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K. N. PANIKKAR*

*Religious Symbols and Political Mobilization:
The Agitation for a Mandir at Ayodhya*

The secular polity of India was considerably convulsed by the mobilization of Hindus around the construction of a temple at Ayodhya. Launched and led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), with the active support and participation of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), the temple campaign was religious only in form but political in content. It was a project pursued in religious idiom by the BJP and its front organisations, collectively called the *Sangh Parivar*, for political ends. In 1991, the BJP's main electoral plank was the Hindu demand for the temple at Ayodhya. This nexus between religion and politics proved to be extremely rewarding to the BJP—it won as many as 118 seats in the parliament and emerged as the main opposition. More importantly, it came to power in four north Indian states—Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh—and recorded its presence in almost all other states.

The Ayodhya movement enabled the BJP to expand its electoral base rather suddenly. In the past, the BJP and its predecessors had not found much favour with the electorate, despite their efforts to champion the Hindu interests. In fact, when the BJP had fought the election without allying with other parties, it had managed to win only two seats in the parliament. The Mandir agitation accounted for a rather dramatic change in its fortunes.

The dispute over the Masjid, constructed in 1528 by Mir Baqui, a noble of Babur's court, had simmered for long, at least since 1885 when litigation had begun for the right to property in the area.¹ What brought about a qualitative change in the dispute was the surreptitious installation of an idol of Ramlalla inside the mosque in 1949.² Ayodhya thus became a potential site of religious confrontation between the Hindus and the Muslims. The BJP effectively exploited this potential in its quest for political power. A dispute which had

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remained dormant for about forty years was enlivened by the BJP and transformed into a 'national' issue, imbuing it with cultural and political significance. An important factor which made this transformation possible was the mobilising potential of religious symbols constantly brought into play by the *sangh parivar*.

1

Much before the *sangh parivar* had launched the Ayodhya agitation religion had intruded into the domain of Indian politics. The separation of religion and politics envisioned in the Constitution and incorporated in the People's Representation Act of 1951 was floundered in actual practice. The religious denominational parties like the Hindu Maha Sabha and the Muslim League functioned within the secular polity. They not only championed the aspirations and interests of their respective communities but also invoked religion in pursuit of their political interests particularly during the elections. Such a tendency was not confined to these parties alone. Very few could resist the temptation to take recourse to religion for electoral gains.

This departure from the secular premises of the Constitution was linked with three important factors. The increasing religiosity in Indian society, the decreasing popular base of the Indian National Congress and the ambivalent nature of secularism as practised by the state. The religious politics of the *sangh parivar*, although occurred in this context, was qualitatively different from the earlier political practice in its assumptions, goals and articulation.

The post-independence Indian polity built around the principles of democracy and secularism had nurtured the notion of territorial nationalism. Political opportunism had often led to deviation from the democratic and secular ideals, particularly since the prime ministership of Indira Gandhi. Yet, the making of the nation through the integration of various nationalities and communities was not entirely given up.

In contrast, the *sangh parivar* promoted the concept of cultural nationalism as the positive nationalism of India.³ The ideological inspiration for such a view was first provided by V.D. Savarkar in his attempt to define the Hindu and the *Hindutva*. Quoting from the *Vishnu Purana*, he had defined Bharat as 'the land which is to the north of the sea and to the south of the Himalaya mountain' in which the descendants of Bharata inhabited.⁴ The Hindus, according to him are those who considered Bharat as their *punnyabhumi* (holy land and *pithrubhumi* (fatherland)). His conception of *Hindutva* was integral to this notion of Hindu, even if he held that 'Hinduism is only a derivative, a fraction, a part of *Hindutva*'.⁵ This distinction however, did not mean that members of other religious denominations have space within *Hindutva*:

It is clear that their (Muslims and Christians) original Hindu blood is thus almost unaffected by an alien adulteration, yet they cannot be called Hindus in the sense in which that term is actually understood, because, we Hindus are bound together not only by the tie of the love we bear to a common fatherland and by the common blood that courses through our veins and keeps our hearts throbbing and our affections warm, but also by the tie of the common homage we pay to our great civilization—our Hindu culture, which could not be better rendered than by the word *sanskriti*, which has been the chosen means of expression and preservation of the culture, of all that was best and worth preserving in the history of our race. We are one because we are a nation, a race and own a common *sanskriti* (civilization).⁶

The *sangh parivar's* concept of cultural nationalism thus had its origins in Savarkar which was elaborated by Guru Golwalker in his book entitled, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* in 1939.⁷ Arguing that in India culture and religion are synonymous, Golwalker had sought to establish a connection between culture, religion and nation. He had asserted that 'in Hindustan, the land of the Hindu, lives and should live the Hindu nation . . . consequently only those movements are truly 'national' as aim at rebuilding, revitalizing and emancipating from its present stupor the Hindu nation'.⁸ Golwalker's idea of the assertion of 'Indian nationalism', was not limited to a Hindu awakening; it also meant a subordination, even extermination, of non-Hindus. His attitude towards non-Hindus was:

The foreign races in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture i.e. of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizen's rights.⁹

Abjuring thus the philosophy of universalism and respect for other religions which Hinduism had developed over centuries, Golwalker tried to conceptualise a Hindu Rastra based on Hindu solidarity on the one hand and hatred of non-Hindus on the other. Despite the distinction made by K.R. Malkani, a BJP ideologue, between Hindu state and Hindu country,¹⁰ the *sangh parivar's* political programme and goals are clearly inspired by Golwalker's ideas. According to Ashok Singhal, the President of the VHP, 'A lasting government will be a Hindu government. If people do not like it, they can go to the country of their choice. Otherwise they must live at the mercy of the Hindus.'^{9A} They have, during the last few years, pursued the

mobilization of Hindus by forging internal solidarity and externalising non-Hindus, particularly the Muslims.

II

Despite the efforts of the nineteenth century reform movements to impart a semitic character to Hinduism and to introduce a homogeneous form of worship on monotheistic lines, an integration of Hindus did not really materialize. They remained fragmented and pluralistic. The revivalist movements also did not bring about any appreciable change. The success of the rather aggressive efforts of later Hindu organizations, both cultural and political, to foster community consciousness have also been limited. The influence of the RSS, the militant Hindu cultural organisation, active since 1925, has not gone much beyond the upper caste circles. The Hindu Maha Sabha after a long period of marginal existence became defunct and Jan Sangh hardly made any impact on Indian polity. The Hindus were obviously guided by considerations other than religion in their political perspective. In other words, a connection between religious identity and political interest had not become part of the consciousness of Hindus.

The *Hindutva* movement unleashed by the *sangh parivar* was an attempt to create such a connection. Efforts to foster Hindu solidarity and identity were on the anvil for quite sometime;¹¹ the RSS had explored several areas and employed religious symbols like *trisul* to arouse Hindus to action. None of them had led to a felt need to act unitedly, either for the Hindus or against the Muslims.

The movement for the construction of a temple at Ayodhya to replace the Babri Masjid, initiated by the VHP, brought about a qualitative change. It touched a sympathetic chord in the mind of Hindus, even in areas where worship of Rama was not popular. This was possible because Ayodhya was imbued with a symbolic meaning, both about the self as well as the 'other'. The necessary pre-requisite for this was to establish Ayodhya as essentially Hindu by linking it with the legend of Rama. Towards this end the present day Ayodhya was identified as the Ayodhya of Valmiki's Ramayana which underlined its antiquity as well as its sanctity, being the birth place of Rama. That historical evidence did not bear out this claim was hardly important as faith rather than reason or historical proof was invoked for support.¹² An historian of the *Hindutva* camp spelt out the 'rationale' as follows:

In religion, it is a matter of faith and not of proof . . . so by faith and faith alone Christians embrace Jesus Christ to be the son of God, by faith and faith alone Muslims believe Muhammad to be the Prophet of Allah, and by faith and faith alone Hindus believe Ramajnamabhumii in Ayodhya to be the birth place of Lord Ram.¹³

The sanctity thus attributed to Ayodhya not only underlined its Hinduness but also made the construction of the Muslim—other easier. The alleged destruction of the temple by Babur was not just a desecration of an ordinary place of worship but a grave assault on Hindu faith itself.¹⁴ Ayodhya was projected as a symbol of that assault which injured the religious feelings of the Hindus. By referring to the Muslims as *Babur Ke Santan* (children of Babur), the Muslim community as a whole was held responsible for acting against the Hindu faith. The Babri Masjid was thus embedded in Hindu consciousness as a symbol of Muslim aggression against the Hindus and their religion. It also represented the collective humiliation of Hindus which remained unmitigated for centuries. Ayodhya therefore became a site for constructing Hindu solidarity and avenging the Muslim wrong. The effective communication of this dual meaning enabled the *Hindutva* to advance.

The strategy of mobilisation employed by the *sangh parivar* was to clarify and communicate the symbolic meaning of Ayodhya through a series of public interventions during 1989 to 1992, from Ram shila puja on 30 September 1988 to the demolition of the Masjid on 6 December 1992. The dual meaning of Ayodhya—a symbol of Hindu identity and Muslim atrocity—became socially visible through these interventions; more importantly, participation in them facilitated their internalisation as well, just as salt satyagraha had made nationalism intelligible to the common man. It was this intelligibility which made Ayodhya a powerful mobilising force.

The Ram shila puja performed from 30 September to 6 November 1988 was a turning point for the *Hindutva* movement. It confirmed the assumption that Ayodhya could serve as a powerful symbol for Hindu communal mobilisation, 'a channel through which the slumbering pride of being a Hindu could be invoked.'¹⁵ The unprecedented response the VHP received was as much due to religious appeal as its organisational ability. The message of the puja, planned in every village—5,00,028 in number—was intended to reach every Hindu whose active involvement with the movement was to be sought through a 'token minimum offering of Rs. 1.25'.¹⁶ Ashok Singhal, had expected about 250 million people to participate in it.¹⁷ Writing in *Organiser*, the BJP mouthpiece, B.K. Kelkar clarified the purpose of the puja:

Firstly, it is a mass contact and mobilization programme which emotionally involves and integrates the Hindu society to a national cause. It is a programme which connects every individual to the national memorial of Shri Ram. In a way it is a memorial which will be built by mass participation brick by brick. Thirdly, the dharmacharyas of all the sects of Hinduism have come together on

a common platform and are actively participating in mass mobilisation of Hindus.¹⁸

The Ram shila puja consisted of two distinct phases. First was the consecration and worship of bricks, inscribed with the name of Rama. For organising the consecration the entire country was divided into *Upakhandas*, *Khandas* and *Prakhandas*. An *Upakhanda* covered 2000 people, a *Khanda* which consisted of five *Upakhandas* had a population of 10,000 and ten *Khandas* made up a *Prakhanda* of 100,000 people.¹⁹ The cadres of the *Sangh Parivar* taking charge of this structure, the VHP was able to make the puja a national event. According to the *Indian Express*, the Puja was actually held in 3,50,000 places.²⁰

The pujas were followed by *Mahayagnas* in every *Prakhanda* which in effect was a site for propaganda—*prachar* and *pradarshini*, according to Nanaji Bhagwat, the all India convenor of Shila puja.²¹ Apart from exhibitions, meetings were held at *Yagnasthals* for women, youth and sants. The booklets, leaflets and posters in these *pradarshinis* were intended either to arouse hostility to the Muslims or to underline the unity and militancy of the Hindus. A common refrain of the propaganda was that the Hindus have fought 76 battles to recover the Ramjanmabhumi temple in which they have lost three lakhs lives.²⁴

Once the consecration was over, the bricks were wrapped in saffron clothes and displayed in a temple or a public place. They now became 'idols' of worship and aroused considerable religious frenzy. Women who were quite prominent in the puja danced and sang *bhajans*. The refrain of one of the Bhajan was, *Saugandh Ram ki khate hai/hum mandir wahim banayenge* (We swear by Ram. We will build the temple there).²³

The second phase of the puja was processions in which Ram shilas were carried around in different localities for eventual transmission to Ayodhya. The procession was an important part of the strategy of mobilization. It implied a transition in participation from religious to a public space, ensuring thus an open commitment to the cause. The greater visibility of processions could also transmit the message to a larger audience. A journalist travelling through the interior of Uttar Pradesh had observed:

I saw numerous small processions, with bricks displayed on the top of vehicles, winding through villages and towns rousing the religious fervour of the Hindus and insecurity among the Muslims. Many roadside shops have sprung up to sell flowers and coconuts for puja and many Hindus stood on the two sides of roads to pay homage with folded hands when bricks were carried past them.²⁴

The sense of insecurity among the Muslims was an alarming consequence of the puja. More dangerous, however, was the 'subterranean tension' it created between the Hindus and Muslims throughout the country.²⁵ Even the VHP did not rule out the possibility of communal riots.²⁶ While riots did occur in Madhya Pradesh, the other parts of India lived in fear.²⁷ But to the *sangh parivar*, it opened the road. One symbol of Ayodhya has been tested and found rewarding; more could follow.

IV

The VHP's programme of Hinduisation and anti-Muslim propaganda continued unabated even after the shila puja. The posters, stickers and audio-video tapes the VHP produced aplenty besieged homes and market places with the Ayodhya message.²⁸ 'They swamped individuals in their ubiquity, contriving a sense of the irresistible tide of *Hindutva*'.²⁹ They prepared the ground for a more intense mobilisation undertaken by the BJP President, Lal Krishna Advani, through a Rathayatra from Somnath to Ayodhya.

The Rathayatra which began at Somnath on 25 September 1991 was scheduled to end at Ayodhya on 30 October after traversing 10,000 kms through seven states—Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh—apart from the national capital.³⁰ The yatra—'Advani's road show', as the *Times of India* described it—covered 300 kms daily and Advani on an average addressed six public meetings a day.³¹

The choice of Somnath as the starting point of the yatra had a powerful symbolic value, made evident by repeated references to it as the target of Muslim tyranny against the Hindus.³² The intention was to contextualise Ayodhya in the historical lineage of Muslim aggression and then to seek legitimacy for Mandir movement by drawing a parallel. The parallel the sangh parivar drew was with the reconstruction of the Somnath temple, 'sanctioned by the Union Cabinet, presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru'.³³ Advani, in one of his speeches, claimed to inherit the mantle of Sardar Patel who had brought about a 'resurgence of the national spirit' by rebuilding the Somnath temple.³⁴ Thus by linking Somnath with Ayodhya, the Rath yatra became a symbol of just not one 'historical wrong' but a series of atrocities committed by the Muslims. It also became the symbol of the Hindu resolve to reclaim the temple at Ayodhya as they did at Somnath. In communicating these meanings, either by word or deed, the Rath yatra left nothing to chance.

Advani set off on his 36-day-long *dharma yuddha*, as the yatra was described by the *sangh parivar*, on 25 September, according to the *Organiser*, amidst tumultuous scenes of 'frenzied religious sentiments and militant national fervour':

. . . as the roar of the ocean on the morning of September 25th mingled with the chanting of vedic hymns and cries of *Har Har Mahadev* and *sougandh Ram ki khate hai, mandir wahim banayenge*, Shri Advani lifted a bow, its arrow pointing to Ayodhya. It was presented by the tribals of Ambaji. The priest of Somnath temple presented him a saffron *dharma dhwaja*. The fishermen from Dwaraka after presenting a conch blew it to mark the occasion. The Gohil Samaj of the Kshatriyas presented Advaniji with a sword. The mood of the milling crowd who came to wave-off the BJP President on his 36-day-long dharma yuddha had one clear message to convey—that they expected him to succeed and that they would even lay down their lives in the fight for the cause.³⁵

The Rath yatra was preceded by a sustained ideological propaganda through print and visual media to implant the image of an angry Ram in popular mind. In contrast to his traditional tranquil, compassionate and benevolent image, the posters and books circulated by the *sang parivar* depicted Rama riding a Rath and 'pulling his bow string, the arrow poised to annihilate'. In some pictures he was even carrying a *trishul*, a sword, and an axe. The suggestion inherent in this transformation is quite clear: 'Rama is 'responding to the specific moment, the loss of the janmabhoomi and involved in a fight to retain it'.³⁶

Just before the yatra, the volunteers of the Bajrang Dal and the VHP, specially trained for the purpose, undertook an intense campaign to disseminate the Ayodhya message. They splashed the yatra route with saffron, pasted posters of the proposed mandir and circulated handbills about the treachery of Muslims. In the public meetings which followed this initial groundwork, the VHP demagogues deploring the impotence the Hindus had shown in the past, extolled them to be aggressive at least now. Thus in each locality the 'Rathyatra entered into a surcharged atmosphere of Hindu militancy and hatred against the Muslims.³⁷

The conduct of the yatra and the content of Advani's speeches contributed to the heightening of this atmosphere. An unmistakable aim of Advani's speeches was to 'infuse a sense of shame and humiliation among the people for Hindu society's alleged failure to protect its shrines from desecration by Muslim conquerors. Once the seeds of shame are implanted, it may not be too difficult to foment anger and the desire for revenge'.³⁸ To that end Advani pictured the Ayodhya issue 'a controversy between Ram and Babur'³⁹ and the construction of the temple an assertion of national pride.⁴⁰ No Hindu, he averred, would live in peace unless the mandir at Ayodhya is completed.⁴¹ Ayodhya thus became a site for reenacting the mythical

fight, with Babur and his descendants replacing Ravana and his troops.

The call for Hindu aggression was not limited to Advani's verbal assault, the volunteers of the *sangh parivar* underlined their militancy through action. At Ahmedabad one of them pierced his arm with a *trishul* and with his blood put a *tilak* on Advani's forehead. At Jetpur a *kalash* (pitcher) full of blood was presented to him by 101 volunteers of Bajrang Dal. At almost every stop he was 'armed' with innumerable bows and arrows, discs, maces, swords, *trishuls* and *kirpans* that Promod Mahajan, the propaganda in-charge, was so moved to observe that. 'If we are to use all the weapons presented to us, we can liberate the Ramjanmabhumi in a day'.⁴² As the yatra progressed, the stature of Rama steadily grew to be 'India's greatest national hero'.⁴³ At Mandasaur, a small town in Madhya Pradesh, Pramod Mahajan, with Advani nodding in acquiescence and hundreds of youths brandishing their swords and *trishuls* asked the Muslims 'to either have faith in Lord Ram or else leave the country'.⁴⁴ And at Bombay Bal Thackeray, the Shiv Sena chief, while welcoming the yatra threatened to wipe out the 'unholy green', if the temple construction was obstructed.⁴⁵ The awakening of Hindus was not only in defence of Ram but also against Babur and his 'clan'.

The justification of Advani to embark upon his journey to arouse 'the national spirit', despite the repeated pleas from almost all quarters of the country, was that it would act as a unifying rather than a divisive force. The actual experience proved otherwise; Advani's Rath turned out to be 'a chariot of fire'.⁴⁶ From the very beginning the yatra created tension between the Hindus and Muslims, even in localities far removed from its route.⁴⁷ Between 1 September and 20 November, 116 communal riots occurred in which 564 people died. The details are as follows:⁴⁸

State/ Union Territory	Number of riots	Number of people killed
Andhra Pradesh	4	27
Assam	1	7
Bihar	8	19
Delhi	-	8
Gujarat	26	99
Karnataka	22	88
Kerala	2	3
Madhya Pradesh	5	21
Maharashtra	3	4
Rajasthan	13	52
Tamilnadu	1	6
Tripura	1	-
Uttar Pradesh	28	224
West Bengal	2	6

Such widespread incidence of communal riots, covering almost the whole of India, was a result of religious hatred generated by the Rath yatra. Even if Advani was not able to reach Ayodhya—Advani was arrested in Bihar—the Rath yatra ensured an unprecedented mobilization of Hindus, with their religious passion aroused against the Muslims. Being a Hindu began to pervade even secular domains of existence, as evident from what an Army Captain told a newspaper correspondent: 'My men are all Hindus. I may have to order them to fire on fellow Hindus in a religious procession. I do not like it'.⁴⁹

Enthused by the success of Ram shila puja and Rath yatra the *sangh parivar* tried to keep alive the connection with Ayodhya through a series of other symbols associated with Rama—Rama Jyoti, Rama Paduka, Rama Prasad, Rama Pataka, Rama Gulal and so on. Among them the Rama Jyoti programme, controlled by a group of one thousand Sadhus and Mahants, was particularly effective. The Rama Jyoti is a torch lit at Ayodhya, multiplied into many torches and then sent to thousands of villages where people were expected to light their Deepavali lamps with them. . . The idea was similar to that of Rama shila, but in reverse gear and hence with greater sanctity, as the jyoti unlike the shila, had originated at Ayodhya. In some regions the jyoti could be easily incorporated into the traditional practice of ritual lighting of evening lamp. A senior police official felt that Rama jyoti was potentially more dangerous than Rath yatra which went through a pre-chartered route covering highways, while Rama jyoti would penetrate remote villages, thus making it virtually impossible to monitor.⁵⁰ Mainly organised by the Bajrang Dal, it became a programme to demonstrate 'Hindu muscle and pyromania'.⁵¹

For about three years the *sangh parivar* constantly kept in view one symbol or the other to ensure that Ayodhya remained within focus and thus to keep the Hindus mobilised. The mobilisation, though in the name of Rama and Ayodhya was not for a religious cause, but for a political goal. At the time of Rath yatra Bhanu Kumar Shastri, a former Member of Parliament, had told the *Times of India*: 'The election campaign has begun. The real question is whether or not Ram Bhakti will translate into votes'.⁵²

V

The mobilisation of Hindus by invoking their religious identity and interests deeply affected the political and cultural foundations of the Indian Republic. It also disrupted the political process which sought to draw together people belonging to diverse cultural ambience and religious persuasions into a nation. The historical experience during the anti-colonial struggle, despite the divisive tendencies within it, had set this process in motion. By basing itself on principles of democracy and secularism, the Constitution imparted to this process a

tangible institutional form. The principles embodied in the Constitution were neither hurriedly conceived nor accidentally adopted. They were the outcome of a conscious choice of the people, as reflected in the prolonged deliberations of the Constituent Assembly. This choice is particularly significant, since it was made in the wake of unprecedented communal violence following the partition of India. Despite this experience—or was it because of it?—the democratic and secular legacy of the national movement as well as the plural and composite cultural traditions were adopted as the guiding spirit of the Republic.

The prospects of a Hindu state—a logical extension of the claim that India is a country of the Hindus—implicit in the *Hindutva* movement has noticeably undermined this spirit, creating not only a chasm but also distrust and suspicion between the Hindus and Muslims.⁵³ The mutual accommodation and respect which earlier characterised the communitarian relations have now given way to exclusiveness and hatred.

The rationale for the claim that India is a Hindu country is that Hindus form an over-whelming majority of the population. That there was no 'Hindu' before the Muslims came to India—there were only a large number of sects, none of them either known or called themselves as Hindu—deprives this claim any historical justification.⁵⁴ Even if the origin of Hinduism is located in the Vedic and Puranic traditions, a majority of those who are now designated as Hindus are outside their pale, in both religious and social practices. The Hindu scriptures and their commentaries, though employed as instruments of caste domination and exploitation, are pertinent to the socio-religious life of only a numerically small section of Brahmins and upper castes. In other words, the majority of Hindus, even in religious terms, are not part of the Hindu majority. The majoritarianism as a justification for Hindu assertion is, therefore, inconsistent with the heterogeneity which marks the social and religious practices of those who constitute the majority. The majoritarianism—the right of 82 per cent of Hindus—is not in conformity with the internal reality of Hinduism itself.

The majoritarianism, however, has strong alienating and ghettoising impact on the Muslims. At least a good number of them seem to concede the *sangh parivar's* claim that India is a country of the Hindus.⁵⁵ Although in absolute terms the Muslim population is very large—about 120 million—the pattern of demographic distribution is such that they are highly vulnerable to Hindu attacks. In almost every communal riot the casualty of Muslims is invariably higher than that of the Hindus. The increasing incidence of riots in the recent past has heightened the sense of fear and insecurity among the Muslims. The secular consensus which prevailed in the post-independence period, despite occasional tensions and riots, has been effectively fractured by the *Hindutva* to suggest that unless the

Muslims submitted to the will of the majority, they are likely to be the targets of the awakened Hindu militancy.

The assertion of *Hindutva* assumed a menacing trajectory because of the increasing inability of Indian state to adhere to secular principles in governance and its obvious propensity to compromise with communalism, either for electoral support or for overcoming a crisis.⁵⁶ For quite some time, the appeasement of communal forces, both Hindu and Muslim, has been a conscious policy of the state. The examples are many: Shah Bano case, the permission granted for *namaz* in protected monuments, the opening of the Babari Masjid for Hindu worship and the Shilanyas at Ayodhya are only some of them. None of these steps contributed to the containment of communalism, they only helped in its consolidation. Moreover the communally partisan attitude of state apparatuses, particularly the bureaucracy and the police, enhanced the striking power of Hindu communal forces.⁵⁷

VI

The strategy of mobilisation pursued by the *sangh parivar* marked a departure from the norms essential for the functioning of the democratic polity and society. The force of public opinion being a decisive factor in a democracy campaigning for its support is a legitimate method for realising political and religious goals. The information it disseminates and debate it generates enables citizens to make their choice. Its purpose is to enhance freedom and not to curb it. The *sangh parivar's* strategy of mobilisation did exactly the opposite by incorporating an element of coercion in it. Each mobilisation programme—from Ram shila puja to *Karseva* on 6 December—was mob oriented, creating deindividualised, irrational and violent participants. A decision was thus pressed through force.

The coercive character of mobilisation was not confined to the political, it embraced the domain of religion as well. The Mandir-Masjid controversy was firmly anchored in religious faith and as such supporting the movement for the retrieval of the temple was projected as a religious obligation. A believing Hindu could not easily dissociate himself from this compulsion and thus he was unconsciously led to endorse the *Hindutva* programme, even if he did not subscribe to communal politics. This clearly implied violence to religious faith.

Another trait which underlined the Hindu mobilisation was the emphasis on the irrational. By invoking faith as the only criterion for locating the temple at the Masjid site, the *Hindutva* not only tried to dismiss facts and evidence as inconsequential but also distanced itself from the rational. The principal thrust of the movement was fostering idolatry, which the religious reformers of the nineteenth century had rejected as irrational and inconsistent with scriptural prescriptions.

The irrational character of the movement is heightened by isolating it from the realities of material life. None of the vital social or economic problems facing the people figured in the campaign. The starvation deaths of tribals in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, lack of drinking water in Rajasthan and cold wave deaths due to inadequate clothing in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were outside the *Hindutva* concern when the Rath yatra traversed through these regions. Understandably so because focus on them might change the priorities of the people.

The twin features of Hindu mobilisation—irrationality and coercion—are reminiscent of the fascist experience in Europe. The observation of Theodore Adorno is instructive in this respect.⁵⁸

The fascist propaganda is psychological because of its irrational authoritarian aims which cannot be attained by means of rational convictions but only through the skilful awakening of 'a portion of the subjects' archaic inheritance'. . . The objective aims of fascism are largely irrational in so far as they contradict the material interest of great number of those whom they try to embrace. . . Since it would be impossible for fascism to win the masses through rational arguments, its propaganda must necessarily be deflected from discursive thinking; it must be oriented psychologically, and has to mobilise irrational, unconscious, regressive processes.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. For details of this dispute see Sushil Srivastava, *The Disputed Mosque*, New Delhi, 1990.
2. The idol was placed in the mosque with the active connivance of the district magistrate, K.K. Nayar, who later became a member of Parliament on a Jana Sangh ticket. Vallabhabhai Patel, the then home minister had described this as a 'unilateral action based on an attitude of aggression and coercion. Yet, the state did not act to remove the idol. A.G. Norrani, 'Legal Aspects of the Issue' in S. Gopal (ed), *Anatomy of a Confrontation*, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 58–98, and S.K. Tripathi, 'One Hundred Years of Litigation' in Ashghar Ali Engineer, *Babri-Masjid-Ramjanmabhumi Controversy*, Delhi, 1990.
3. K.N. Panikkar, 'Culture and Communalism' *Social Scientist*, March-April, 1993, vol. 21, nos. 3–4, pp. 24–31.
4. V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva*, 1989 Edition, p. 13. *Hindutva* was first published in 1924.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92. Also see B.D. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics*, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 44–45.
7. For an analysis of Golwalkar's ideas in this book see, Sitaram Yechuri, *Frontline*, 12 March 1993. The *Sangh Parivar* claims that this highly provocative book which practically advocates the extermination of non-Hindus was withdrawn from circulation. But a new edition was published in 1947.
8. Quoted in J.A. Curran, *Militant Hinduism in Indian Politics: A Study of the RSS*, New York, 1951.

9. Quoted in B.D. Graham, *op.cit*, p. 46.
- 9A. Interview, *Frontline*, 25 March 1994.
10. K.R. Malkani, *The Politics of Ayodhya and Hindu-Muslim Relation*, Preface, New Delhi, 1993.
11. K.N. Panikkar, *Communalism in India—A Perspective for Intervention*, New Delhi, 1991.
12. These unsubstantiated claims have been questioned and rejected by historians and archaeologists. For a recent discussion of archaeological evidence see D. Mandal, *Ayodhya: Archaeology After Demolition*, New Delhi, 1991.
13. K.S. Lal, 'Ramjanmabhumi—Some Issues', *Organiser*, October, 1989.
14. In projecting this idea the VHP shifted the terrain from faith to historical facts. In the memorandum submitted to the government the VHP produced a long list of documents to prove the destruction of the temple. It also came up very frequently with archaeological evidence unearthed by *Karsevaks*, D. Mandal, *op.cit*.
15. *Times of India*, 10 October, 1989.
16. *Organiser*, 8 October 1989. According to Ashok Singhal 82.9 million people have made their offering. Interview, *Frontline*, 25 March 1994.
17. *National Herald*, 5 October, 1989.
18. B.K. Kelkar, 'Frankly Speaking'. *Organiser*, 8 October 1989.
19. *New Age*, 8 October 1989.
20. *Indian Express*, 11 October, 1989.
21. *Ibid*.
22. *Organiser*, 8 Oct. 1989. History does not record any battle in Ayodhya between the Hindus and Muslims over the Babri Masjid and no lives were lost before the VHP came on the scene. The only armed conflict was in 1855 which was about the Hanumangarhi temple and not about Babri Masjid. For details see K.N. Panikkar, 'A Historical Overview' in S. Gopal (ed), *op.cit*, 23–33.
23. *Indian Express*, 2 November 1989.
24. Kuldeep Nayar in *Tribune*, 12 October 1989.
25. *National Herald*, 5 October, 1989.
26. *Hindustan Times*, 5 October, 1989.
27. *Hindustan Times*, 10 October and *Times of India*, 10 October 1989.
28. For details see Tapan Basu et al, *Khakhi Shorts and Saffron Flags*, New Delhi, 1933, pp. 56–109.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
30. For the actual route of the *Yatra* see Appendix 1.
31. *Times of India*, 25 September and 14 October 1990.
32. *Tribune*, 8 October 1990. The temple of Somnath was plundered by Mahmud Gazni in 1025. The motive, however was more economic than religious, as temples at that time were depositories of large quantities of wealth, in cash, gold and jewellery.
33. K.R. Malkhani, *op.cit*, p. 12.
34. *Tribune*, 8 October 1990.
35. *Organiser*, 14 October 1990.
36. For an excellent study of this change in Rama's image see Anuradha Kapur, 'Diety to Crusader: The Changing Iconography of Ram' in Gyanendra Pandey, (ed) *Hindus and Others*, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 74–107.
37. *Telegraph*, 14 October 1990.
38. *Tribune*, 8 October 1990.
39. *Indian Express*, 17 September 1990.
40. *Telegraph*, 14 October 1990.
41. *Times of India*, 11 October 1990.
42. *Organiser*, 14 October 1990.
43. *Telegraph*, 14 October 1990.

44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. *Tribune*, 8 October 1990.
47. *Sunday Observer*, 14 October and *Tribune*, 12 October 1990.
48. *Divided We Stand—A Dossier on Masjid-Mandir Conflict*, prepared by Delhi Forum, New Delhi, 1992.
49. Peter Hillmore in *The Observer*, London, 20 October 1990.
50. *The Statesman*, 20 September, 1990.
51. Ibid.
52. *Times of India*, 14 October 1990.
53. '... the aura and atmosphere of India will now increasingly be authentic Indian and not synthetic secular'. K.R. Malkhani, *op.cit.*, preface.
54. Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 60–80.
55. Several Muslim leaders are now eager to seek an accommodation with Hindu communal forces. There is an increasing trend among them to accept the demolition of Babri Masjid in lieu of a promise to protect other mosques, particularly those at Benares and Mathura.
56. For details see K.N. Panikkar, *Communalism in India: History, Politics and Culture*, Introduction, New Delhi, 1991, pp. 1–16.
57. During the last few years the police force has been increasingly communalised. It became distinctly visible during the 1984 riots in Delhi. Subsequently, the police has acted communally on several occasions; their role in the recent riots in Agra, Surat and Bombay are perhaps the worst. At Ayodhya when a group of Bajrang Dal volunteers tore up an exhibition put up by a cultural organisation, Sahmat, on the pretext of injured religious feelings the policemen posted there did not do anything to prevent the vandalism.
58. Theodor W. Adorno: *The Culture Industry*, London, 1991, pp. 119 and 129.

