



THE HINDU CENTRE

for

Politics and Public Policy



25 Years after Babri Masjid Demolition

"Counterfeit politics has communalised all aspects of our lives": An Open Letter from Lalit Prasad Yadav to Fellow Citizens

Lalit Prasad Yadav

Dec 6, 2017



Bihar Chief Minister Lalit Prasad Yadav leading a procession calling for communal harmony in Patna on December 07, 1992. Violence erupted after demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on December 06, 1992. Photo: The Hindu Archives

*"This was no demolition of a mere mosque. It was, in its effect, a beginning of the era in India when politics of deception and trickery of the Sangh Parivar and the BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] was accepted as a mainstream way of doing politics. The ideology that killed Bapu has an innate relationship with the Hindu right and has wreaked havoc on the social fabric of India," writes **Lalit Prasad Yadav**, national president of the Rashtriya Janata Dal and former Chief Minister of Bihar, in an impassioned open letter to his fellow citizens.*

My dear fellow Citizens of India,

In the 70-year old brief history of Independent India we have had a chance to celebrate 25th anniversaries of some truly magnificent events as well as others that were devastating. In 2009, we celebrated 25th anniversary of the first space flight by an Indian citizen, Rakesh Sharma. The year also marked 25 years since the tragedy of Bhopal gas leaks in 1984.

Last year marked the 25 years of economic liberalisation of India. The situation arising out of liberalisation, privatisation and 'opening' of our economy to globalisation ensured that this anniversary was no occasion to celebrate. I hope that some of my colleagues used this opportunity to reflect upon the conditions of the labouring poor of our country.

The year before that, we marked the 25 years of acceptance of Mandal Commission Report recommendation in 1990. The way reservation for OBC continues to be debated, challenged, or inclusion is demanded for more groups, indicates that the aspirations for representation are far from satiated.

Today, we mark the 25 years of Babri Masjid Demolition. I do not need to remind you that this was no demolition of a mere mosque. It was, in its effect, a beginning of the era in India when politics of deception and trickery of the Sangh Parivar and the BJP was accepted as a mainstream way of doing politics. The ideology that killed Bapu has an innate relationship with the Hindu right and has wreaked havoc on the social fabric of India.

I have spoken about the events leading to the unfortunate demolition repeatedly in media. In the National Integration Council meeting held just days before the demolition of Babri Masjid, Advaniji gave his word that the mosque will not be damaged. At the time, we knew about his party's massive communal mobilisation all over northern and western India. In my mind [at the time], the memories of two years ago were very fresh: [In 1990] I had made an appeal to Advaniji to cancel his Rath Yatra and return to Delhi but he paid no heed to my appeal. He continued his yatra which left a trail of communal violence all over the landscape of the country's heartland.

“ *I had resolved that whether I stay in power or not, I will stop his communal yatra. Advaniji, had openly proclaimed that he will not listen to any court or any government. He warned me to not come in the path of his yatra.* ”

I had resolved that whether I stay in power or not, I will stop his communal yatra. Advaniji, had openly proclaimed that he will not listen to any court or any government. He warned me to not come in the path of his yatra. What happened subsequent to that is well-known. You can imagine, I had no reason to believe that a person who does not respect the law of the land, who is not invested in public order and peace, will keep his word of not harming the mosque. Sadly, the then Prime Minister Narsimha Raoji and his government chose to trust Advaniji's word. They did not deem it necessary to take preventive or even precautionary measures. What to say of Kalyan Singh? He dishonoured an affidavit he filed as UP's Chief Minister in the Supreme Court of India. The will to dishonour the constitution runs deep in BJP's culture and ideology.

Indeed, Advaniji proved my fears and assessment correct. He was truer to his political ideology of hate and violence than to the Constitution of India and to the good of the nation. His ecstatic happiness and euphoric hugging of his colleagues as the Babri Mosque demolition was perpetrated has been captured in iconic photographs of the cataclysmic event.

But friends, I write today not just to repeat the lament of damage caused by this wilful and planned act in the past of India by the ideology that has captured power today. I am not just lamenting lost Hindu-Muslim brotherhood. I am writing to appeal to you to do more than just remember. The remembering and lamenting are important to soothe the wounded collective psyche of our nation, but after 25 years we need more. Unlike our Prime Minister Modi I will not advise you to forget and move on.

What we need to do is to use history and our sense of hurt, to change our present. We need to use this process to redouble our efforts and shield not just the social fabric of communal relationships but also our polity, our institutions, and even our economy.

I say this because you need to remember that whenever deception and trickery—such as that brought Babri Masjid down—comes to power, it also unleashes governance through violence and revenge. The autonomy of democratic institutions stand compromised.

“ Look around and you cannot ignore that it is not just that Muslims are being attacked and lynched but that opposition, judiciary, NGOs and media have all been threatened to fall in line. ”

Look around and you cannot ignore that it is not just that Muslims are being attacked and lynched but that opposition, judiciary, NGOs and media have all been threatened to fall in line. Whether it is those who pointed out the failures and devastating consequences of demonetisation and GST, whether it is those who brought to fore the corruption of gargantuan proportions—those who speak out against this vengeful governance are doing so in the face of great personal risk.

My friends, across the world and history, students, workers, artists, intellectuals, lawyers and journalists have been at the forefront to remind governments and rulers of their duties to the national community and citizens. When they do this they are working for the good of the entire citizenry as true patriots. In India, it is they, along with the political opposition that are keeping governments accountable. For the government of the day to brand any opposition as patently ‘anti-national’ should make you suspicious of their intent.

The politics that gained currency in the wake of the Babri Masjid demolition is the counterfeit version of ethical politics. Only lip service is paid to values such as honesty, hard work, propriety, development but the real value of such politics is nil. In fact just like counterfeit currency slowly suffocates the economy this counterfeit brand of politics has slowly taken over our institutions and processes, and communalised all aspects of our national lives.

Our cities, towns and neighbourhoods stand separated and polarised. We have become fearful of those who should be the receivers of our sympathy, help and solidarity. It is my most fervent appeal to you dear fellow citizens not to repose all your trust, unquestioningly, in one political party. Absolute submission to one party’s vision—no matter how good it sounds to your ears—is the sure path to authoritarianism. A healthy opposition is important for a democracy to survive.

Dear friends, on the 25 years of Babri Masjid demolition I ask you to invest time in scrutinising the actions of the governments and not just go by what the Prime Minister/Chief Ministers or what their council of ministers say. The politics of deceit and trickery that I mentioned above thrives on confusing people and disorienting them. I ask you to invest time in knowing your concerns better—do not believe in empty promises. You are so patient about these continually

hollow claims to job creation, development, in the face of falling standards of public health and education provisions. Why be so easy to get angry at issues that do not address your most pressing concerns? Do not fall for scapegoating the weak. Visit your friends and colleagues from different communities and faith when they celebrate their festivals, invite them to your houses when you celebrate yours. Reach out to people unlike you. Stand with people who feel frightened. Save them when they are faced with violence.

“ *The demolition of Babri Masjid is a potent symbol of the failure of social contract of the Indian state with its Muslim citizens. Today, if Muslims feel that they have been rendered redundant in the Indian politics, it is a sad day for our democracy.* ”

The demolition of Babri Masjid is a potent symbol of the failure of social contract of the Indian state with its Muslim citizens. Today, if Muslims feel that they have been rendered redundant in the Indian politics, it is a sad day for our democracy. In India, minorities need protection not only because of their vulnerability but also because different kinds of minorities criss-cross our entire society. If the principle of protection of minority is compromised, I can assure you that each one of us, will at some point of time, find ourselves in some kind of minority within our present milieu—regional minority as a migrant, or opinion minority in any group. Denial of civic rights of minorities will surely, if slowly, erode everyone's rights.

I especially appeal for the young citizens of India. I have so much faith in their abilities. The poor youth of India deserve better work and education opportunities. I have recently joined twitter and as much as I get ridiculed, I also get to see that the youth of India are truly invested in a glorious future of India. This can only take place if it means moving towards a widely shared vision of this future. If we leave behind anyone, let alone the largest minority of India, we cannot hope to progress.

I myself became politically active during my student days in the Patna University campus. On the call of Jayprakash Narayan I ventured into politics that responded to the broader political malaise of our society of that time. Although we have made important progress on the matter of representation and dignity, we are far from having reached our goals. The youth of today have an added challenge—they have to wade through confusing propaganda on mainstream and new media.



October 18, 1990: Bihar Chief Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav visits L.K. Advani in New Delhi to request him to call off his rath yatra. Photo: The Hindu Archives.

The voices from so many universities campuses and of youth activists across India convince me that they have seen through the trickery and confusion creating tactics of the right wing. Please listen to them patiently because convincing takes time, gathering evidence and presenting it is often very difficult. No matter who we are, we have a duty to arm ourselves with knowledge of dangers that India faces today and to discuss these with those who do not have the time or ability to do it.

I wish to share my experience with this kind of study and communication during the campaign for the last Bihar Assembly elections. I took RSS thinker Golwalkar's book *A Bunch of Thoughts* with me to my rallies and read with people. They analysed the RSS ideology and rejected it. Cutting through the lies with this kind of education is important when education has been reduced to 'skilling', when even those leaders who began their political careers taking the Socialist path have strayed away from it.

“ *Make sure you do not find yourself then on the wrong side of history. Make sure you do not find yourself standing among people who lied and spread hatred.*

Make sure that you are not found siding with those who were complicit in making the lives of their fellow citizens difficult. ”

Mainstream media have never before sided with the regime in power so blatantly but it is the new scrounge of fake news that is more effectively being used by the right-wing propagandists to disorient people. Propagandist media may suggest that their messaging is common sense – as if it is the view and belief of a large number of people—you need to question it and make up your own mind. Nobody is exempt from history. In the days to come, and I am very sure of it, we will eventually see the ruling ideology of hate for what it is. It may dress itself in attractive clothes today or talk in a deceptive language but one day the veneer will be stripped off. Make sure you do not find yourself then on the wrong side of history. Make sure you do not find yourself standing among people who lied and spread hatred. Make sure that you are not found siding with those who were complicit in making the lives of their fellow citizens difficult.

Many societies took a long time to realise they were being led on a dangerous path. But once the realisation came it was clear that a lot of bad things were done in the name of those decided to stay quiet as their neighbours, friends, colleagues, and compatriots were being persecuted. Today Babri Masjid demolition may seem like a blip in the history of India but a time will come when its consequences will be fully understood. Our children will ask us how such a thing could have happened. What was everybody thinking? Was there no one who could have done something about it? Sadly, such things are happening around us today. All of us, even if not concerned, are quite aware of how our societies are becoming more unsympathetic and violent. What are we doing about it now?

Dear fellow citizens, commitment to facts is the basic requirement for humane, social communication. The government of the day seems to be implying that it can lie to you about everything because it will, in some unidentified near future, build a Ram Temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya where the ill-fated Babri Masjid once stood. As alert citizens of India you should not need anyone to tell you that the government in question is neither interested in the Ram Temple, nor is it interested in considering, even for a moment, what is good for our country.

The now erased visage of the Babri Masjid domes dotted with Kar Sevaks who brought it down, should fill our patriotic hearts with alarm. If this image, in 25 years, has meant that the Hindutva ideology has been given a long leash then we have to halt the BJP from leading the country down the path of self-destruction.

“ I have been confronted several times with hard choices and I have not let the considerations of staying in power overwhelm me. Never have I sided with communal forces and I have tried to suture together coalitions that safeguard the interests of the most powerless in Indian society ... In the land of Gandhi and Ambedkar, this politics—even though maligned by the elites—is the actual, as well as ethical politics. ”

In my entire political career, I have been confronted several times with hard choices and I have not let the considerations of staying in power overwhelm me. Never have I sided with communal forces and I have tried to suture together coalitions that safeguard the interests of the most powerless in Indian society. I have been a target of vendetta politics. I have been called many names. Allegations have been made against me of indulging in identity politics and politics of symbolism. While history will be my true judge, I have always considered it important to side with the powerless, poor and minorities and communicate this openly to anyone interested. I am not ashamed of optics that convey to the marginalised that we are allies in their struggle. In the land of Gandhi and Ambedkar, this politics—even though maligned by the elites—is the actual, as well as ethical politics.

It is the solidarity of the marginalised that post-Babri Masjid India needs. The counterfeit politics of BJP and Sangh Parivar has obstructed building of this solidarity because it pits one oppressed against another. Dear fellow citizens, we need to raise the questions that pertain to our everyday survival—against spiralling prices of food and basic commodities, against joblessness, against lack of adequate provision of health and education, against daily subversions of justice; rather than being sidelined into issues that will not make any difference to our quality of life.

Irrespective of names people call them, the true patriots of India will be those who carry on raising uncomfortable questions to those in power.

Lalu Prasad Yadav

Dec 06, 2017

India.

(Lalu Prasad Yadav is the national president of the Rashtriya Janata Dal and former Chief Minister of Bihar.)