

IMPORTANCE OF DECEMBER 6, 1992.

- Ashok Chowgule

December 6, 1992, I believe, will be recorded as a more important date than August 15, 1947, in India's history. This is the day when India's destiny and the direction that it will take has been determined. That India will be a Hindu Rashtra is now without doubt, and this concept of Hindu Rashtra is the one espoused by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

December 6 is the beginning of the culmination of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement. Those well-wishers of Hinduism, who sometimes feel uncomfortable of the movement, see it as merely a programme to construct a temple at the Janmasthan - that is, they see it as bricks and mortar. They do not see it as a movement which has changed the attitudes that have been inculcated in our politics in the last forty-five years since our independence. In these attitudes, the interest of the nation has been set aside, the only objective being that of winning the election for the sake of power. Time and again, people like Swami Vivekanand have been crying for the unity of Hindus to ensure that Hinduism survives the onslaught that it has been receiving from all sorts of people, either at the physical or intellectual level.

December 6 has given a firm indication that the Hindu samaj will set a limit to tolerance, an attribute unique to Hinduism. Shri Balasaheb Deoras, in his 1993 Vijaydashmi address said, "Tolerance does not mean tolerating intolerance." Thus truth and truth alone will be tolerated. More than anything, it is the denial of the destruction of the temple in 1528 to construct the Babri structure that has aroused the passions of the samaj. Shri V S Naipaul is one of the few people not directly involved in the movement, who has seen the essence of it. He calls it a great awakening, and that too from the bottom. He says, "It is not enough to abuse (those involved in the movement) or to use that fashionable word from Europe: fascism. There is a big historical development going on in India. Wise men should understand it and ensure that it does not remain in the hands of fanatics. Rather they should use it for the intellectual transformation of India." Sadly, the 'wise men' do not seem to wish to heed this advice.

December 6 has brought to the fore the contradictions of those who label themselves as secular. People have now seen clearly the double standards that they have applied in the past, and the way Hinduism has been unjustly abused by them. An editor of an English weekly recently wrote about the 'aeroplane bores' who would spend the whole journey telling him about the way the Muslims have been appeased, etc. The editor should have wondered why is it only now that such a conversation is taking place. The Sahamat episode has brought out the hypocrisy of the organisation. It was formed in the memory of a person murdered for performing street plays as parodies of the Congress rule then. And the same organisation takes large sums of money from a Congress government, and tries its best to hide the source of its funding.

December 6 has enthused those who ardently believe in the ideology of Hindutva to be no longer afraid of being open about it. After the January riots in Bombay, a senior business person asked at a managing committee meeting of an industry association, "How long will the Muslims keep on teasing the Hindus?" The response to the maha-artis from all walks of life was something that was unimaginable. (It must be remembered that such events are unnatural in Hindu scriptures; but the samaj wanted to prove a point.) The mood of the people is that the country has tolerated nonsense for far too long, and those who support a radical change in the way things are done will be supported. India has been discussing issues at the domestic and international level from position of weakness - this has to stop.

December 6 has focused the minds of the liberal Muslim, and those who genuinely feel for them, but do not subscribe to the Hindutva ideology. It must be admitted that the process had started in the last two years, as was highlighted by an English fortnightly, when the Ram Janmabhoomi movement was very strong. But today, these people have become bold enough to say openly that their leaders and protectors have misled the community, and that education, etc., is much more important than the so-called religious teachings.

December 6 has exposed those who still do not wish to understand what is happening. Whether it is deliberate or not is besides the point. This group sees the new dispensation as a threat to the vested interest that they have been able to create in the last forty-five years. They know that they are fighting the last battle, and they also know that if logic is allowed to play its rightful role, they will lose this battle too. The culmination of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement will be the beginning of the construction at the Janmasthan, and the dawn of Ram Rajya.

THE WAY WE LOOK AT ISSUES

- Ashok Chowgule
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When we look at issues, if the facts and the sequences are twisted, then we will draw wrong conclusions from them. The need to look at the issues in a truthful manner is important because we have to learn from them, since we cannot allow history to repeat itself. Or as Shri Jagmohan said, "Those who do not read history, make bad history!" This was in response to what ShriyRajiv Gandhi said when accused of not knowing history - "I don't read history, I make history!" (Of course, knowing history is no guarantee that it will not be repeated.) To explain what I wish to say, I will take a few issues of national importance.

THE RISE OF BHRINDENWALE

We cannot look at Bhrindenwale unless we understand how is it that he came to be in the position that he was. Today, many analysts try and create an impression that his rise was due to either some burning issue that he had taken up or that the Sikhs nominated him as their leader to take up the burning issues. He, therefore, was a legitimate champion of his people's cause, which had a basis in the way they were unfairly treated as compared to the rest of the people in the country. These analysts would like to propagate that the Sikhs needed special treatment.

That the Sikhs had grievance, and still do, cannot be doubted. However, what one has to enquire if these grievance has to do with their faith, or due to wrong policies of the government. If it is the former, then one has to enquire what has been done by the government, and other sections of the people of the country, which would be termed to be as something that would harm their faith. Has anything been done which would prevent them from teaching their scriptures to their children? Or were some Gurudwaras closed down for malicious reasons? Or that Gurudwaras were not allowed to be constructed?

If the problem is due to the wrong policies of the government, then there should have been greater agitation in states like Bihar and Orissa, which are much poorer than Punjab. Yet, we only talk about unemployed youths only in Punjab. The two states has had a much larger share of social injustice than Punjab, and the law and order situation is not worth writing about. I do not think that the problem in Punjab is something that is unique to the people or the place. With the wrong policies of the government, the whole nation is much poorer than what it should be.

To look at the things in their right perspective, we have to first understand when and why the Sikhs have been considered to be different from the Hindus. We have to understand that the Sikhs began as a fighting arm of the society, at a time when it was being continuously invaded from the west. The area where they lived was the first entry point for the invaders, and if the latter had to be effectively dealt with, then this was the best place to do it. As in many sects in the country, this produced its own saints and spiritual leaders. However, the inspiration for these leaders was the Hindu scriptures, the Vedas. The plan to wean away the Sikhs from the mainstream was started in 1857, after the First War of Independence. It was continued after the Independence in 1947, as a means to achieve political power.

The fact of the matter is that the Akalis were being seen by the people of Punjab as an alternative to the Congress. This situation arose due to the failure of the Congress party to give effective governance, mainly due to corruption. At the same time, the party was not capable to handling such issues at the democratic and political level. This was seen the way the Communist government was dismissed in Kerala in the late fifties. It would appear that the objective of the leadership was to stay in power by hook or crook. The concept of serving the people was secondary. Under the circumstances, the Congress party could think of only two methods to follow. One was to divide the opposition, and the second was to create problems for them by asking someone to take the issues that they had taken up in a more violent manner.

The strategy followed in the case of Punjab was the second one. Thus a person was created, particularly a so-called religious one in this case. Bhrindenwale's spiritual background was not such that he would be truly considered a saint. Such a person suited the requirements of the people who wished to use him, since he would do their bidding. The Congress party put him up as an substitute for the Akalis, who had presented themselves as alternative to the Congress. This was done by projecting Bhrindenwale as a more radical Akali, which was the only way to quickly get him public recognition. Thus, while the moderate Akalis were willing to work within the

Constitution, Bhrindenwale necessarily took a position outside it. As Bhrindenwale got prominence, the other Akalis were forced to take extreme positions, and adopt the plank of secession.

What Bhrindenwale did is known. In the initial stages he assumed the leadership of the Akalis. When this was achieved, his political masters, viz. the Congress, told him that his work was done, and he could now go into the obscurity that they had pulled him out of. But, a person who has now achieved the notoreity (he thought it was popularity) that he had, could not fade into the background so willingly. While he was dependent on the masters at the beginning, it was quite clear that the masters were now dependent upon him. Psychologically, the position of anonymity would be a big step down. Having established his base, it became easy for Bhrindenwale to undertake the programme of carnage that he did. Of course, he did receive help from Pakistan, which was on the look out to create problems for India. But, the opportunity was presented to them by the way the Congress party acted. Again, without justifying or condoning Pakistan's role, what she did can be considered to be perfectly normal, given its objective. What should be understood is that without the role the Congress party played, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for Pakistan to have created a Bhrindenwale.

The problem also received international attention, with the support the extremists received from the Sikh community abroad. By this time, two or three generations Indians were brought up with their education of history emphasising the diversity of the people of the country, rather than the unity. (For example, most people today would accept the theory that it was the British which created a concept of India, in political terms.) The governments at the time, did very little to tackle the law and order situation with the firmness that was needed. They allowed the things to deteriorate, because the people causing the problem were their protegees. And when the action was finally decided to be taken, it necessarily had to be harsh. After allowing the militants to turn the Golden Temple into an ammunition depot, the only way to tackle the problem was to storm it. However, it is necessary to discuss why action was not taken at the time when the first information was received.

SHAH BANO CASE

Shah Bano was not the first Muslim woman who was divorced according to the Shariat. But, she was the first one who took recourse to the secular laws of the country to get support from her ex-husband. What she challenged was not a husband's right to divorce his wife, but his right to do so without taking financial responsibility for her and their children. The case went right up to the Supreme Court, which upheld the decisions of the lower courts, which had said that the secular laws did apply in such cases. The amount of alimony determined was varied at each stage. However, the Supreme Court passed a comment that it was a sad state of affairs that successive governments had not made any effort to work towards a uniform civil code. Our Constitution enjoins the state to do this.

Shri Mohammed Ahmad Khan married Shah Bano in 1932 and had three sons and two daughters. In 1946 he married Halima Begum, and had one son and six daughters off her. In 1975 (?) he divorced Shah Bano, who then went to court for maintenance. Four aspects of the case has to be considered. First, the alimony determined was Rs 179.20 per month. Second, the ex-husband is a prosperous lawyer. Third, Shri Rajiv Gandhi initially decided to support the judgement, and got Shri Arif Mohammed Khan, a minister in his cabinet, to speak in its favour in the Parliament. And fourth, he suddenly decided to bring in the Protection of Muslim Women Bill. The sequence of the events is also important.

Today, most commentators talk about how the Supreme Court's judgement played into the hands of the fundamentalists. They aver that the court went beyond its jurisdiction to comment on the failure of not enacting a uniform civil code. They criticise the court for its comment on the Shariat. This is a communal way of looking at things, and it is done by those who label themselves as secularists. Considering the majority that the Congress party had, and the goodwill that Shri Rajiv Gandhi commanded from the people, it would have been quite easy for him to have withstood the pressure. Also, the liberals at that time had also supported him on the stand that he initially took. But the politics of vote bank was sine qua non for the Congress party to fight the elections, and its established leaders did not know what else they could do. The 'liberals' developed cold feet in the way that Shri Rajiv Gandhi capitulated in face of the threats from the Islamic fundamentalists.

What was not anticipated was the way the Hindus reacted to the situation. If there was one thing that made them realise the complicity of the Congress it was this case. This is where the sequence and the four aspects mentioned above become important. Moreover, Shri Rajiv Gandhi tried to pass off the new bill as an effective way to provide for the divorced women. This he had to do having first supported the Supreme Court judgement. (The bill put the burden of maintenance first on the family of the woman, and if this was not possible, then the Wakf Boards had the responsibility. Knowing the condition of the Boards, there was no possibility that the

divorced woman would get proper justice.) If there was one incident which was responsible for bringing Hindutva to the national agenda, it was the Shah Bano case.

One also hears of an argument that the Shah Bano case is not the concern of Hindus, since it affects Muslim women only. This argument would establish the non-secular character of the person. No society would like to have a single citizen who is disgruntled for whatever reason. Such a citizen would then become a problem for the community. If there is a group that is disgruntled, then the problem is multiplied many times. This argument also means that there would be no interaction between various communities to solve problems. It would also mean that people should not study each others religions and culture, to have a better understanding between groups. Taking the logic further, then non-Hindus should not be concerned about Sati. It would also mean that if two persons try to solve their personal problem through violence against each other, then the society should not be concerned with it.

At the same time, one wonders if the Congress party would have reacted in any different manner. Here again, the four aspects become important. In this sense, it can well be said that while the Shah Bano case propelled Hindutva to center stage, it would have come there sooner or later.

RAM JANMABHOOMI

In 1528, a temple in honour of Lord Ram was destroyed by Babur's army, and a mosque was built in its place. There have been numerous efforts by Hindus to recover the site. In 1949, idols of Ram Lalla were placed. While there have been many court cases, the issue took a political turn during the term of Shri Rajiv Gandhi, with the vote bank politics forcing him to over turn the Shah Bano case. (See above.) This was led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad at the mass level, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the political level. The first kar-seva was held in October 90, which was opposed by the government with its full machinery, and brutally. With this, the issue became politicised. The people of the country felt that trampling on the rights of the Hindus is OK politics. The theory has been that since the Hindus are divided by castes, they will never come together on a political platform. At the same time, the minorities, mainly the Muslims, have traditionally been voting on the basis of a block, and it thus became electorally profitable to woo them as a group.

In discussing the Ram Janmabhoomi case, the history of the case is rarely looked at. There is a deliberate attempt made to confuse the case, and the evidence that the VHP had compiled is never given any credence. In fact, the media would like to give an impression that the people of Ayodhya kept a prominent site vacant for thousands of years for Babar to come and build his mosque. They ignore that Ayodhya is an important pilgrimage centre not only for the Vishnuites, but also for Jains and Buddhists. The historical record to prove the destruction of the temple in 1528 is on the basis of not only British writings, but also of Muslims. (The latter is dismissed as exaggeration to please the ruler at the time.) The legal records show the numerous efforts made by the Hindus to recover the site. One judgement laments that it is unfortunate that a mosque was built on the site considered to be sacred by the Hindus. The archeological findings have discovered pillar bases matching the pillars that existed in the structure.

The publicity to the evidence compiled by the VHP is denied because the issue was posed as follows: "Give the proof of the destruction, the Muslims will then shift the structure". The proof would have completely taken away the ground from those who are opposed to the VHP. To confuse the issue, large publicity has been given to vague theories like the original Ayodhya is in Afghanistan. The same publication also tried to show that Lord Ram is an Iranian. Recently another publication postulated that Lord Ram is actually the first pharaoh of Egypt. In presenting the evidence, the VHP had also dealt with all these theories, and many more. (A leading daily tried to plam off the historians who were presenting the AIBMAC case as being independent.)

To further the confusion, the media has hidden from the public the efforts that the VHP had made in December 90 and January 91 to come to a negotiated solution. The record at that time clearly shows that the AIBMAC went about these discussions with no intention to come to a solution. When they realised that they had lost the battle, they did not turn up for the second round of discussions amongst the experts of both the sides on January 25, 1991. At the same time, the media, in an oblique manner, tries to say that the discussions were broken off by the VHP.

If the truth of the destruction of the temple was made known to the people, then the issue would not have been politicised. After all, the Hindus were making a reasonable demand that a holy site, taken away from them by force, should be returned to them. Instead, the impression that was being created is that the demand had no basis. It is this, more than anything else, that has agitated the minds of the Muslims. If the truth had been told, there would have been no opposition.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE CULTURE

A unique feature of Hinduism is that it is an assimilating culture, and not an exclusive one. It has embraced the good points from many thoughts, philosophies, etc. Many invaders have so merged with the local people, that one sees no trace of them. Others like the Parsis and the Jews, who came here due to religious persecution in their home lands, have found peaceful and prosperous homes here. But the experience with proselytising faiths like Christianity and Islam has been bad. To a certain extent, with the internal reform within Christianity, one does not see the negative sides, except in case of their work on conversion in the tribal areas.

But, the record of the past is attempted to be minimised by saying that there has been contribution by various religions to the culture of the country. When asked to be specific, names are given, names who have excelled in their respective fields. However, it is not only people of one faith who have excelled in these faiths. Thus, one sees musicians, singers, actors, sports personnel, etc., belonging to all the religions that exist in India. No one faith is over-represented. Hence what one has to ask is if the excellence is due to the religion or due to some special ability of the person. Thus a Hindu (Muslim) musician is a good artist not because he is a Hindu (Muslim) but because he is a good musician. His religion does not give him any special benefit.

Moreover, the contribution to culture argument has to be seen not only in the positive characteristics, but also negatives. Thus, if a Muslim cricketer is highlighted, then a Muslim smuggler must also be highlighted. It is perversion of logic if the former's religion is mentioned and not the latter's. Of course, it is nobody's argument that a smuggler takes to the profession because of his religion. It should also be nobody's argument that a painter is good because of his religion.

PAYING FOR PAST MISTAKES

When it is pointed out, for example, the evil that the Muslim (and Christian) invaders and rulers did in this country, it is asked how does one blame the present generation of Muslims for those deeds. Under this argument, the past history must not be studied and only the positive things must be looked at. Thus one talks about the composite culture (which is dealt with separately).

One has to study history dispassionately. The objective is not to start with a set of assumptions, and try to fit the data to them. History is to be studied to understand the mistakes that have been made, and why they were made so that they are not repeated again. The record of the Muslims (and Christian) invaders and rulers has to be studied, and taught, to all the citizens of the country. It should be taught in a way that the Hindus do not feel outraged, or the Muslims (or the Christians) do not feel ashamed. For this to happen, the latter must not demand that this part of the history should not be ignored. Only then can they come out openly and disassociate themselves from the actions of the leaders of their community in the past.

Of course, this disassociation does not, by any stretch of imagination, imply that the present generation holds itself responsible for these actions. In apologising for the holocaust, has the German Chancellor personally accept the responsibility for the behaviour of the Nazis? The American government has compensated their Japanese origin citizens who were illegally interned during the Second World War. In October 92 in the Dominican Republic, and in August 93 in the USA, the Pope said that the church had done the native Americans wrong. The Japanese governments have apologised to the Koreans and the Chinese for what happened in the Second World War. (It is well known the fuss that the host countries made on this issue before permitting official representatives of Japan to visit them.) What is being done is that the truth is accepted. In fact, in India, the Hindus are not expecting any apology from anybody. But, when the truth is being denied, then one has to wonder what is the real objective behind the manouver.

The-paying-for-past-mistake argument is used most often when Hindus are asking for a return of the three most important Hindu sites which have been forcibly occupied and converted into mosques. These are Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi. For arguments sake, let us assume that these are not returned, and that a father takes his child for a pilgrimage to these places. The child has been told the historical and religious importance of the site. When he then sees a mosque at the same place, he asks his father why does a structure exist where a temple should be. The father will have to say that the Hindus have been asking for the return of the sites, and that due to an obscurantist attitude of the Muslims, it is not possible to rebuild the original temple. How will this

affect the psyche of the child? Conversely, let us assume that the site has been given back to the Hindus by the Muslims willingly, and that the child is so informed. Will this not carry a favourable impression in the mind of the child, and make him think of the Muslims in a positive light?

MANDAL COMMISSION

The Constitution of India has prescribed for certain seats to be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This was on the basis of the Pune Agreement between Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi. This forced Dr Ambedkar to drop his demand for a separate electorate on the same lines as the Muslims. Subsequently, to ensure that there is a quicker economic and social growth of these sections, reservation was permitted in education institutes, followed by employment in government and public sector services. Towards the end 70s, a commission was formed by the then Janata Party government, to look into the question of what is called the Other Backward Castes (OBCs). This commission, known as the Mandal Commission, came to the conclusion that the government should make reservations for jobs in the central government for such castes as well. However, it did not categorise who were backward and what percentage should be reserved for them. There are some castes which are specific to certain states, and the last time caste was considered for census purposes was in 1931.

In June 90, the government of Shri V P Singh decided to accept the report, and made a suitable announcement. It said that this was a part of the social justice platform of the manifesto of the Janata Dal on the basis of which it fought the 1989 elections. It also said that this was the only way that the economic lot of the OBCs can be quickly improved.

The social tensions that this announcement caused is well known. However, one has to look if acceptance of the Mandal report had actually anything to do with social justice. To be able to do this, we have to study the relationship between Shri V P Singh and Shri Devi Lal. The elections of 1989 were fought and won on the grounds of corruption, and Bofors became of symbol of this. As a minister in the Rajiv Gandhi government, Shri V P Singh was a major player in exposing the sordid affairs at the time. The Janata Dal formed an alliance called the National Front, and had seat adjustments with Bharatiya Janata Party and the Communist parties. It was a minority government, but had the support of these latter parties. Although the National Front had ambitious leaders, like Shri Devi Lal and Shri Chandra Shekar, both of whom wanted to be the Prime Minister, the mood in the country was clearly in favour of Shri V P Singh. However, for reasons that are difficult to understand, a charade was played at the time of electing the leader of the Janata Dal Parliamentary Party. In this, Shri Devi Lal was first proposed as the leader. As per the plan, he declined to accept the position, and crowned himself as the Tau, and proposed Shri V P Singh. In the process, Shri Chandra Shekar felt cheated and a lasting enemy was created. As part of the deal, Shri Devi Lal was made the Deputy Prime Minister.

Shri Devi Lal thought that he was indispensable to the party, and started to make unreasonable demands. The first thing he insisted was that only Shri V P Singh and him should be sworn in separately from the rest of the ministers. This set him apart from the others. As always happens, the demands kept on increasing, until they reached a breaking point, and Shri V P Singh dismissed him from the ministry. But, by this time Shri Devi Lal had created an aura around himself, and used the title of Tau to the hilt. To establish his importance, he organised a big rally in Delhi, which rattled Shri V P Singh and his advisers. This was perhaps due to the insecurity that they had of their own base, having realised that they came to power on a negative vote.

It was at this time that Shri V P Singh announced the acceptance of the Mandal recommendations. Hence, one has to wonder if the social justice programme had anything to do with it, and not the internal 'war' that was being fought in the National Front to establish a person's political superiority. Had Shri V P Singh ignored Shri Devi Lal, it is quite likely that the insignificance of the latter would have been exposed. But, the people in power were used to making decisions on the basis of manouvers, having been brought up on the Congress culture.

An editorial in The Statesman ("Caste-Benefit Ratio", December 8, 1993) said, "It was (Sri V P Singh) who unleashed the Mandal Commission report, against better advice, with the facile argument that this was the only way to check the saffron on-slaught." This completely reverses the sequence of events. While the Ram Janmabhoomi issue had caught the imagination of the people, it was still handled not on the basis of "taking to the street". Shri L K Advani's Rath Yatra took place after the announcement of the acceptance of the Madal report. (In this way, one could say that Mandal advanced the 'saffron on-slaught.'). One of the compulsion of the Yatra was to prevent the division of the Hindu society, which Mandal tried to do.

Why the VHP objects to the statements of the BJP President in Pakistan.

- Ashok Chowgule, Vice-President, Vishwa Hindu Parishad

We in the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) would like to make it clear that we are not against Shri LK Advani as an individual. We recognise the constructive work he has done for the Hindu samaj in the past – as a youth in the present day Pakistan, as a young adult in his role as a pracharak of the Rashtriya Swamaysevak Sangh (RSS) in Rajasthan, his efforts in building up the Bharatiya Jana Sangh under the guidance of Shri Deen Dayal Upadhaya, and as the President of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) after it had slumped to two seats in the Lok Sabha.

But we are extremely troubled about the statements made by the BJP President in Pakistan in June 2005. In the words of Shri Ramji Madhav, the Spokesman of the RSS, the BJP President should have kept in mind what impact his statements would have on the cadres of the Sangh Parivar, a cadre whose help was valuable in bringing the BJP to its eminent status that it had until a year ago.

We would also like to make it clear that we are not unduly concerned about the speech that the BJP President made at the Karachi Council on Foreign Relations, Economic Affairs & Law, on June 5, 2005. Our problem is about two statements of his while in Pakistan. The first is the following that he made during an interview given to Shri Hamid Mir, anchorman of GEO TV and reproduced on the website of Rediff on Net, dated June 6, 2005:

“As I said earlier the demolition of the Babri mosque was the saddest day of my life. The issue of the Ram temple must be addressed through democratic ways, through political means, nobody should be allowed to take the law into his hands.”

The second is what the BJP President wrote in the guest book at the grave of Mohammed Jinnah, namely:

“There are many people who leave an inerasable stamp on history. There are very few who actually create history. Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah was one such rare individual. Sarojini Naidu, a leading luminary of India’s freedom struggle, described Mr Jinnah as an ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity. His address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan on August 11, 1947 is really a classic, a forceful espousal of a secular state in which, while every citizen would be free to practise his own religion, the state shall make no distinction between one individual and another on grounds of faith. My respectful homage to the great man.”

The anguish of the VHP on these two statements is aggravated by many of the actions of the BJP President, and the party that he leads, during their time in government. On many occasions serious obstacles were put in the work of the VHP, a work which also helped the party to come to its position of eminence in the politics of India. The two statements can be considered to be the proverbial equivalent of the last straw that broke our tolerance. Had this history not been present, and these serious transgressions were the first such incidents, the reaction would have been entirely different. One cannot ignore the future state of affairs at which the history points – a future in which the BJP may well flaunt pseudo-secularism.

This anguish of the VHP has not only to do with the obstructions placed by the BJP-led NDA government in the work of the VHP related to increasing the national awakening, but also many other events. For example, while in power the senior BJP leaders in government, such as

the then Prime Minister and the then Home Minister, found no time to visit the squalid camps where the Kashmiri Pandits are struggling to live, after becoming refugees in their own country since 1989. An influential Hindu leader was killed in Manipur, and the BJP President had then asked for a CBI inquiry. When he later became the Home Minister, the family of the dead person asked him to fulfil his own demands – to no avail.

The BJP says that they have kept the core issues of their agenda on the back burner to ensure that the NDA government worked. We do not understand how the incidents as mentioned in the above paragraph could have been against the interests of its coalition partners. We also do not know what core issues did the other coalition members put on the back burner, to make the coalition work. For example, we would like to know how an issue like the Uniform Civil Code can be kept on the back burner. If it is alleged that it is a communal issue, we do not understand the logic. We would like to remind the BJP President what he had said in an interview to the now-defunct *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, in March 1993, namely:

“When the BJP talks of a uniform civil code, it does not contemplate imposing the Hindu law on the country. Our party manifesto has very clearly stated that the BJP would ask the Law Commission to examine the Hindu law, the Muslim law, the Christian law and the Parsi law and cull out the modern, progressive, equitable ingredients of these laws and, on that basis, draw up a common civil code.”

During a subsequent election campaign, the BJP President once again expounded the way in which his party would like to bring forward the Uniform Civil Code. In an editorial (January 7, 1998), *The Times of India* found this to be what it called ‘a welcome climb-down from the party’s earlier rigid position’. That it was no change from the earlier position is another matter. The fact that it did endorse the method clearly shows that it was the right way to go about implementing what the Constitution mandates in the Directive Principles.

Like on many other issues, we in the VHP found that the BJP set aside the core issues without any discussion, or asking its partners to explain the demerits. They did not make even a semblance of an attempt to have a discussion on issues like the Uniform Civil Code. It was a clear sign that the BJP had no respect to the sentiments of the votaries who have propelled them to the centre stage.

What the BJP President said in Pakistan is a continuation of the programme of taking the core base of his party for granted. For the Hindus, the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi issue is not merely one of bricks and mortar. The spirit was well espoused by the then Prime Minister of India on December 6, 2000, namely: “The construction of Ram temple at Ayodhya is an expression of national sentiment that remains unrealised.”

We all recognise that Shri Ram is the Maryada Purushottam, who is an exponent of our Sanatan (eternal) values. How then can we accept a monument of our slavery at his birthplace? More importantly, should not the Maryada Purushottam have a fitting monument at his birthplace? The BJP President has trivialised the issue in looking at the temple purely as a physical structure. He has, moreover, negated the Ram Rath Yatra that he led in 1989. He has disowned his own party’s White Paper on Ayodhya and *The Rama Temple Movement*, brought out in April 1993.

What is equally objectionable in the BJP President’s statement is the implication that the Hindus have not attempted to get back their holy sites in a democratic way. Ever since the destruction of the temple in 1528 AD, Hindus have been making continuous efforts for the return of the site. Within fifty years of the destruction, they were able to persuade Akbar to at least let them pray at the site, as a second best option, and constructed the Shri Ram Chabootar.

When frustrated, they tried to use force to wrest the site from the illegal owners. When a judicial option was available under the British rule, they tried to use the law to get justice done. After the independence, once again attempts were made to use the legal system so that justice could be done. For one reason or the other, the Hindus were continuously frustrated.

The Hindus had even exhibited their willingness to work within the political system, and had discussions with three prime ministers. They full co-operated with the recent court ordered archaeological investigations, which have clearly established the existence of the temple where the Babri structure once stood. These dialogues, and the evidence, were not allowed to be taken to their logical conclusion on the altar of vote-bank politics.

We are surprised that the BJP President does not recognise these efforts in a conscious manner, since not only he but also his party was actively participating in the efforts during the post-independence period. We would like to ask him how long should the Hindus wait for the democratic process to work to get justice done.

Thus, we seriously object to the BJP President's statement that the Hindus have taken law in their own hands. If that be the case, then surely he should object to Veer Savarkar for his revolutionary actions, and the great freedom fighters, many of who were hanged, would be considered as criminals. Recently, some women in Nagpur lynched a criminal who was harassing them for more than a year. This they did when the police were not taking an action that was expected of them. Does the BJP President condemn them for taking the law in their own hands?

Had the BJP President used the opportunity to explain to the people of Pakistan the essence of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi movement, as he had done when he went around in the country in the Ram Rath, he would have done a great service in trying to get the whole discussion to be on the logical plane. By trivialising, he has not only hurt the Hindu sentiments but has also encouraged the attempt to keep the debate in the morass that the pseudo-secularists are trying to situate it in.

In the same interview in Rediff, in context of the illegal travel of the Hurriyat leadership to Pakistan, the BJP President said: "I don't want to criticise my government in Pakistan. I will do it in India." We in the VHP welcome the BJP President's statement about not wanting to criticise the Government of India outside our country. If at all he felt politically prudent not to tell the truth about the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi movement, he could have used this line in deflecting the issue.

We also do not understand why the BJP President has to indulge in self-flagellation on this issue. We do not see any Congress person saying that October 30, 1984, when more than 3000 Sikhs were killed by their goons, to be the saddest day in their lives. We have not heard Musharraf of Pakistan saying that the day he decided to attack India through Kargil was the saddest day in his life. The Queen of Great Britain did not apologise on behalf of her government for the massacre of innocent people at Jalianwala Bagh in Amritsar, when she visited the monument there a few years ago.

Coming to the statement of the BJP President in the visitor's book at the grave of Jinnah. Here again we see a complete perversion of the events in history. Jinnah could well be a great man for the people of Pakistan. Islamic terrorists all over the world consider Osama bin Laden as a great man. Just as Stalin and Mao Tse Tung are great people for the communists in India. Others will evaluate such persons in history in different light, and take into account the whole body of evidence available to them.

Do the people of India evaluate Jinnah on the basis of what he was when Smt Saorjini Naidu made her statement, or the actions of Jinnah that led to the partition? Do the people of India remember him for the speech he gave on August 11, 1947, or for the call for Direct Action Day in 1946, when thousands of innocent Hindus were mercilessly killed in Kolkatta? Should anyone be evaluated on the basis of some statements that he/she made, recognised to be exceptions, or on the basis of statements and actions that reflect the rule?

It is said that the objective of the BJP President was to create a debate amongst the people of Pakistan about what kind of nation they have and what their founder was supposed to have envisaged. Obviously he has not been informed that the debate took place even at the time when the speech was made. The then government made serious attempt to prevent the speech from coming out in print. Subsequent comments, some as late as 2000, tried to give a spin to it by talking about some alleged political compulsions of the time. It was equivalent of saying that having ridden the tiger for so long, Jinnah was attempting to dismount. In effect, the people of Pakistan disown the interpretation that the BJP President wants to place on the speech by Jinnah.

The BJP President should also have been aware of what is Pakistan today. The true spirit of what the leaders of Pakistan wanted to direct their country towards was better captured by Shri JN Mandal, Pakistan's first Law & Labour Minister, in his resignation letter dated 8th October, 1950. He narrated many incidents of atrocities against Hindus, including the dalits who thought that they would be better off in Pakistan. If the BJP President wanted to hold a mirror to the people of Pakistan, then he should have quoted from the resignation letter of Shri JN Mandal, instead of the speech by Jinnah in 1947.

What Jinnah created, and what Shri JN Mandal realised was happening, is well captured in the statement issued by the BJP on June 10, 2005, in which the last paragraph says:

“The BJP reiterates that whatever may have been Jinnah's vision of Pakistan, the state he founded is theocratic and non-secular, the very idea of Hindus and Muslims being two separate nations is repugnant to it. The BJP has always condemned the division of India on communal lines and continues to steadfastly reject the two-nation theory championed by Jinnah and endorsed by British colonists. There can be no revisiting the reality that Jinnah led a communal agitation to achieve his goal of Pakistan, which devoured thousands of innocent people in its wake and dispossessed millions of their homes and livelihoods.”

Some commentators are saying that the BJP President is trying to create a different image for himself and his party. If it is true, we would like to ask what he has to regret? Is he saying that being pro-Hindu is to be anti-others? And what about the slogan that he and his party is supposed to have: “Justice of all, appeasement of none”? Has this too been put on the back-burner?

We in the VHP consider all those whose ancestors are part of Akhand Bharat to be our brothers and sisters. At the same time, we want them to understand and accept the civilisation ethos of these ancestors, and respect it. Looking at the present day people with a lens of religion is surely to have a communal and not a secular approach to the issues concerned. The BJP President had made popular the term pseudo-secular for this method. How is he different?

The tactics of the political opponents of the BJP of looking at Muslims as a vote-bank was rightly criticised by the BJP President for precisely the above reason. After all, the benefits the state can give to its citizens are essentially secular in nature – that is good education, providing employment opportunities, etc. These cannot be different for different communal groups. What can be different is like the issue of the Haj subsidy, so-called promotion of Urdu, etc.

While in power, the BJP not only did nothing to arrest the increase in the Haj subsidy, but actually increased it. One astute commentator had coined the phrase 'thekedars' for the pseudo-secular politicians who projected themselves as protectors and benefactors of the Muslims. We are wondering if the BJP President thinks he can do one better than them.

In concluding, we welcome the BJP President's statement that there should be a debate on what he said in Pakistan. We have made a small contribution in furthering his wishes. If he wants to discuss with us in greater details, we from the VHP will be very happy to depute our representatives who will be able to project our perspective in greater detail.

Appeasement of the Religious Minorities

Publication: Hindu Vivek Kendra

Date: July 2001.

In discussing the appeasement of the Muslims, the media does not seem to be able to separate the wheat from the chaff. Perhaps it is a deliberate ploy to confuse the issue, so that the attention is diverted from the real issues. This is exactly what has been done in case of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, which is treated as a bricks and mortar, case, rather than one of attitudes. If the truth of the destruction of the temple in 1528 AD was told, then the solution would have been a peaceful one on the lines of Somnath.

2) To create a discussion we would like to enumerate some of the instances of the appeasement that it is talking about. At the beginning, it should be understood that the appeasement is not only of the Muslims, but of all religious minorities. While the pre-Independence issues like the support to the Khilafat movement are important, the following are the instances of the appeasement in the post-Independence period:

* While the Hindu Code Bill was rightly introduced, there was no move to change the archaic laws, in case of the other communities.

* The facilities given to the education institutes of the religious minorities have been grossly misused.

* While a state funded education institute belonging to a religious minorities can teach its own holy books, teaching of the Hindu scriptures is not permitted.

* The laws permit, rightly, that the use of funds with a temple are monitored by the government, and suitable action is taken where the affairs are not run in the best interest of the society. No such provision exists for places of worship of the religious minorities.

* Article 370 of the Constitution, although conceived as a temporary measure, is still on the statute. Although some of the sections have been deleted, the most important (which says that any act passed by the Parliament is applicable in Jammu & Kashmir only after the state assembly accepts it, giving the latter an effective veto over the Parliament) part still remains.

* The law relating to property in J&K (not a part of Article 370) has made the people of the state feel that they are different from the other people of India.

* The changes in the child adoption bills were dropped because of the resistance of the Muslim clergy.

* The date of introduction of the Aligarh Muslim University Bill was changed, since it fell on a Friday, and the Muslim MPs thought it more important to go for their namaz rather than fulfil their duties in the parliament.

* A private members bill to regulate conversion was opposed by the Christian and the Muslim clergy, and the government subsequently thought it fit not to pursue with it.

* The Supreme Court Judgement on the Shah Bano case was overturned, at the insistence of the religious leaders of the Muslims. (The maintenance allowance asked to be paid was only Rs 250 per month.)

- * A national holiday on the Prophet Mohammed's birthday was announced at the time of the Independence Day speech of the Prime Minister.
- * No follow up action has been taken on the recommendation of an independent committee to look into the abuse of powers of the Syedna over the Bhorī community.
- * The list of the candidates of a political party had to be approved by the Shahī Imam, to ensure that the party has his support.
- * India was the first country to ban Satanic Verses, even before any of the Islamic countries.
- * The Minorities Commission (recently given statutory provision) enables a member of a religious minority to get justice at a different plane than a Hindu against whom the same injustice has been done. It is for this reason that the Minorities Commission should be replaced with a Human Rights Commission.
- * The General Affairs Committee of the Lok Sabha under the chairmanship of the Speaker took a unanimous decision to start each session with the national song "Vande Matram". But the day before the start of the session, some Muslim MPs objected because they claimed the song is idolatry'. The 'secular' political parties supported them.
- * The then communist government in Kerala carved out a new district on the basis of Muslim majority. Similarly, the DMK government in Tamil Nadu changed the name of Dindigul District to Kaide Millat District.
- * Urdu is made the second language of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh by the state Congress governments.

3) The above list is not exhaustive. These measures have nothing to do with the improvement of their economic and social lot of the religious minorities. The whole objective has been a political one, to keep the leaders of the community happy, and the interest of these leaders was that their folks remain poor, since it is the only way in which the latter will listen to them. This was being done, as Shri Arun Shourie has rightly brought out in one of his books, by looking at people as groups rather than individuals. In this way, all that was needed was to keep the leader of the group happy, and the leader will ensure that the group will vote in a particular manner.

4) It is necessary that the issue of 'pampering' has to be discussed in a detailed manner, and not superficially as the media has tended to do. What will be discovered is that the pampering has taken place, and it is the pampering of the so-called leaders. And this pampering is being done by the so-called protectors, who can survive only by creating a feeling of insecurity amongst the religious minorities. Imputing motives, and equating everything that the votaries of Hindutva say in terms of Hindu-Muslim only helps in making the atmosphere murky.

An area of awakening, (Naipaul's interview)

Dileep Padgaonkar,
The Times of India, July 18, 1993

(Excerpts of an interview of Sir Vidiadhar Naipaul, concerning his views on the Ram Janmabhoomi movement)

P: In India we have seen time and again that people have been either aggressive or apologetic about their cultural identity. In today's India it is difficult to get people to admit that there are several layers to a cultural identity: Hinduism in all its pluralistic splendour, the contribution made by Islam's long presence in the sub-continent, the exposure to the West.

N: The alternatives - traditionalism versus westernism - might be false. There is no either/or because the essence of literature, iniquity and philosophy is a constant examination of oneself and one's world and one's own culture. One hopes to leave the world with different ideas than those given to one when one entered the world. The alternatives proposed in India could lead to brutal clashes. Remember that India was trampled over, fought over, It had destroyed itself by its wars. It was almost at a standstill. You had the invasions and you had the absence of a response to them. There was an absence even of the idea of a people, of a nation defending itself. So there is no reason really for people to be either aggressive or apologetic about all this.

P: Unless of course the perception is that you have to contend with the "other". Some of this is reflected in India: A Million Mutinies Now. For the past ten or 12 years the feeling in India has burgeoned that Hinduism faces a threat from the mushroom growth of Islamic fundamentalism. It began with the revolution in Iran. The Islamisation process of Pakistan under General Zia exacerbated that feeling. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent rise of Islamic nations in Central Asia, the Salman Rushdie affair, similar harassment by fundamentalists of liberal Muslim intellectuals in India: all these factors taken together persuaded some forces to argue that a divided Hindu society cannot counteract Islamic fundamentalism.

N: I don't see it quite in that way. The things you mentioned are quite superficial. You cannot be a fundamentalist if you want to go and live in America. Ask any Iranian where he wants to go: it is to America. If that is your goal you cannot be a fundamentalist. I think fundamentalism is a passing phase even in Islam. It is a religion on the defensive.

What is happening in India is a new, historical awakening. Gandhi used religion in a way as to marshal people for the independence cause. People who entered the independence movement did it because they felt they would earn individual merit.

Today, it seems to me that Indians are becoming alive to their history. This has not happened before. Romila Thapar's book on Indian history is a Marxist attitude to history which in substance says: there is a higher truth behind the invasions, feudalism and all that. The correct truth is the way the invaders looked at their actions. They were conquering, they were subjugating. And they were in a country where people never understood this.

Only now are the people beginning to understand that there has been a great vandalising of India. Because of the nature of the conquest and the nature of Hindu society such understanding had eluded Indians before. In pre-industrial India people moved about in small areas unaware of the dimension, of the country and without any notion of a community or a

nation. People seemed to say: we are all right here. The West may be disastrous. But we are not affected.

Now, however, things seem to be changing. What is happening in India is a mighty creative process. Indian intellectuals, who want to be secure in their liberal beliefs, may not understand what is going on, especially if these intellectuals happen to be in the United States. But every other Indian knows precisely what is happening: deep down he knows that a larger response is emerging even if at times this response appears in his eyes to be threatening.

We have to be careful about something else happening in the world. It might be news to you. I recently received a document, the text of a lecture given by some sort of an expert on India who teaches at Trinity College, Cambridge. The lecture was on fundamentalism. In it we are told that Islam was brought to India by traders and merchants and that places of Hindu worship became absorbed into Mohamedan places of worship.

Well, all this is absurd and it is said by a serious scholar. This ties in with what I read in *The Independent* recently. Its correspondent in Delhi reported that the Indians removed the Hindus from Kashmir to give their armed forces a free hand. So the expulsion of the Hindus was self-done; it had nothing to do with attacks on them. I don't know how true this is.

However, we are aware of one of the more cynical forms of liberalism: it admits that one fundamentalism is all right in the world. This is the fundamentalism they are really frightened of: Islamic fundamentalism. Its source is Arab money. It is not intellectually to be taken seriously etc. I don't see the Hindu reaction purely in terms of one fundamentalism pitted against another. The reaction is a much larger response... Mohamedan fundamentalism is essentially negative, a protection against a world it desperately wishes to join. It is a last ditch fight against the world.

But the sense of history that the Hindus are now developing is a new thing. Some Indians speak about a synthetic culture: this is what a defeated people always speak about. The synthesis may be culturally true. But to stress it could also be a form of response to intense persecution. This is sometimes taken to absurd lengths by Nirad Chaudhuri, for instance, who in the midst of the massive vandalism speaks about Hindu aggressiveness. He talks about Al Baruni coming as though peacefully and Hindus reacting to them in an aggressive manner. This is nonsensical.

P: This new sense of history as you call it is being used in India in very many different ways. Some use it for short- term political gain. But there are those whom well beyond the pale of Hindu political forces, are striving to come to terms with the past. It is revealing is it not, that leftists in India now think it necessary to quote Vivekananda and the poets of the Bhakti movement. All the same, my worry is that somewhere down the line this search for a sense of history might yet again turn into hostility toward something precious which came to use from the West: the notion of the individual.....

N: This is where the intellectuals have a duty to perform. The duty is the use of the mind. It is not enough for intellectuals to chant their liberal views or to abuse what is happening. To use the mind is to reject the grosser aspects of this vast emotional upsurge.

We all live in a universal civilisation. Some more than the others. We have our individual particularities. But we are all inhabited by a universal civilisation. It is very hard to go back.

P: How did you react to the Ayodhya incident?

N: Not as badly, as the others did, I am afraid. The people who say that there was no temple there are missing the point. Babar, you must understand, had contempt for the country he had conquered. And his building of that mosque was an act of contempt for the country.

In Turkey, they turned the Church of Santa Sophia into a mosque. In Nicosia churches were converted into mosques too. The Spaniards spent many centuries re-conquering their land from Muslim invaders. So these things have happened before and elsewhere.

In Ayodhya the construction of a mosque on a spot regarded as sacred by the conquered population was meant as an insult. It was meant as an insult to an ancient idea, the idea of Ram which was two or three thousand years old.

P: The people who climbed on top of these domes and broke them were not bearded people wearing saffron robes and with ash on their foreheads. They were young people clad in jeans and tee-shirts.

N: One needs to understand the passion that took them on top of the domes. The jeans and the tee-shirts are superficial. The passion alone is real. You can't dismiss it. You have to try to harness it.

Hitherto in India the thinking has come from the top. I spoke earlier about the state of the country: destitute, trampled upon, crushed. You then had the Bengali renaissance, the thinkers of the 19th century. But all this came from the top. What is happening now is different. The movement is now from below.

P: My colleague, the cartoonist, Mr R K Laxman, and I recently travelled thousands of miles in Maharashtra. In many places we found that noses and breasts had been chopped off from the statues of female deities. Quite evidently this was a sign of conquest. The Hindutva forces point to this too to stir up emotions. The problem is: how do you prevent these stirred-up emotions from spilling over and creating fresh tensions?

N: I understand. But it is not enough to abuse them or to use that fashionable word from Europe: fascism. There is a big, historical development going on in India. Wise men should understand it and ensure that it does not remain in the hands of fanatics. Rather they should use it for the intellectual transformation of India.

P: This would imply a fairly radical revision of many of the basic assumptions we have made regarding the country: the nature of Indian society, the way it is to be governed, its place in the world...

N: What kind of assumptions?

P: One basic assumption flows from the Constitution. When it was adopted, its architect, Dr Ambedkar, made a speech in which he said in substance: today we have performed a revolutionary act. We have put not the village, the caste or the community at the centre of the scheme of things but the individual. Schematically speaking, this importance given to the individual is inspired by the American and French revolutions and by the enlightenment. The feeling now is that the individual will be subjugated if the basis of Indian nationhood is to be Hinduism alone. That is a potential danger.

N: There are too many people who think like you for that to be realised. Fortunately, this movement in favour of the individual has come as a result of education, of several generations of educated people. There are enough people who are educated, who feel like you, who read

your paper and similar papers to fight this. There is a self-regulatory thermostat, which should take care of the problem.

P: I hope you are right. But the possibility that the individual will be displaced frightens me no end. This is important for all people but especially for the Dalits and women. Women in particular. They are the ones who are in many respects in the forefront of progress. They should not be endangered. The Hindutva idea of a woman should not confine her in the "Sita-Savitri" mould.

N: That is dreadful. And that needs to be fought for many reasons. One of the most important surely is the economic imperative. You can't keep the economy going with such notions. The economic liberalisation should help to counter the trend. I hope liberalisation is moving ahead....

P: It is. The atmosphere has clearly changed. Attitudes are beginning to change. Indians are rediscovering the entrepreneurial spirit.

N: What about the modern, moderate elements in the BJP?

P: Some fine people who belong to the modernist stream have recently joined the party. This is all to the good. However, I am afraid that there are not enough of such elements to contain the extremist trends. Time has frozen for them. They want to recreate the golden age which did not exist in the first place. All the same, that educated people - doctors and engineers for instance - are backing the BJP not because they necessarily subscribe to everything that goes under the name of Hindutva but because they are disillusioned with the Congress system or because they are genuinely worried about the rise of Islamic fundamentalism.

At any rate, whatever the reasons, Indians are discussing, admittedly in a chaotic and confused manner, several issues concerning the country. I wonder however whether the debate can be conducted meaningfully if it is couched entirely in a western vocabulary.

N: Well, perhaps, you need to do what Anand Coomaraswamy did for Indian aesthetics.

P: Or Radhakrishnan for Indian philosophy.

N: Yes.