a national broadcast 8 a.m., IST, the news took its own time to reach the common people who went about their business as always. However, two hours into our

outing, we sensed something was wrong. The pavement shops began to thin out as we watched, and the bigger outlets too looked ready to wrap up; many of them worked behind half-downed shutters.

We were young but fancied ourselves as political animals, which at the time was shorthand for being passionately anti-Congress and anti-Indira. There was no way we were going to head home without knowing what had happened. There was already considerable excitement in our small friends' circle over two landmark developments: the June 12, 1975 Allahabad High Court ruling unseating Indira for electoral malpractices and the Congress's unexpected defeat in the State election in Gujarat. The Supreme Court had allowed Indira to continue as Prime Minister but that did not dampen our joy; it was a technical reprieve that did not lessen the political blow she had received.

Politics as show business

But the legend of Indira was such that we feared she would do something, anything to have her way. She had spent the 12 days since the judgment railing at the Opposition for the `injustice' done to her. Any time we turned on the radio, we heard her shrill voice urging people to defeat the designs of *desh-virodhi shakti* (anti-national forces). Rented crowds brought by the busloads to her morning durbar affirmed their faith in her leadership and shouted, *Indira tum sangharsh karo* (fight on Indira).

> *"The over-the-top injury act, the bussed-in crowds and loud affirmations support by loyalists became Indira's lasting contributions to Indian politics."*

We didn't know it then but this was the beginning of politics as show business. The over-the-top injury act, the bussed-in crowds and loud affirmations of support by loyalists became Indira's lasting contributions to Indian politics. In the years to come, leaders, big and small, would follow the Indira prototype to get out of sticky situations. We bristled at the daily circus but also laughed out loud at Indira's stock lines, in particular, "anti-national forces have raised their ugly heads". The equation of the self with the nation was another of Indira's bequests to Indian politics. The tool has since been finessed and used by leaders across the spectrum to project any threat to themselves as a threat to the nation.

Back in Karol Bagh, my friend and I learnt from a shopkeeper that Indira had made an *aapatkalin ghoshna* (emergency declaration). We knew it was time to turn back.

On our way home and even on the bus, my friend and I saw no outward signs of anything having changed. When I reached home, the mood was grim. My father, who was in government service, was a staunch critic of Indira, and he wasn't going to have it easy in the changed circumstances. In fact, our dining table conversations at home were always about Indira and her ruthless disregard for the due process. We also despaired of Sanjay Gandhi, and voraciously consumed any and all gossip around him.

I had a theoretical understanding of what an Emergency rule entailed, but was unprepared for its actual consequences. The suspension of fundamental rights meant that we could no longer exercise the right to free speech. The right to freely speak and express was at the core of human consciousness, and how could we live without it? Those in government, like my father, had to be very careful. But I was a nobody — a non-descript, low-profile undergrad with no history of activism, much less of participation in student politics. Even so, the new regime hit me hard. Nobody spoke of the Emergency on the university campus; it was as if nothing had happened. Students

and teachers in Miranda House, my college, avoided touching on anything that was connected to politics and government. A similar *omerta* operated on the 'University specials' where noise was the norm and politics hotly debated. (The U-special was a student bus service that connected Delhi University's main campus to distant neighbourhoods.)

I hated the enforced silence, and was bursting with things to say. But mercifully I wasn't alone and soon a handful of us started meeting discreetly. We found nooks and crannies where we could sit and vent. We were angry and disturbed but came to no harm unlike students in active politics many of whom were either underground or in jail. By the following year, we had become experts at identifying the `spies' and those that were likely to be against the ruling regime.

As happens in all repressive regimes, there was little to distinguish between fact and fiction. One very strong and believable rumour had it that all girl students would, henceforth, not only wear the saree compulsorily but the design would be prescribed by the government. The saree was to be in white khadi with the tricolour forming the border. Of course, somebody had made this up to scare us and we were indeed scared. Never having worn the saree before, I worried about being engulfed in it, besides resenting the encroachment into my private life.

Unsurprisingly there was also a lot of black humour. I remember a particularly nasty joke, *Shantivan se aayee pukar*, *aao beti mere paas* (The voice calls out from Shantivan (Nehru's Samadhi): come to me my daughter). We also had loads of fun lampooning Indira Gandhi's 20-point programme and Sanjay Gandhi's infantile obsession with homilies and sermons. Of his many commandments, the best known was of course, "talk less, work more," which we were expected to imbibe and follow. But another unforgettable one was a dire warning to hoarders : *Kale dhande ka mazaa kali muh kadi sazaa* (black marketeers, your face will be blackened).

Yet the thrills we got from forging small connections and exchanging bits of news, gossip and jokes did not in any way diminish the tension and uncertainty we felt from not knowing what lay ahead. Would we ever regain our freedom? We began to appreciate what our fathers' generation must have felt living under British rule.

Emergency lifted

In January 1977, Indira Gandhi unexpectedly, and to the relief of all except the courtiers surrounding her, called for the general election. Although the Emergency was lifted later, the election brought with it the first whiff of democracy after 18 months of stifling dictatorship. Political prisoners were freed, campaigning started in full earnest and parties began merger negotiations aimed at defeating Indira. There was change in the air. My personal high point was an election rally I attended at the Ram Lila *maidan*. It was an Opposition show, and the star speaker was the Jan Sangh's Atal Bihari Vajpayee whose slow drawl, pauses and wit had the crowds in raptures. I returned home wanting Vajpayee to become the next Prime Minister.

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Little did I know at the time that cataclysmic later events would push India headlong into a different kind of politics — a politics helmed by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-backed Bharatiya Janata Party (the Jan Sangh's successor) and so viciously divisive that the Congress would seem almost benign by comparison. The period

from Indira's authoritarianism to the BJP's incendiary politics would be long, tortuous and interspersed with successive spells of indifferent governance, including by Indira's son and successor, Rajiv Gandhi. As the Indian political landscape changed so did my own understanding of politics. I outgrew my obsessive anti-Congressism, became more empathetic to Dalit and backward caste aspirations, and simultaneously came to view Hindutva as a threat to India's social, political and emotional well-being.

But all that was well into the future. Up until the early nineties, anti-Congressism reigned and I felt it in my blood as did almost all my friends and like-minded associates. The defeat of Indira and Sanjay Gandhi in the March 1977 election is etched in my memory. It was final exam time but I couldn't be bothered. My sister and I stayed glued to BBC radio. But there were all kinds of fears. That Indira would manipulate her victory; that the elements would conspire against us; that we were fated to live under Indira and so forth.

Our fears were unfounded: The rout surpassed the wildest expectations. Indira Gandhi, her son Sanjay, and their factotums in government and party were decimated. We were incredulous; this was revolution; this was the people's stinging slap to an arrogant dictator. I was an unknown, unimportant young person, I had no tales of daring or personal struggle to tell and yet I savoured the Opposition triumph as if it was my own. I remember thinking that if the Emergency were cinema, this moment would be the climactic grand finale, the magnificent "the end" with its "happily ever after" connotations.

Alas this was reality. The Janata Party experiment collapsed leaving me inconsolable. Nearly a dozen parties had merged to form the Janata Party, among them, the Bharatiya Lok Dal, the Congress (Organisation) the Jan Sangh, the Swatantra Party, the two Socialist parties, Praja and Samyukta, and the Jagjivan Ram-led Congress for Democracy. On March 24, 1977, the new party formed a government with Morarji Desai as the Prime Minister. However, the constituents were loath to subsume their identities in the larger whole.

Ambition, greed and competition wrecked the alliance. But the internecine battles also carried early warnings of the ideological challenges India would face a decade hence. The Socialists in the Janata Party wanted the Jan Sangh to sever its ties with its spiritual guru, the militarist, Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. The RSS wanted the Jan Sangh to stay on in government because elected office conferred legitimacy, which had always eluded the Sangh, and facilitated the expansion of the Hindutva project. The Jan Sangh and its mentor attempted various compromises with the Janata Party but a separation between the Jan Sangh and the RSS was inconceivable, and in the end the Morarji Desai Government collapsed due to its own contradictions.

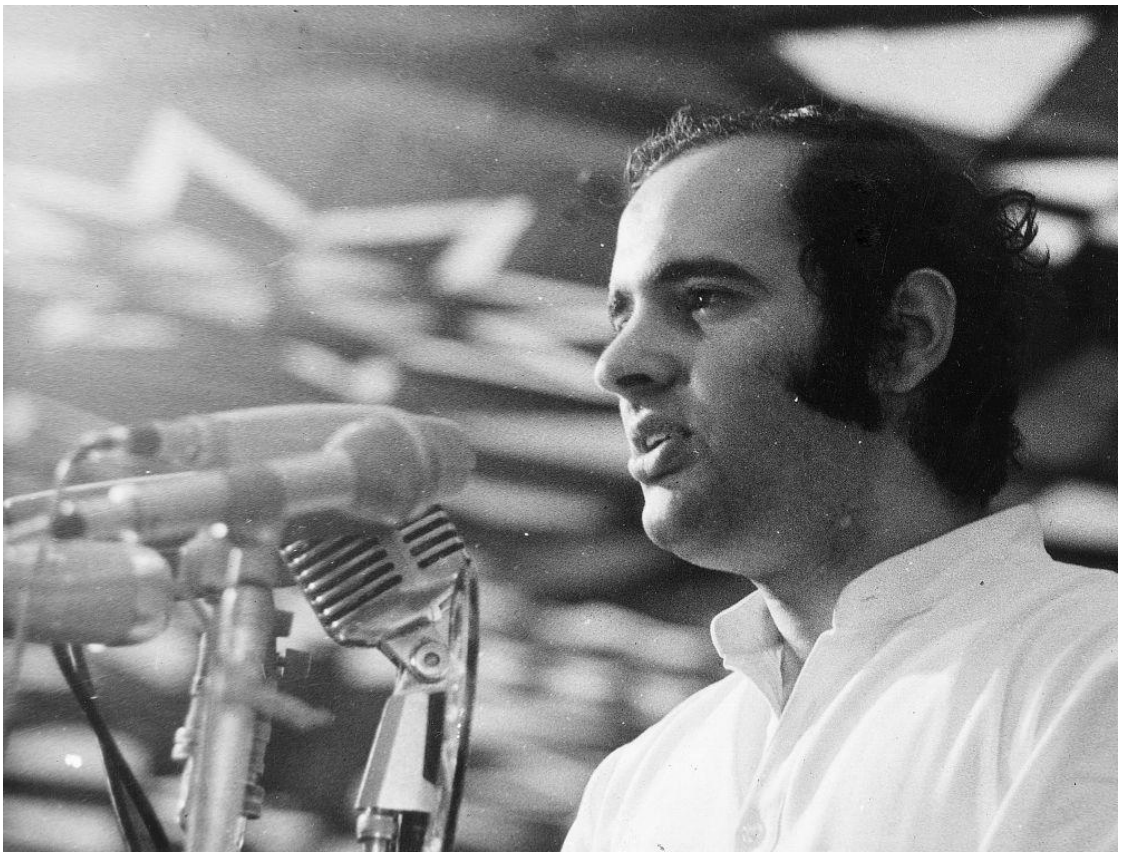
My agony wasn't over with this. The Bharatiya Lok Dal's Charan Singh took the Congress's support to become the Prime Minister. This was absolute travesty. The Congress at the point represented the worst in politics: it was authoritarian, it defiled and disrespected the Constitution, it crushed institutions and it was corrupt. People did not overthrow a dictator to have her rule them by proxy. Charan Singh got his comeuppance when the Congress pulled the plug on him. He earned the ignominy of becoming India's first Prime Minister to quit without facing Parliament.

The false dawn ends

The return of Indira Gandhi — and Sanjay Gandhi — in 1980 was another heartbreak moment. Until the last minute I had hopes that the Janata Party would regroup recognising the imperative to stop Indira's return. How could they, or any citizen for that matter, so easily forget the nightmare of the Emergency? I was wrong. The Janata Party had self-destructed beyond rescue. And the ordinary citizen preferred the Congress, with its dark history, to the daily *tamasha* of the Janata Party. Indira's big majority and the son's assured place as her adviser, warned of intolerable things to come. However, things didn't span out this way.

In July 1980, I joined *The Indian Express*, my first job, which brought politics closer to me. Though I was only a rookie reporter, and therefore some distance from politics played out in real time, it was exciting enough working for a paper which energetically chased political stories. In the event, my entry into journalism was dramatic. I interviewed for the job on June 23, 1980 -- the day Sanjay Gandhi died in a plane crash. Arun Shourie, the Executive Editor of the paper and a trenchant critic of the Congress, and Coomi Kapoor, its chief reporter, were on the interview panel. The paper itself was fiercely anti-Congress and expectedly the air crackled with electricity. I watched wide-eyed as Kuldip Nayar walked up to Shourie and shared the details of the crash.

When my turn came, the panel asked me if I had any special interest. Of course, I had. It was politics. Unprompted, I declaimed on the Emergency and Indira Gandhi. I was on the verge of confessing my uncensored feelings at Sanjay Gandhi's gory end, when Shourie smiled and signalled the interview was over. I got the job — and I was convinced it was because of my little speech!



Sanjay Gandhi's death devastated and broke Indira who was no longer recognisable as the hard-as-nails Prime Minister who held the country in terror. Indira turned to spiritualism, became increasingly superstitious and, for the first time, showed a willingness to play the Hindu card. In the 1983 Jammu and Kashmir State election, she aggressively campaigned against the Resettlement Bill, which gave Kashmiris who had left for Pakistan between 1947 and 1954, the right to return, reclaim their property and resettle in India.

I, of course, was not perturbed by this for the reason that I saw politics from the prism of corruption and authoritarianism, which, in my view as in the larger public view, were synonymous with the Congress. I had very little idea at the time of how unalterably communalism would divide and damage India.

Eight days before her death, Indira was in Bombay, where I worked for *The Indian Express*, to attend a concert held at the National Centre for the Performing Arts. My office asked me to cover the event, which I did with my colleague, Smita Gupta. Our access as journalists got us close to Indira who was resplendent in a

red, *chungri* saree. We noticed her glowing health and wistfully remarked that in our lifetime we were unlikely to see another Prime Minister; she would surely outlive us.

We felt a little guilty after Indira's assassination but gratefully reverted to robust Congress-bashing following two shameful chapters. The first was President Zail Singh's hurried installation of Rajiv Gandhi as Prime Minister, which, though nominally constitutional, was terrible in form, more so as it legitimised dynastic succession. The second was the orgy of retaliatory violence against the Sikhs who were unjustifiably and unconscionably held to be responsible for the assassination. Tragically for the Sikhs, the popular mood spiralled in favour of the Congress and Rajiv Gandhi as if in inverse proportion to their own tragedies and injuries. Sensing victory, Rajiv Gandhi's advisers suggested advancing the general election to December 1984. In the election, Rajiv won the biggest mandate by an Indian Prime Minister, surpassing the achievements of his own grandfather and the country's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

Rajiv's victory sent the commentariat into a swoon. Ramnath Goenka, the proprietor of *The Indian Express* and a life-long opponent of the Nehru-Gandhis, memorably commented that he could die in peace knowing India was in Rajiv's safe hands. I was unable to share the pervasive joy at the elevation of a young dynast at the expense of senior leaders such as P.V. Narasimha Rao and Shankarrao Chavan. Goenka had the final word in the *Express*, my paper, and I worried that his personal fondness for Rajiv would silence the critical voices in the paper. Not only did that not happen, he himself changed very soon.

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Rajiv was earnest enough but he was apt to be misled by his advisers, among them his close friend and minister in his government, Arun Nehru. It was Nehru who pushed Rajiv into the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi maelstrom. The Frankenstein's Monster was itself a product of another grievous misjudgement – the overturning of the Shah Bano Judgment [1]allowing maintenance to Muslim divorcees. Rajiv lurched from blunder to blunder, some of which horribly impacted the country, like the communal politics over Ayodhya, while others like the Bofors scandal led to his own loss of stature and finally to defeat in the 1989 general election.

This period started me on a long journey of self-introspection and learning. In late 1987, Arun Shourie posted me to Lucknow as a State correspondent. The assignment brought me terrific dividends: it expanded my understanding of politics and opened my eyes to the injustices and discrimination integral to realpolitik, in particular to Uttar Pradesh politics. The prequel to the Mandal agitation was building up, revealing the simmering tensions between upper caste and backward caste politics. I met a Dalit IAS officer, the only Dalit officer in his department, who had been driven to insanity by the prejudices of his colleagues. I began to understand that while reservation can give statutory protection to the suppressed, it is often ineffective against social bigotry.

But while my mind opened up to admit multiple realities, I remained steadfast in my anti-Congressism, which was bolstered by the rapidly unspooling Bofors scandal. Rajiv was in a mess, with one of his key ministers, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, turning adversarial and alleging that Rajiv had received kickbacks in the purchase of the Swedish Bofors gun. The scam itself was exposed in a series of investigative articles written for the *Express* by Arun Shourie and for *The Hindu* by N. Ram and Chitra Subramanian. The long-running expose combined with Singh's relentless campaign to devastating effect. Rajiv loyalist Arun Nehru quit the Congress to join Singh, followed by Arif

Mohammad Khan, who had raised the Shah Bano case, and many others, among them Vidya Charan Shukla and Satyapal Malik. Together, these men formed the Jan Morcha which later took the political shape of the Janata Dal.

A hack's ringside view

In May-June 1988, *The Indian Express* sent me to Allahabad to cover an important by-election that set the stage for Singh's emergence as Rajiv's chief challenger. In the fray were Singh, Sunil Shastri from the Congress and Kanshi Ram from the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). The seat had been vacated by Amitabh Bachchan who had resigned calling politics a cesspool. Bachchan was widely expected to recontest but the Congress fielded Shastri in his place, not wanting to expose Bachchan to Singh's firepower.

The by-election had everything a reporter could ask for. V. P. Singh had made the election a referendum against Rajiv and Bofors, making it a do-or-die battle for both the incumbent Prime Minister and himself. The entire Opposition plus a bunch of Rajiv's former loyalists came together to support Singh which left Rajiv isolated and vulnerable. And finally there was the mystery man called Kanshi Ram.

I had arrived in Allahabad to a mystifying blue welcome; the walls of the town were splattered with little blue elephants. Early next day, I saw a splash of blue again, and soon a cluster of cyclists each carrying a blue flag came into view. I learnt later that they were volunteers of the BSP and were camping in Allahabad to campaign for Kanshi Ram, the BSP's founder and the third contestant in the by-election.

The BSP was a tough party to cover but the experience overturned my world and exposed my scanty knowledge of harsh ground realities. The BSP abhorred the media and barred journalists from attending its rallies. At each rally venue I would be stopped by volunteers who'd accuse me of representing the *manuwadi* media.

I persisted and wore down their resistance, and later I would spend several evenings in the volunteer quarters trying to understand Dalit issues, not from my upper caste journalist's perspective, but from their lived experiences. One question they hurled at me which haunts me even today was: why are we called Harijans? If we are Harijans, what are you? Are you not a child of God? From that day I stopped using the word, though Harijan was in common usage at the time.

V.P. Singh had declared that he would fight a clean and frugal election without loudspeakers, posters and external help. But as the campaign progressed, posters sprung up as if from nowhere, and pink flags and buntings flooded the constituency. How this happened was like this: Although Singh made sure to keep the BJP at a safe distance, in truth it was the RSS and the BJP that unobtrusively managed the logistics of the campaign.

I stumbled on to this truth by chance. The Allahabad election happened back when there were no computers, no mobile phones, not even direct telephone lines. Our only recourse as journalists was the local post office. But this was often a nightmare with frequent shutdowns interrupting copy flow, not to mention teleprinter operators who unconcernedly mangled our stories. My office very helpfully suggested that I file my copy over phone from the house of the BJP's Kesrinath Tripathi who later went on to become the Speaker of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly.

On my way out of Tripathi's home, I accidentally went into a room where election posters and other paraphernalia were being put together. So this is where V.P. Singh's campaign material was coming from. I was stunned but took it in my stride. Much later, RSS veteran K.N. Govindacharya would tell some of us how the Sangh had planned the by-election to the last detail.

I should have asked myself an important question: was it ethical on my part to send my copy from a politician's house? The BJP's covert support to Singh should have also made me wary. But such was my involvement in the election that I thought of nothing else. V.P. Singh was the nearest to a hero I ever had — because of his integrity and incorruptibility but most importantly because he had taken on Rajiv Gandhi. This fact made me blind to whatever I saw. I followed Singh everywhere and filed reams of copy which my paper unquestioningly used. The top bosses of my paper and I were completely in sync on the focus the election required knowing a success for Singh would decisively turn the tide against Rajiv.

Most of the reports I filed at the time had glowing references to the BJP, in particular to Vajpayee. Singh might have said he would fight the election alone, but slowly the Opposition united, and electioneering reached a peak with nearly a dozen Opposition leaders converging on Allahabad in support of Singh. The verdict was as expected, and I glowed with satisfaction at my own little contribution to Singh's success.

Events took off at break-neck speed thereafter, culminating in the general election of 1989 and the appointment of V.P. Singh as the Prime Minister. Singh's swearing-in was like a celebration for most journalists in Delhi. My friends called me from the Capital to say the mood was so joyous, the sense of freedom so great that it was a virtual free-for-all at the swearing in. They broke the cordon and reached within touching distance of the new Prime Minister; many clambered on to chairs reserved for Ministers.

My feeling, in retrospect, is that the jubilation was excessive. Rajiv was nowhere near as authoritarian or cunning as his mother which is exactly why he sunk deeper and deeper into the Bofors quicksand. But other than this, 1989-1990 was a near replay of 1977-1979 — the initial euphoria followed by dissensions and finally the breaking away of a key member, Chandra Shekhar this time, to form a government with the Congress — a short-lived experiment that ended with relations souring between the Congress and Chandra Shekhar.

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The V.P. Singh Government was inherently unstable. His Janata Dal, itself a coalition of parties, was in alliance with several regional parties which together formed the National Front. The National Front was supported on one side by the Left parties and the other by the BJP. As in 1977, this grand coming together was a product of deep anti-Congressism, formed only to defeat a Congress Prime Minister. As in 1977, there were deep ideological differences between the constituents. The Janata Dal's proclaimed secularism sat uneasily with the BJP's Hindutva. And as in 1977, the schisms would be used by one section to overthrow the incumbent Prime Minister and form a disastrous factional government with the Congress to oppose which the Janata Dal-National Front alliance was formed in the first place.

Mandal and *mandir* reshape politics

The Singh Government ran into a storm of popular protests over the Mandal Commission recommendations [2] . But Mandal and*Mandir* converged to send him out of office. The BJP was upset by Mandal and used *Mandir* to offset it, which in turn made its association with the Singh Government untenable. Mandal had been championed, among others of socialist persuasion, by Chandra Shekhar, but instead of standing with Singh on the unrest, he successively teamed up with the BJP and the Congress, to unseat Singh and fulfil his own dream of becoming the Prime Minister. He voted with the BJP against the government in Parliament and he took the support of the Congress to reach the Prime Minister's Office.

The notification for the implementation of job reservation for the Other Backward Castes split the country along caste divisions. Upper castes in all professions, politics, law, journalism and education, united to oppose the move, resulting in country-wide protests marked by violence and copy-cat suicides. The Mandal recommendations were an immediate threat to the BJP and the RSS whose joint agenda was to unite the Hindu castes against the minorities.

Thus Mandal became the springboard for full-blown *Mandir* politics. If Mandal divided the Hindu castes to give them individual identities, *Mandir* would unite them towards Hindutva and Hindu Rashtra. The BJP had always tacitly supported its affiliate, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, on its *Mandir* demand. It formalised this association in June 1989 with the Palampur resolution. Meeting in Palampur in Himachal Pradesh, the BJP's national executive passed a resolution endorsing the VHP's position that the Ram*mandir* would be built in the exact spot where the Babri Masjid stood. Prior to the BJP's coming on board, the temple had been the VHP's solo show. Among its many disruptive programmes was the *Ram shila yatra* consisting of processions of *Ram Shilas*(bricks consecrated and worshipped over many days) collected from thousands of villages for use in temple construction in Ayodhya, and reverse journeys of earth dug up from Ayodhya to the same villages. Around 200,000 villages sent bricks, as many as 300,000 pujas were performed, and many millions participated in the processions [3] .

The Palampur resolution made the agitation official, pushing the VHP into frenetic activity geared towards securing the temple: Aside from the *Ram shila yatras*, there were *Ram jyoti yatras* (parades of lighted torches) and multiple mahayagnas performed in Ayodhya to cries of *Jai Shri Ram* and *garv se kaho hum Hindu hain* (say with pride that you are a Hindu). The VHP also warned that it wouldn't stop at Ayodhya and it wanted 3,000 more disputed `temples' besides the ones at Kashi and Mathura. All this resulted in a significant victory for the BJP-VHP-RSS combine: on November 9, 1989, virtually on the eve of the general election, Rajiv Gandhi permitted the laying of the first stone for the temple in a grand *shilanyas* ceremony.

In other words, the communalisation of the polity was well on course when L`affaire Bofors reached its zenith coinciding with the calling of the 1989 general election. Yet because Singh was fixated on removing the Congress and Rajiv, he chose not to quarrel with the BJP on this. His way of expressing his discomfiture was by refusing to share a platform with the BJP and limiting the Janata Dal-BJP association for the election to seat-sharing

agreements. He did not have an alliance with the BJP, nor did he admit it into government. However, this supposed distance was rendered meaningless by his government having to depend on the BJP for survival.

Mandal conferred greatness upon V.P. Singh. His support among the OBCs grew in proportion to the anti-Mandal protests. And this, in turn, egged the BJP to step on the gas on *Mandir*. Singh was a different man by the time of his exit following withdrawal of support by the BJP. His anti-Congressism had dimmed and he donned a new avatar as a messiah of the backward castes.

“The violent politics of the Mandal-Mandir period shook me up from the inside. For the first time since my youth, I was able to view politics from a perspective other than anti-Congressism. And what I saw affected me in more fundamental ways than anything before and anything I could have imagined. I was an ordinary reporter, a hack, with no pretensions to scholarship. But as the times changed, so did my perception of events I watched and recorded.”

The violent politics of this period shook me up from the inside. For the first time since my youth, I was able to view politics from a perspective other than anti-Congressism. And what I saw affected me in more fundamental ways than anything before and anything I could have imagined. I was an ordinary reporter, a hack, with no pretensions to scholarship. But as the times changed, so did my perception of events I watched and recorded.

The two dominant trends of the time, relating to Mandal and *Mandir*, were equally disturbing. One was the near complete upper caste consolidation against Mandal. Politicians ganged up against it. Rajiv Gandhi called caste a cancer, not understanding that this was not caste in the conventional sense but caste as a bloodless, peaceful assertion of a suppressed people’s rights. Many well-regarded journalists of the time too were virulently anti-Mandal, critiquing it in the guise of national interest. Mandal would deepen the caste system instead of ridding the country of it, they argued, glossing over the fact that caste was a socio-political reality. Besides, Mandal was largely symbolic; it brought no real job benefits to the OBCs but it empowered them politically, levelling the field and making legislatures more representative than ever before.

I recollect one particular example of duplicity in measuring casteism. The year V.P. Singh became the Prime Minister, 1989, was also the year Mulayam Singh was sworn in for the first time as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. The power transition in U.P happened to accusations of Yadavisation of government and the bureaucracy. The allegation was that Mulayam Singh gave primacy to his own caste in official appointments. Nobody bothered to find out which castes dominated the previous regime. Christophe Jaffrelot records that in 1984, 93.8 per cent of the principal secretaries and secretaries to the U.P. Government were from the upper castes and 78.6 per cent of the District Magistrates were from the upper castes, including 41 per cent Brahmins [4] .

The other aspect was the vicious nature of Hindutva, glimpses of which were visible in the VHP’s mobilisation efforts, but which revealed itself in a magnified, true form only post the Mandal announcement. On September 25, 1990, Lal Krishna Advani boarded a mini-bus reconstructed as a *rath* (chariot), earning it the nick name, Toyota rath. The journey turned out to be life-altering for the country.

Bigotry on a chariot

Advani's *Ram rath yatra* — from Somnath in Gujarat to Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh via Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh,

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Delhi and Bihar — left behind a trail of communal riots. Worse, the *yatra*inflicted more lasting damage than any instance of rioting could. It changed India's vocabulary and brought bigotry out of the closet. Advani's coinages such as pseudo-secularism and minority-appeasement, were lapped up by his growing following and internalised by large sections of the middle and upper class. Prejudices against Muslims, earlier regarded as offensive, and restricted to private conversations if at all, were now freely aired in the open. The Nehruvian consensus on civility and accommodation broke down, exposing the fragility of India's famed tolerance. Respect for diversity, held to be a civilisational value and expressed in such ideas as `unity in diversity', was increasingly being shown up as a farce.

Simultaneously, the BJP, through the VHP, made inroads into the rural, backward caste population by picking on their most vulnerable point — religion. Traditionally more caste and identity conscious, villagers found themselves united by the desire to contribute in some way to the Ram temple. This strategy, as intended by the larger Sangh

parivar, blunted the effect of Mandal. The parivar deliberately chose a Dalit man to lay the first stone in the November 1989 *shilanyas* ceremony at Ayodhya.

Violence was the *leitmotif* of Advani's 1990 rath yatra. For instance, Advani showed off the *Sudarshan Chakra*, considered the ultimate weapon of destruction, at his rallies. His followers, in turn, received him with a blood tilak (applied with blood drawn from a sword), vessels of blood and collection of weapons, chief among them being the *trishul*. The Trishul, symbolising muscle, was Shiva's tool but in the BJP posters, the trishul replaced Ram's bow and arrow, making the maryadapurushottam a violent God.

In an interview to *The Sunday Times* of October 14, 1990, Advani admitted to the use of blood and weaponry but dismissed these as symbolic, saying "they don't mean anything [5] ." If the display of blood was symbolic, what did it symbolise? What place could human blood and weaponry possibly have in a reception held in honour of a political leader? What legitimate reason could there be for a leader to hold up a weapon of destruction at a mass gathering? Whether or not Advani was willing to admit it, these suggested aggression against an enemy, which in this case was the Muslim. Advani's repeated invocation of injured Hindu sentiment in his speeches was unambiguously in reference to Muslims and it is not surprising that his followers took the cue from the leader.

As the *rath* wound its way through the States, Advani's speeches got progressively more rabble-rousing, setting off stampedes among ever swelling crowds. The shrill speeches and the charged crowds fed off each other but amidst all the frenzy there was also apprehension, especially in sections derided by Advani as "pseudo-secular." An editorial in *The Times of India*, dated October 5, 1990, titled Playing with Fire said:

"If the BJP president is congratulating himself on the success of his Rath Yatra … the rest of the country has reason to be greatly worried. For with the conclusion of the Gujarat chapter of the programme, it should be plain that Mr. Advani's campaign is leaving a trail of destruction in its wake. Communal riots have already broken out in Baroda and Banskantha. It is difficult not to see the connections between the Rath yatra and the Ram Jyoti campaigns on the one hand and the heightening of communal tensions in different parts of the country on the other. Indeed, the collection of lethal weapons, particularly of trishuls, gory ceremonies and performance of other rituals designed to create a spirit of militancy … it would be something of a surprise if violence did not follow it.

"… His (Advani's) inflammatory speeches, his indulgent wielding of glittering *Sudarshan Chakras* in public and his endorsement of the most bigoted among the militants threaten to identify him with the likes of Acharya Giriraj Kishore of the VHP [6] … If Advani is concerned about the unity and integrity of the country and stands for the defence of law and order, he should reconsider his course [7] ."

Reports of communal flare-ups came from many places on the *rath yatra* route, including from over one dozen districts each in Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. *The Telegraph* of October 14, 1990 noted that with Advani still to enter Uttar Pradesh, around 44 people had died in communal clashes [8] . The *rath yatra* ended on October 23, 1990 with the arrest of Advani on the orders of Bihar Chief Minister Laloo Yadav. It was delayed action by the V.P. Singh Government because passions were already at a point from where there was no return. Indeed, *the rath* yatra set in motion a ruinous chain of events culminating in the murderous razing down of the Babri Masjid.

Advani's arrest was preceded by his arrival in Patna to humongous crowds that lined up the streets, showering garlands and rose petals and shouting *Jai Shri Ram* (salutations to Lord Ram). In his speech, Advani denied any communal incidents on the way, arguing instead that the *yatra's* popularity had proved Rama was a unifying figure. But the sub-text of the speech was unambiguously anti-Muslim: "It is shocking that in India, Hindus who constitute the majority population have to agitate for the construction of a temple and that too at the birthplace of Rama."

Ascent of lynch mobs

Immediately after Advani's arrest, the BJP withdrew support to V.P. Singh leading to his defeat in Parliament. Advani's arrest instantaneously set off another bout of communal clashes. Jaffrelot wrote that violence was widespread. The BJP called a Bharat bandh which targeted Muslims, notably in areas where they refused to shut their shops. By October 25, the official death toll in communal riots was 61 [9] .

There was more mayhem, this time in Ayodhya which for all outward appearances was impenetrably barricaded by Chief Minister Mulayam Singh. But the VHP made short work of the arrangements. It called upon *Ram Kar sewaks* (temple construction volunteers) to retaliate by laying siege to the town. On October 30, 1990, days after Advani's arrest, lakhs of them poured into Ayodhya defying the ban and headed for the Masjid, provoking Mulayam Singh to order firing into the crowds. The deaths of *Kar Sewaks* in the firing fuelled another round of violence, creating a war like situation on the ground.

My time during this period was divided between tracking Ayodhya and Uttar Pradesh and reporting from Delhi where developments within the Janata Dal were fast heading to a denouement. Each day brought a new disaster. There were midnight resignations, threats and tantrums.

All this, of course, meant that I would lose out on the chance to cover the *rath yatra*. By this time I had left *The Indian Express* to join *The Indian Post* and thereafter *The Independent* — the early part in Lucknow and later in Delhi. The transition symbolised my own transformation — from fanatical opposition to the Congress while in *The Indian Express* to a graded understanding of society and politics, in particular the volatile politics of Mandal and *Mandir*.

...the fall of V.P. Singh marked the beginning of a horrific phase in Indian politics that climaxed in the shameful destruction of the Babri Masjid.

One of the saddest events I covered at this time was the fall of V.P. Singh on the floor of the Lok Sabha. The day was November 10, 1990 and he was jointly brought down by the BJP, the Congress and the Chandra Shekhar faction of the Janata Dal. The lower House burst into cheers as the deed was done — the BJP and the Congress congratulated Chandra Shekhar. But the happiness was tragically misplaced — not only because Singh had upheld the Indian Constitution in defending Mandal, which in its essence was about equality, and opposing *Mandir*, but also because that day marked the beginning of a horrific phase in Indian politics that climaxed in the shameful destruction of the Babri Masjid.

As the *Mandir* agitation picked up momentum, the VHP and the All-India Babri Masjid Action Committee (AIBMAC), the latter formed in 1986 to represent the Muslim side in the dispute, were placed in an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation. The VHP operated from mostly Hindu Ayodhya and the AIBMAC from the adjoining Faizabad town which had a heavy concentration of Muslims. For every action, every slogan raised in Ayodhya, there would be equal action and slogan in Faizabad.

I remember one cold morning in December 1990 when I flitted between Ayodhya and Faizabad. Conchshells boomed and trishuls were whipped out in Ayodhya. In Faizabad, Muslims gathered on a terrace led by the belligerent Azam Khan. There was a flood of saffron in Ayodhya; there were achkans and skull caps on the Faizabad terrace. Ayodhya resounded to shouts of Jai Shri Ram. Faizabad replied with matching cries of *Nare*

Takbeer Alla-hu-Akbar, Allah-hu-Akbar (the Muslim call to Allah). Watching the action-reaction played out in a loop, I felt a chill go down my spine. And this had nothing to do with the winter cold. From here on, Muslim politics would assume a stridency that would rebound on ordinary Muslims with even greater ferocity.

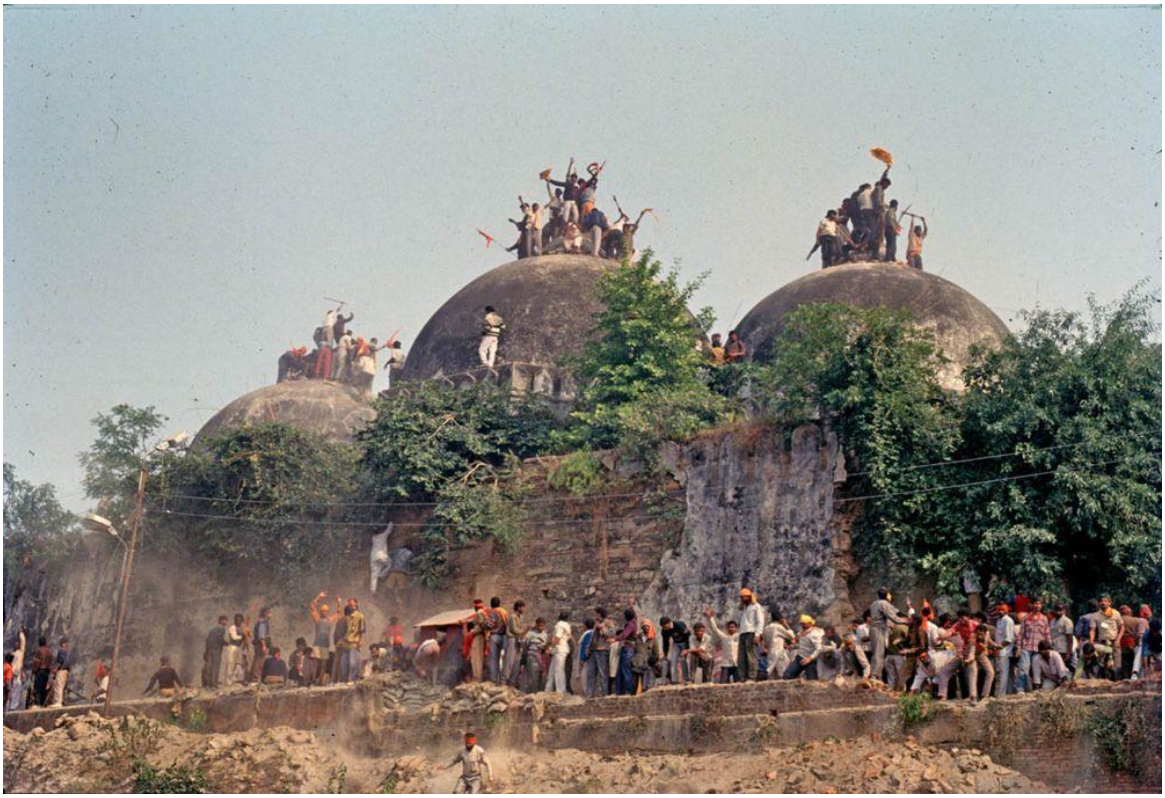
The 1991 U.P. Assembly election was frightening beyond belief. The *Mandir* hysteria spread like a contagion, blurring the dividing line between the BJP and its opponents, between Sangh parivar volunteers and ordinary citizens. Towns and cities were awash in saffron colour, Bajrang Dal activists and common citizens alike wore orange bandanas and drove vehicles with stickers that beseeched voters to vote in the name of Ram: *Aap ke vote Ram ke naam*.

This was patently unconstitutional and ought to have attracted the Election Commission of India's censure. But the coercion in the air seemed to compel everyone to fall in line. In Ayodhya, Congresspersons took part in *Mandir Kar sewa* (voluntary work). I remember Congressman Nirmal Khatri telling some of us journalists he had to bend to the popular mood. There were reports that Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, an important Congress leader, wanted her party to back the *Mandir* movement.

If the *Mandir* movement was born of genuine devotion, few would oppose it. But this was, without doubt, a majoritarian message. On my travels during the U.P. election, BJP activists engaged me in conversations that inevitably broke up over my refusal to say*Vande Mataram*. People who seemed normal would suddenly flare up: Why don't you say *Vande Mataram?* I would tell them I didn't like the coercion implicit in their slogan, *Hindustan me rahna ho to Vande Mataram Kahna hoga* (You have to say *Vande Mataram* if you want to live in India). They unfailingly hit back: "You don't look like a Muslim but you behave like one."

The saffron mood was reflected in the Assembly election results. In the 1989 election, the BJP had won 57 of 421 seats for a vote share of 11.61 per cent. Five years later, it won a majority with 221 seats for a vote share of 31.45 per cent. In the battle between Mandal and *Mandir*, the latter seemed to have won, judging by the participation in the VHP programmes of millions of backward caste rural men and women.

In retrospect, Babri Masjid was destined to go. The VHP and the BJP, backed by the RSS, had pumped up so much negative energy in the volunteers that it had to find its release in destruction. Advani's refrain throughout his campaign was that Hindus had waited 40 years to claim their temple and they were now straining at the leash. There was no other way to interpret this than as a call to obliterate the *Masjid*. The vandals brought down the masjid dome by dome. The Babri Masjid was defiled and destroyed and with it the identity and security of the Indian Muslim.



After the demolition, Advani tried to defend himself by saying he had made desperate appeals to the *kar sewaks* to halt the attack. But Advani's Personal Security Officer, Anju Gupta, refuted this. In a March 2010 deposition in a Rae Bareli Court, she said Advani gave a *joshilay* (inflammatory) speech from the stage, repeating over and over again that *mandir yahin banayenge* (we will make the *mandir* here only), which inflamed the *kar sewaks*, pushing them to mount an assault. It takes enormous courage for a serving Indian Police Service (IPS) officer to depose against a leading political figure, and I was glad *The Hindu* sent me to cover her deposition [10] .

> *...the passing on of the Babri Masjid, an ordinary mosque that few Muslims had any regard for, came to symbolise the community's identity, safety and very existence.*

To my eternal regret, I was laid up with a fever and not able to cover the demolition of December 6, 1992 — a sacrilege, a violence that shamed and convulsed India. The newspapers of the next day did full justice to it. One particular article, published in the *India Today* edition of December 15-30, 1992, and authored by its correspondent, Zafar Agha, left a searing pain in the heart. To me that summed up everything that needed to be said. That showed how and why the passing on of the Babri Masjid, an ordinary mosque that few Muslims had any regard for, came to symbolise the community's identity, safety and very existence. Excerpts:

Symbol of Identity

By ***Zafar Agha***

It was on a chilly February morning in 1986 that I first heard of a mosque called the Babri Masjid. Till then, Ayodhya had been for me a town of Hindu pilgrimage. Born and brought up in Allahabad, Lord Ram was part of my cultural heritage. I grew up watching Ram Lilla with my friends and family. So, when I first heard of the Babri Masjid, I dismissed it as a passing fuss over an old, abandoned mosque. But the extent of my miscalculation was to hit home as events overtook beliefs.

The Babri Masjid startled me. It was an island in a sea of temples. As I approached it with a big tilak on my forehead. I was surprised to find the idols of Ram Lalla placed under the central dome from where an Imam leads the prayer. It provoked consternation.

But by the time I left, I'd suppressed the irritation, and had begun to feel that Muslims should make a gesture towards the Hindus and hand over the structure to them. Two factors guided my thinking. The first, that the Hindu claim was an inflammatory one. And second was the spectre of large-scale riots due to VHP sloganeering. Suddenly, the Indian Muslim was being turned into Babar's Santaan (descendants). It was no longer enough that I was an Indian. I kept hearing speeches reminding Hindus that the Muslims had destroyed Hindu temples. I kept hearing the exhortation: make up your mind – either go to Pakistan or hand over the masjid to the Hindus. I felt it was unfair that the issue was being forced onto the streets. Couldn't it be settled through negotiations?

I argued with my people that they should give up their claims to the mosque and make peace with the Hindus. But each time the argument was: what about the other 3,000 mosques the VHP is seeking? What about Mathura and Kashi? I had no answers. Then I found figures like Imam Bukhari and Syed Shahabuddin had become Muslim leaders overnight. I didn't want such leaders. I warned my people that these leaders would only add to the problem. But my voice was drowned out in the growing crescendo of VHP slogans, in the speeches of Ashok Singhal, Sadhvi Rithambara and Uma Bharati. The insecurity amongst my people grew. Babri Masjid was no more an abandoned mosque. It was now the symbol of Muslim security, of their identity.

In June 1987, I was visiting Allahabad for my father's death anniversary when riots broke out. … ….constables barged into my home and picked me up along with other young males of the family. We were taken to the kotwali. My press card was ignored. In the heat of June, we all sat on the floor. If someone tried to move, he was told: "Saale Pakistani hilna nahin." That night I groped for explanations. But I was convinced things would improve.
Again I had miscalculated. Soon there were yatras and hate campaigns. Politicians, mullahs, sants, all behaved with equal short-sightedness. The 1989 and 1991 elections became us versus them. My liberal stance was now ridiculed by my Muslim friends. They said I would end up compromising my 'identity'.

Finally, the BJP took power in Uttar Pradesh. It had taken a public pledge. "Mandir vahin banayenge." But I insisted even the VHP would not break the mosque. I trusted Indian tolerance and the Hindu spirit of live and let live. When my people scoffed at my optimism, I said simply: "India can never become Pakistan." Even two days before the demolition, I was telling my editor, "December 6 will pass off without any damage to the mosque."
No wonder then, when I learnt of the mosque's demolition, it took me a long time to believe it. As I watched the rubble of the once-abandoned Babri Masjid on my television, tears began to roll down my cheeks. And I realized how a decrepit mosque in Ayodhya had become a symbol of identity for millions of Muslims.

(the text here is taken from the article's reproduction in a 2003 book brought out by Sahmat. It has been corrected for typos)

> *"The Babri Masjid's painful death completed my ideological transformation. It is not that I started liking the Congress. I continue to be discomfited by dynastic politics and corruption. But I fear the BJP and the Sangh parivar more."*

The Babri Masjid's painful death completed my ideological transformation. It is not that I started liking the Congress. I continue to be discomfited by dynastic politics and corruption. But I fear the BJP and the Sangh parivar more.

The Congress's communalism — and there is no getting away from it — is a product of realpolitik and hard-nosed opportunism. The Congress leadership's failure to safeguard the party's philosophy and train its cadre in inclusive thoughts and practices, and its own compromised policies have together allowed the Congress brand of communalism to flourish. This combined with the indiscriminate admission into the Congress of defectors from parties like the BJP and the Shiv Sena has meant that on the ground Congresspersons would often be indistinguishable from their BJP/ Shiv Sena counterparts. Besides, traditionally the Congress was an umbrella organisation, accommodating people and ideas from the Left, Centre and the Right. However, unlike the BJP, the Congress has always had a liberal core and is fundamentally an inclusive party wedded to the goals of equity and pluralism. It is often communal by practice but it is not communal by belief or ideology.

Consider, for instance, the following extracts from a speech Jawaharlal Nehru delivered in the Lok Sabha on February 18, 1953:

We have in India 40 million Muslims—as big a number as any other Muslim country has excepting Pakistan and Indonesia… Any propaganda, that gives these people a sense of insecurity or makes them feel that they do not have the same opportunities or development and progress as everybody else, is an anti-national thing and a communal thing. I submit that such propaganda is going on and that there are organisations in the country whose sole purpose seems to be to promote it.

We call our state a secular one. The word "secular" perhaps is not a very happy one. And yet, for want of a better, we have used it. What exactly does it mean? It does not obviously mean a state where religion as such is discouraged. It means freedom of religion and conscience, including freedom for those who may have no religion. It means free play for all religions, subject only to their not interfering with each other or the basic conceptions of our state. It means that the minority communities, from the religious point of view, should accept this position. It means, even more, that the majority community, from this point of view, should fully realise it. For, by virtue of numbers as well as in other ways, it is the dominant community and it is its responsibility not to use its position in any way which might prejudice our secular ideal.

By contrast, the BJP and its mentor, the RSS, are vehemently exclusivist both by belief and practice. The RSS was born to protect and promote Hindu interests and Hindu unity. The success of this mission depends on the demonisation of the enemy or the non-Hindu minorities, specifically Muslims. The RSS's venerated Guru, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar (Guruji), wrote in the Bunch of thoughts in 1939:

"… Some wise men of today tell us that no man is born as Hindu or Muslim or Christian but as a simple human being. This may be true of others. But for a Hindu, he gets the smaskar when he enters the mother's womb, and the last when his body is consigned to the flames. ... We are Hindus even before we emerge form (from) the womb of our mother. We are therefore born as Hindus. About the others, they are born to this world as simple unnamed human beings and later on, either circumcised or baptised, they become Muslims or Christians…[11]*"*

Specifically on Muslims, Golwalkar said:

"….Then came the question of Muslims. They had come here as invaders. They were conceiving themselves as conquerors and rulers here for the last twelve hundred years. That complex was still in their mind. History has recorded that their antagonism was not merely political. Had it been so, they could have been won over in a very

short time. But it was so deep-rooted that whatever we believed in, the Muslim was wholly hostile to it. If we worship in the temple, he would desecrate it. If we carry on bhajans and car festivals, that would irritate him. If we worship cow, he would like to eat it. If we glorify woman as a symbol of sacred motherhood, he would like to molest her. He was tooth and nail opposed to our way of life in all aspects-religious, cultural, social, etc. He had imbibed that hostility to the very core. His number also was not small. Next to the Hindu's, his was the largest… [12] *"*

Neither has Golwalkar been disowned nor the pernicious text quoted above. Far from it, Lal Krishna Advani is on record attributing his understanding of "secularism" to Guruji Golwalkar. In 2008, Narendra Modi, now Prime Minister, wrote a book titled,*Jyoti Punj*, which had an entire chapter devoted to Guruji's greatness.

Cultural Nationalism

The BJP-Sangh Parivar's Cultural Nationalism — or the belief that civilisationally India has been and is one nation, one culture and one people — is the inverse of the Congress's vision of India as a mosaic of multiple cultures. Thus, Cultural Nationalism defines all Indians as Hindu, possibly with varying modes of worship. Under this broad rubric, Muslims become Mohammadi Hindus and Christians Christi Hindus.

This majoritarian view of politics necessarily requires the BJP to be in a state of constant conflict with minorities and those seen to be empathetic to minorities, the `pseudo-secularists' in short. Any policy the BJP makes or any policy it opposes is almost instinctively framed in terms of how much the minorities are "appeased".

The BJP website's description of Advani's Ram *rath yatra* encapsulates the party's position on minorities:

The BJP's first yatra, contrary to what the pseudo-secularists claim, was not merely a part of the Mandir-Masjid dispute centred around Ram Janmabhumi at Ayodhya. Although linked to the liberation of Ram Janmabhumi, its aim was to raise three fundamental questions that had all along lurked in the collective sub-conscience of the nation but nobody had dared ask them, fearful of retribution from the pseudo-secularists who had ruled India by default since 1947. These questions were:

- *What is secularism? What is communalism?*
- *Can national integration be achieved by constantly pandering to minority communalism?*
- *Cannot Government reject the cult of minorityism?* [13]

I was in my 13th year as a journalist when the Babri Masjid crumbled in a heap, It took me this long to make the journey from blinkered anti-Congressism to understanding that that the Sangh Parivar's ideology of Hindutva posed a great and insidious threat to India's survival. I have consciously not used the word anti-BJPism here — not because to use this phrase is to invite yourself to be damned; not because in today's polarised India you can wear your anti-Congressism as a proud label but not express yourself similarly with regard to the BJP or the larger parivar. My reason is simply that anti-anything implies blind, unthinking, unconsidered opposition, which is not the case with me. Besides, my discomfort is not with the BJP, which is a recognised political party, but to its political philosophy, Hindutva.

PostScript:

A decade after Babri Masjid, Gujarat erupted in a gorier replay. Babri Masjid was a metaphorical assault on the mind and body of the Muslim. The 2002 Gujarat violence was a planned physical attack on Muslims to 'teach them a lesson', to 'tell them their place in India'. The pogrom affected not only secular Hindus, but secular Muslims who had fought the orthodoxy of the clergy all their lives. Like Zafar Agha in 1992, M. Hasan Jowher in 2002 was proudly

secular, with more Hindu than Muslim friends. He was (and is) a rationalist and it was his life's mission to rescue young Muslims from obscurantism. Post the pogrom, his world would collapse as he helplessly watched the same young people being appropriated by the Muslim clergy. Nobody else came to the rescue of the victims and he would cry seeing forced marriages between elderly clerics and young Muslim women in the relief camps.

As in 1992, middle class homes erupted in anger at Muslims. The argument was that this was just desserts for what they had done to Hindus in Godhra. The popular consensus against Muslims was so pervasive that newspapers came under pressure to hold back their punches. At The Times of India, where I worked on the editorial page between 1994 and 2004, we managed to sneak in a few critical articles but even so it wasn't an easy time for us. I remember telling the Edit Page editor, Jug Suraiya, about the growing urban anger against Muslims, and he suggested I write an article in the form of an open letter to my `extended family', which was euphemism for the educated middle and upper classes. The article argued that Muslim-appeasement was more imagined than real. Predictably, it brought me more brickbats than bouquets [14] .

In 2004, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance took power and stayed for 10 years. Outwardly, this seemed a rejection of communal politics. But it was not. Regardless of how India voted, there was a change deep down, reflected in the emergence of a permissive new vocabulary, in the deepening of the Hindu-Muslim divide and in the hostility with which the state apparatus everywhere treated Muslims, the indiscriminate implication of young Muslims in terror cases being one example.

On December 23, 2013, a lower court in Gujarat cleared Narendra Modi and 57 others of charges that they were involved in the 2002 pogrom. The verdict was based on the findings of a Special Investigation Team appointed by the Supreme Court. As a journalist writing on the case, I had carefully read the SIT's reports, and found them riddled with inconsistencies and errors [15] . But for the media, TV media especially, the TRP-generating "clean chit " from the lower court was as good as final. It didn't matter that the appeals process extending right up to apex court had not been exhausted.

Modi's emergence in 2014 was a surprise only to the extent that he seemed to have shed the Hindutva baggage for development. But even as he enticed the young generation across castes with promises of new opportunities and well-paying jobs, his lackeys remained true to their lineage. Amit Shah's inflammatory hectoring ricocheted through U.P. and the signal was picked up by the rank and file. Modi spoke of development but in riot-torn Muzzafarnagar in Western UP, Jats violently confronted Muslims. The BJP also gave the party ticket to men associated with anti-Muslim violence.

In Government, Modi kept the focus on development but in what seemed to be a tacit backing of party hot heads, allowed them to do as they willed. Ministers, MPs and other party functionaries competed to make incendiary speeches. A minister of state, Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti, instigated her followers with libellous language against

Muslims. The hot- headed Mahant Adityanath rallied and thundered at Muslims and threatened to implement ghar wapsi on a mass scale (bringing them back to the Hindu fold by force). The militant Bajrang Dal added its own bit to the boiling cauldron in the form of the anti-Love Jehad campaign (protests against Muslim boys alleged to be ensnaring Hindu girls into marriage).

But while all this made headline news, the real agenda was the Hinduisation of India — reflected in the rush to fill up important positions with poorly qualified persons with RSS affiliations, in the reforms initiated in education at the prompting of Sangh-linked organisations, and finally in the RSS's own exalted status in the new regime. On October 3, 2014, Doordarshan and All India Radio carried live the annual Vijaya Dashami address of Sarsanghchalak Mohan Bhagwat. Since then, a co-ordination panel comprising high-ranking Cabinet ministers and key RSS officials has been deciding important policy matters, especially in education where work is in rapid progress for the introduction of a new Hinduised curriculum.

Not just this. Of 27 ministers in the Union Cabinet, 15, or more that half, have their origins in the parent Sangh or its affiliates. This is the largest presence of the Sangh in any BJP-led Cabinet.

Indira Gandhi was authoritarian, she trampled upon institutions, and during the Emergency became India's de jure and de facto dictator. Mr. Modi shares many these qualities as is evident from his intolerance of dissent and the relentless crackdowns he has ordered on civil society. But where Indira was Left-leaning, Mr. Modi is India's first fully and unapologetically right-wing, both economic and religious, Prime Minister.

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