

SUBHASHINI ALI

### **Thirty Years After the Demolition**

The horrifying and barbaric destruction of the Babri Masjid on 6 December, 1992 was a seismic moment in our history. It should be seen, however, not as an isolated incident of barbarity but as part of an agenda that aims to change the course adopted by a very young nation taking its first uncertain steps after attaining freedom on August 15, 1947. Despite the communal bloodbath of horrific proportions that accompanied its birth, it bravely adopted a course towards the establishment of a secular, democratic State.

It was precisely this course that forces like the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha were determined to thwart. The first blow was struck by them on January 30, 1948 when Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by Nathuram Godse, a member of both organizations. Godse, editor of a publication named *Hindu Rashtra*, had no compunctions about the crime he committed. He defended himself in the court and said repeatedly that, as a Hindu, it was his duty to kill Gandhi. Other members of the RSS and Mahasabha were also jailed along with Nathuram. His brother, Gopal, and his co-conspirator Apte received the life sentence and the death penalty respectively as did Nathuram. Hundreds of activists were arrested when the two organizations were banned. Prominent leaders like V.D. Savarkar and Mahant Digvijaynath of the Gorakhpur Gorakdham Ashram had to spend nearly a year in jail and were accused of being co-conspirators behind the murder.

Savarkar, propagator of the concept of Hindutva, had, in 1937 publicly announced that Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations who could not co-exist as one. This was endorsed by Jinnah and his Muslim League only in 1940 and what followed was the vivisection of India into India and Pakistan. Pakistan elected to become a theocracy while the tallest among the leaders of independent India pledged to carry forward the ideals of the freedom movement.

The idea of India as a secular nation was unacceptable to both Savarkar and his Hindu Mahasabha and to the RSS led by Golwalkar. They believed firmly that Indian nationality was defined by its Hinduness and that only Hindus could be the 'real' citizens of Independent India. Those belonging to other religions like Islam and Christianity could only live in India as second-class citizens entirely at the mercy of the majority community. For them, India could only be a Hindu Rashtra and they pursued their agenda with a

relentlessness that rode roughshod over constitutional propriety, the rule of law and concern for human lives. Their relentlessness was responsible for much bloodshed and immense damage to a shared culture and to intermingling relationships forged over centuries.

Immediately after Independence, the Hindu Mahasabha that was quite visible on the political scene worked in close tandem with the RSS as demonstrated by Gandhi's murder by people belonging to both organizations. While this act led to both organizations being banned and their leaders incarcerated amidst general outrage, it is important to remember that they had the support of large number of Indians, many of them in important positions of power. They were almost acknowledged by many as being 'Hindu' nationalists despite the fact that they had played no role in the movement for freedom which Savarkar had actively opposed. Much of the support they enjoyed emanated from those belonging to the upper castes who were consumed with a longing for a hierarchical past that seemed threatened by the ideas of democracy and secularism. The trauma of partition and the terrible communal violence it engendered did much to polarize society and created a groundswell of support for them. G.D. Khosla, one of the judges who tried Nathuram Godse wrote later "(after hearing Godse's defence of his act) the audience was visibly and audibly moved. There was a deep silence when he had finished talking...I have no doubt that had the audience been constituted into a jury with the task of deciding Godse's appeal, they would have brought in a verdict of 'not guilty' by an overwhelming majority."

These conflicting attitudes towards the future course of the Indian nation were prevalent not only among large sections of the people but also shared by many of their leaders who were not members of the Hindu Mahasabha or RSS but of the Congress. Many of them were harsh critics of the Mahasabha-RSS ideology but they adopted compromising positions towards a defence of secularism and the rule of law because of their own majoritarian ideas, their casteist outlook, their political opportunism or a combination of these factors. It was this that made possible the events of the night of December 22, 1949 and the train of events that followed.

On that night, Mahant Abhiram Das of the Hanumangarhi Akhada, a leader of the local unit of the Hindu Mahasabha, climbed over the wall that separated the Ram chabutra (a courtyard which had earlier been claimed as the birthplace of Ram) from the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. He was accompanied by two others. The old and feeble *muezzin* of the Masjid woke up in alarm. He was shocked to see that Abhiram Das was cradling an idol of Rama in his arms. He tried to snatch it but was pushed and beaten. Bruised and bleeding, he ran for his life and took shelter in a nearby village where he

remained for the rest of his life. He was haunted by what he had seen on that fateful night and nightmares tormented him till his death a few years later.

Abhram Das and his companions entered the mosque and placed the idol there. They started removing items associated with prayers in the mosque and painted the name of Ram on the walls. In the very early hours of dawn, they lit a lamp and started to pray and singing loudly. The District Magistrate and the Additional District Magistrate arrived on the scene only after large numbers of people started collecting outside the mosque. Leaflets announcing the 'miraculous' appearance of the child Ram (Ramlalla) in the mosque had been distributed throughout the night and loudspeakers were relaying the news of this 'miracle' in different places. The administrators removed Abhram Das and his companions from the mosque but not the idol.

The surreptitious placing of the idol in the mosque had been meticulously planned by a group of leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha the most important of whom was Digvijaynath, Mahant of the Gorakhnath Temple in Gorakhpur who had recently been released from jail where he had been incarcerated for his role in the Gandhi murder. The District Magistrate, KKK Nair and the ADM, Singh, had been privy to these plans which they supported wholeheartedly (KKK Nair's wife, Shakuntala, went on to become a Hindu Mahasabha MLA after which both she and Nair became Hindu Mahasabha MPs. Even their driver became a Mahasabha MLA.) The local Congress MLA, Raghav Das, who had the support of the Chief Minister, G.B. Pant, had won the election vowing to construct the Ram Mandir by 'forcing the irreligious (Muslims) to leave'. He was involved in all the activities of Abhram Das and his colleagues and participated enthusiastically in a series of 'kathas' and 'paths' on the Ramchabutra. These rituals were accompanied by many attacks on Muslims, their graveyards and their homes.

Apart from the administration and the local Congress leadership, the district judiciary also played a role in ensuring that the idols were not removed, that a lock was placed on the mosque, that Muslims were forbidden access to it and that a budget was sanctioned for the regular feeding of Lord Ram inside the mosque.

At the very time that the installation of the idol was taking place, V.D. Savarkar, also recently released from jail for his role in the Gandhi murder, was proceeding towards Calcutta for the 28 th Conference of the Mahasabha. On the way, on December 22, he addressed a gathering at Nagpur station saying "... Mahasabha, after two years of travails and suffering, has emerged stronger with its principles fully vindicated by the events during the period ... The talk of a secular state is absurd in a country which is inhabited largely by Hindus, and it is their proud task to establish a Hindu Rashtra."

On December 24, after the idols were firmly established in the mosque, N.B. Khare, the newly elected president of the Hindu Mahasabha, announced

that the party was “now re-entering the field of politics with the ideology of a cultural state of Hindu Rashtra after a temporary suspension of its political activities”. He asserted “Congress leaders say they would not allow the establishment of a Hindu Rashtra in this country; nobody wants Hindu Raj or Hindu government. Their confusion must stop. Hindu Rashtra is already there, and no power on earth can destroy it.”

The confident declarations of the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha were paid little heed at the time. A few weeks earlier, on November 26, the final draft of the Constitution was placed before the Constituent Assembly by Dr. Ambedkar. Its passage was welcomed as the opening of a new chapter in Indian history. A set of laws promising equality to all its citizens, irrespective of caste, creed and gender, became the law of the land. Just a few years after the bloody partition of the country in the name of religion and after the establishment of an Islamic state on its Western and Eastern borders, the Indian Constitution embodying secular principles was passed. It seemed that the course of the Indian nation towards a future that promised equality and justice to all its citizens had been set and that all those engaged in thwarting it had been pushed to the margins.<sup>1</sup>

Both the Mahasabha and the RSS mocked the new Constitution and publicly reiterated their commitment to the *Manusmriti* as the real Nyay Shastra (sacred legal document). Savarkar wrote that after the Vedas, the *Manusmriti* was the most holy religious document. He said that this work guides us in all that we do and is the Hindu law and Constitution today (*V.D.Savarkar 'Manusmriti and Women', Collected Works, Vol 4*).

Golwalkar, Sarsanghchhalak of the RSS, wrote in the *Organiser* of November 30, 1949, “To this day laws as enunciated in the *Manusmriti* excite the admiration of the world...But to our constitutional pundits that means nothing.’ Golwalkar was bitterly opposed to every aspect of India’s Constitution and an admirer of the pernicious caste system. In his *Bunch of Thoughts*, he writes ‘...Brahmin is the head, and Kshatriya the hands, Vaishya the thighs and Sudras the feet. This means that the people who have this fourfold arrangement, i.e. the Hindu people, is our God. This supreme vision of Godhead is the very core of our concept of ‘nation’...’ (pp 36-37). Golwalkar and Savarkar’s opposition to the Constitution and their commitment to *Manusmriti* define the Hindu Rashtra of their dreams.

In 1950, the incidents of the night of December 22 were not even known to many and for others, their memories had dimmed. A terrible crime against the rule of law and civilizational norms went unpunished and was soon lost in dusty files in Ayodhya court-rooms and government offices. Those responsible for committing it also lost much of their relevance. It seemed as if those committed to the Constitution and its values had succeeded in achieving a dominant influence on the way that masses of Indians envisaged

their future and that of their nation. In fact, however, this influence was uneven and often superficial.

The RSS used the succeeding decades into expanding and strengthening its organization. It developed a formidable Sangh Parivar comprising of an ever-expanding combination of organizations that could attract into their fold diverse sections of society – students, religious heads, farmers, workers, tribals, women, retired persons and various professionals. Its political wing, the Jan Sangh developed the capacity to enter into alliances and adjustments with a wide variety of political parties.

By the end of seven decades of Independence, the failure of the ruling class to deliver masses of Indians out of poverty, hunger and unemployment, their failure to end landlordism and carry out widespread and far-reaching land reforms and their failure to ensure justice and security to women, dalits, adivasis and members of minority communities created the frustration and anger which was channelized by the opposition parties, including the Left. The political formation established by the RSS, the Jan Sangh was also able to achieve political successes in the changed environment.

It was precisely at this time that the Sangh Parivar along with other like-minded Hindutva groups decided to once again flex their muscles and challenge the constitutional state. For several years they had been organizing campaigns to ban cow slaughter all over the country. The issue selected was not only connected to Hindu religious belief but was also one that targeted and demonised members of the Muslim community as ‘cow killers’. On November 7, 1966 several hundred thousand protestors including hordes of ‘holy’ men, members of Hindu sects along with members of different organizations linked to the RSS and Mahasabha participated in a march to Parliament at the end of a year-long campaign. Jan Sangh members including Members of Parliament also participated in the march. They marched through the main thoroughfare of the capital of India, brandishing tridents and swords, shouting slogans that threatened cow-killers and their supporters with death and worse, demanding a Hindu Rashtra. The procession ended in a public meeting outside the gates of the parliament. Swami Rameshwaranand, a Jan Sangh MP, took the mike and exhorted the crowd to ‘teach a lesson’ to MPs by closing down Parliament. The impassioned crowd breached the barricades, stoned a policeman to death and tried to break the Parliament gates. The police resorted to a cane charge and firing, killing 8 persons. The crowd dispersed, broke into the houses of several legislators and set many vehicles on fire. None of the ringleaders, however, was arrested or charged. Soon, the united front leading the agitation splintered and was disbanded.

The campaign leading up to November 7, 1966 and the events of that day have many significant aspects. For the first time since Independence, the Jan

Sangh, RSS, influential capitalists like Dalmia, the Hindu Mahasabha came together with several Shankaracharyas, mahants and religious Hindu sects to conduct a nationwide campaign on an issue that was both religious in its appeal and deeply polarising. The campaign was extremely successful in mobilising vast numbers to participate in its march to Parliament. It resulted in a major attack on the Parliament without anyone being punished for the mayhem and violence that left at least one policeman and eight protestors dead. Those responsible for organising the March showed not the slightest remorse over either the attempt to attack the most important constitutional institution in the country or over the bloodshed that this attack caused. The prime minister Indira Gandhi responded with a series of palliative measures giving credence to the belief that the huge support that the Cow Protection campaign had been able to garner was instrumental in influencing her to soften her stand towards communal majoritarianism.

Soon after this, the general election of 1967 was held. The Jan Sangh made electoral gains that enabled it to join coalition governments in prominent Northern States with parties opposed to its ideological beliefs but eager to break the political dominance of the Congress. This naturally expanded its political base and also helped the Sangh Parivar to increase its influence and penetration into the administration, the media and various powerful institutions. While the Congress lost ground in these states, it retained its hold on the central government.

The victory over Pakistan and its dismemberment helped Indira Gandhi to win the 1971 election comfortably. In a few years, however, the dismal economic scenario once again gave opposition parties the opportunity to come together against the growing authoritarianism of the Congress government. The RSS was quick to ensure that all its wings, including the Jan Sangh, participated in a big way in the 'Nav Nirman' movement against Congress corruption in Gujarat and the JP movement against Indira Gandhi's dictatorial ways in Bihar. These movements and the Allahabad High Court Judgment setting aside Indira Gandhi's election in 1971 resulted in imposition of a National Emergency in 1975. RSS-BJP participation in these movements and the subsequent arrest of many of their leaders like L.K. Advani did much to burnish the political appeal of the Jan Sangh and to reduce public perception of it being a 'communal party'.

After the Emergency was lifted, major opposition parties including the Jan Sangh but excluding the Communists merged to form the Janata Party. In the General elections of 1977 they were able to form a Government at the center with Communist support. This experiment, however, did not last very long and, in 1980, Indira Gandhi led her party to a big victory at the center and in many of the North Indian States. Its stint in Government, however, gave the

RSS an opportunity to continue its infiltration in the corridors of power, the administration and the media.

The erstwhile Jan Sangh members left the Janata Party after their defeat in 1980 and the BJP was formed. Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984 paved the way for a huge Congress victory later that year under the leadership of her son, Rajiv Gandhi. The BJP could win only 2 seats.

The Sangh Parivar responded to this electoral setback by rebuilding alliances with various Hindu religious leaders and heads of sects and making the Ram Janmabhoomi issue central to its future campaigns. Responsibility for this campaign was entrusted to one of its wings, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). In 1984, the VHP organised a large gathering of various Hindu religious and spiritual leaders in the Vigyan Bhawan, Delhi and a decision was taken to reconstruct Hindu temples at Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi (Varanasi) for the first time. After this, the VHP, along with its youth wing, the Bajrang Dal, started organizing 'Ramjanaki rath yatras' in Ayodhya.<sup>2</sup>

To regain lost space in electoral politics, the BJP under its President, L.K. Advani, decided to lend its support to the VHP's Ramjanmabhoomi campaign. In its fateful Palampur declaration of June, 1989, it said "The BJP holds that the nature of this controversy is such that it just cannot be sorted out by a court of law. A court of law can settle issues of title, trespass, possession etc. But it cannot adjudicate as to whether Babar did actually invade Ayodhya, destroyed a temple and built a mosque in its place. Even where a court does pronounce on such facts, it cannot suggest remedies to undo the vandalism of history.... On March 3, 1951, in Gopal Singh Visharad versus Zahur Ahmad and others, the Civil Judge, Faizabad observed, inter alia: "...at least from 1936 onwards, the Muslims have neither used the site as a mosque nor offered prayers there, and that the Hindus have been performing their Pooja etc. on the disputed site." Then, on 1 February, 1986, District Judge Faizabad referred to this 1951 order and directed that as "for the last 35 years Hindus have (had) an unrestricted right of worship at the place, the locks put on two gates in 1951 on grounds of law and order should be removed...."

"...The Bharatiya Janata Party calls upon the Rajiv Government to adopt the same positive approach in respect of Ayodhya that the Nehru Government did with regard to Somnath. The sentiments of the people must be respected, and Ram Janmasthan handed over to the Hindus - if possible, through a negotiated settlement or else, by legislation."

This declaration contained many half-truths and untruths. The Faizabad Civil judge's assertion in 1951 about Muslims not having offered prayers in the mosque was one such untruth since a muezzin who had been calling the faithful to prayer was chased out of the mosque in the night of December

22nd/23rd, 1949. The reference to the Nehru Government's approach to the construction of the Somnath temple was a half-truth. Not only did Nehru strongly oppose the construction of the temple but he ensured that it was not built by the Government. That temple was, in any case, not constructed on the site occupied by a mosque. Statements and documents penned by members of the Sangh Parivar are littered with such half-truths and untruths as part of their effort to convince others of the veracity of their claims.

The pusillanimity displayed by Rajiv Gandhi in compromising with Muslim fundamentalists opposing the Shah Bano judgment by the Supreme Court in 1986 gave the BJP a strong argument against accepting a judicial decision in the Ramjanmabhoomi matter. His thoughtless chicanery in ensuring that the Faizabad District Judge passed an order removing the locks that had been placed on the doors of the Babri Masjid also strengthened the BJP hand. While both decisions had been made with any eye to increasing Congress support among Muslims and Hindus in the upcoming 1989 general election, they had the opposite result.

On the eve of the election, the VHP carried out a massive *shila puja* campaign. Bricks meant for the construction of the Ram temple were collected from every village, town and city of the country polarizing Hindus and Muslims in many places. Clashes and riots took place and Bhagalpur, Bihar witnessed a pogrom against Muslims in which more than 3000 were killed.

The *shilanyas* itself was undertaken on November 9 after the Congress Home Minister gave the VHP leader Ashok Singhal permission to do so. The VHP was urged to conduct the ceremony outside the disputed area but, as the *Indian Express* reported, '... on November 9, a congregation of VHP leaders dug a 7x7x7 pit just at the main entrance of the sanctum sanctorum, clearly on the disputed land, defying the agreement they had made with the authorities'.

Huge celebratory crowds collected in Ayodhya and Ashok Singhal, President of the VHP, announced "We have today laid the foundation stone of a Hindu Rashtra'.

The Ramjanmabhoomi issue found a guarded mention in the BJP manifesto for the 1989 general election since it was fighting in alliance with the newly-formed Janata Dal. The Communist Parties also allied with Janata Party but there were contests with the BJP in all the seats that they fought. The double-edged strategy of the BJP, alliance with secular parties and support to a communalizing and polarizing campaign, paid handsome dividends and it could win 85 seats in the Lok Sabha. After the 1990 Assembly election, it formed Governments in Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh and joined coalition governments in Gujarat and Rajasthan.



The Sangh Parivar did everything to maintain the momentum of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. Militant demonstrations were held every month in different parts of the country with a special focus on UP where major riots were organised in early 1990.

On August 7, 1990 the Janata Dal Government announced implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations giving 27 per-cent reservation to OBC communities in Central Government jobs and educational institutions. While most BJP leaders and supporters were bitterly opposed to this move, OBC leaders like Uma Bharti were jubilant. The Sangh leadership realized that their project of creating an over-arching Hindu identity, subsuming caste differences, so essential to their march towards the creation of a Hindu Rashtra, had been endangered. To turn the tide in their favour, the audacious decision to embark on the Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya between September 25 and October 30 under the leadership of Advani was taken. The Yatra aroused a frenzy of hate against the 'descendants of Babar', and its path was soon drenched in blood.

In the *Sunday Observer* of October 14, 1990, Sudheendra Kulkarni, wrote: "What is new to this present round of communal violence...is the extent to which it has succeeded in penetrating the villages." *The Telegraph* of the same date says: "...The extent to which communal passions have been heightened is evident simply by taking a look at what is happening in UP today: even before Mr. Advani's rath has entered the state, the death toll in communal clashes has gone up to 44...It was not just coincidence that communal riots should break out in Karnataka, within days of Mr Advani and his Ram rath passing through Solapur, near Maharashtra's border with Karnataka...At Mandsaur, Pramod Mahajan, asked the Muslims to either have faith in Lord Ram or else leave the country. Mr Advani all the while nodded in acquiescence and the hundreds of youths who surrounded the podium brandished their swords and trishuls and hailed the speech."

And yet, in an interview with Swapan Dasgupta reported in the *Sunday Times* of October 14, Advani could say "I am sure that everyone knows that it (the Yatra) has provided a healing touch; it has not caused any tensions or has not inflamed passions... But now the sentiments of the Hindus have been manifested and articulated in such a powerful fashion without arousing any communal passion" (*emphasis added*).

Finally, on October 22, the Yatra was stopped by the police who arrested Advani in Samastipur, Bihar on the orders of Chief Minister, Lalu Prasad Yadav. No rioting took place in the State either before or after the arrest. The BJP withdrew support to the Government and went ahead with the *kar seva* programme in Ayodhya on October 30th. Bajrang Dal activists and former DGP, Shirish Chand Dikshit an MP from Varanasi, entered the mosque and

planted saffron flags on its dome. The police opened fire and about 32 *kar sevaks* were killed but the mosque was saved.

V.P.Singh resigned and India went to the polls again in 1991. The election campaign witnessed widespread rioting in Northern States and also the tragic assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. The Congress could form a minority Government at the Center and, significantly, the BJP saw the biggest jump in its vote share which increased 1.8. times to reach 20.1%. The BJP had succeeded in mobilizing large sections of Hindus, including OBCs, behind its Ramjanmabhoomi campaign despite its opposition to the Mandal recommendations. It won 120 seats in the Lok Sabha and formed a Government in the crucial state of Uttar Pradesh. An elated BJP and Sangh Parivar announced that *kar seva* would once again be carried out at the disputed site on 6 December, 1992.

As is well-known, huge numbers of Sangh Parivar activists entered Ayodhya before and on 6 December. The demolition of the mosque took place in broad daylight, in full view of the national and international press and of thousands of security personnel that had been deputed there to ensure the security of the mosque. The presence of a BJP Government in UP and of a pusillanimous Congress Government at the Center ensured that they did not do so.

As the demolition neared completion, the *Indian Express* reported that the following slogan was raised "*Ab banega Hindu rashtra*" (*Now a Hindu Rashtra will be established.*)

The demolition was received with both jubilation and also with horror and stringent criticism. The CPI(M) was unequivocal in its response, deeming it a barbaric assault on the Constitution and demanding the reconstruction of the mosque at the site of its demolition. Complete bandhs were observed in the Left-ruled States of West Bengal and Kerala. At a meeting of the National Integration Council earlier, the CPI(M) had actually urged the Prime Minister to act under Article 356 and remove the BJP Government of Uttar Pradesh to defend the Constitution. After the UP Government was removed in the night of 6 December, the CPI(M) demanded the removal of BJP-led State Governments in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. This was done subsequently.

The demolition was accompanied by violent attacks on Muslim lives and homes in Ayodhya and rioting in many parts of the country including several rounds of vicious attacks on Muslims in and around Bombay which claimed more than a 100 lives.

What transpired on 6 December was more than an act of communal vengeance. It was a carefully planned attack on the Constitution itself as part of the project to replace a secular India with a Hindu Rashtra. The very choice

of the date, 6 December, the death anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar, architect of the Constitution was very symbolic.

An eminent Marxist scholar, the late Aijaz Ahmad, puts the act of demolition in the correct perspective when he writes "... with reference to the destruction of the Babri Masjid and the forces that carried it out, I would say that we would forget at our peril the fundamentally fascistic character of that event and those forces. This seems clear with regard to the nature of the event, the modes of mobilization, the very structure of the *Sangh parivar*, and the specific ideological form in which it practices and propagates its communalism...the Central Government, also sworn to uphold the Constitution, fully aware of the preparations, duly warned by the intelligence agencies that destruction of the mosque Supreme Court order was indeed part of the *Hindutva* plan, but following a 'soft saffron' (an early use of what has become a commonplace) line, did nothing to prevent that violation of the constitutional obligation...after the event, the government made simply no move to punish the actual culprits..." ('On the Ruins of Ayodhya', *Lineages of the Present*). What the BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi said in an interview carried by the *Hindustan Times* of January 1, 1993, lends credence to this understanding. He said "It has brought Hindutva to the centre-stage. The BJP has become the voice of resurgent nationalism. It is redefining the political ideology of every aspect of the national life – be it secularism, socialism, foreign policy or economic issues. The Hindutva concept is going to be the deciding factor. All the political parties are going to be affected by this. This would lead to the creation of a new India."

The years after the demolition have been years in which the Sangh Parivar has been able to make headway in its journey towards its goal of establishing a Hindu Rashtra. It has, however, been a journey of zig-zags. It has had to face considerable obstacles which demonstrate the strength of those opposed to this goal.

Its politics of polarization and violence that repeatedly made use of the Ramjanmabhoomi issue, the launch pad for its growth, continued to propel it forward. In this it was helped by the ambivalent attitude of various courts to repeated assertions by the Sangh Parivar that they would carry out construction of the Ram Mandir at the site where the Babri Masjid stood. It should be remembered that in December 2001, another mobilization was made in Ayodhya to undertake kar seva. Finally, the Supreme Court intervened to protect the status quo and thousands of infuriated kar sevaks were forced to leave Ayodhya. One group left for Ahmedabad on the Sabarmati Express.

A fire broke out inside the compartment in which many passengers died. Their bodies were taken to Ahmedabad by the Modi Government and were displayed as the bodies of Kar sevaks burnt to death by Muslims.

It was in the wake of this that the ghastly genocide of Muslims started later in the day and continued till at least the 10th of March.

The Sangh Parivar's claims received further legitimacy from the judgment delivered by the Allahabad High Court in 2007 in the title suit regarding ownership of the site. While the judgment divided the whole site into three giving 2 to Hindu plaintiffs and one to the Muslim side, two judges of three opined that "The area under the central dome is indeed the birthplace of Ram as per belief and faith of Hindus."

It is important to remember that, in this period, the BJP started replacing the Congress as the most favoured party for large sections of the capitalist class of the country, including the big bourgeoisie. The BJP was not only demonstrating its success in winning elections but the policies of its Government in Gujarat provided ample proof of its commitment to the neo-liberal paradigm.

In 2014, the BJP was able to come to power on its own at the Center under the leadership of Narendra Modi. In 2019, it was able to increase its majority in the Assembly. It has used State power to accelerate its journey towards achieving the objectives of the Sangh Parivar, riding roughshod over most obstacles in the way.

The Supreme Court judgment in the Ramjanmabhoomi case in 2019 gave a tremendous boost to the Sangh Parivar's quest to establish a Hindu Rashtra. The Supreme Court in 2019 awarded the disputed site to Ram Lalla. The CPI(M) was perhaps the only political party that approached the judgment with skepticism and reservations. It said that once it became clear that a negotiated settlement of the issue was not possible, the judicial route was the only way to settle the matter. It goes on to say in an article that appeared in the Party weekly, *People's Democracy*, "Though the judgment is replete with declarations about the necessity to settle the dispute not on the basis of faith but on evidence and facts; though it asserts that secularism enjoins treating all religions and faiths equally, the end result has been giving faith a greater weightage and, more disturbingly, giving precedence to the beliefs of one community. ... The paradox continues in that the judgment holds the desecration of the mosque by the illegal placing of idols within the mosque in December 1949 and the demolition of the mosque in December 1992 as "serious violation of law", but ends up handing over the site to the very forces responsible for this criminal assault. It should be noted that the representative of Ram Lalla – the "next friend" of the deity, on whose behalf a suit was filed in 1989 – is a leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the organisation that led the agitation that resulted in the demolition of the mosque.

"The Supreme Court has cited the Places of Worship Act 1991 as a law, which enforces the constitutional obligations to uphold the equality of all

religions and secularism. However, it would have been better, if the court had invoked Article 142 of the Constitution to decree that no other religious place can be subject to a dispute and alteration. This is all the more important since the Ayodhya verdict should not become a template for raising demands regarding Kashi, Mathura and other religious sites. The RSS chief, Mohan Bhagwat, has said that the claims regarding Kashi and Mathura are not on the agenda “for now”.

“The judgment seems to give priority to maintenance of peace and tranquility rather than seeing that justice is rendered. Among the reasons given for reversing the Allahabad High Court judgment is that it would not “restore a lasting sense of peace and tranquility”. This is where it appears political considerations have come in for reckoning. The prevailing dominance of the Hindutva regime, the dire prospects, if the judicial verdict went against the majority sentiment – all seem to have weighed on the decision to hand over the entire 2.77 acres of disputed land to the juridical person of Ram Lalla.

“The prevailing sentiment that somehow the dispute has to be resolved and it is time to move on seems to have influenced the response of many of the secular parties and organisations to welcome the verdict. It is one thing to convey acceptance of the verdict of the highest judicial body of the land, but that should not blind us to the compromise with majoritarianism and its possible deleterious consequences.” (*emphasis added.*)

The Narendra Modi Government and Sangh Parivar lost no time in taking advantage of the judgment. On August 5, 2020, a *shila puja* of the Ram temple was held at the very spot where the Babri Masjid had once stood. The *puja* was attended by the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, the saffron-clad Yogi Adityanath successor of Mahant Digvijaynath who had been such an important part of the successful conspiracy to install the idol of Ram in the Babri Masjid on the fateful night of December 22/23, 1949. The presence of these two leaders, elected to two important Constitutional posts was a tangible and visible blow to the secular Constitution. They were accompanied by Mohan Bhagwat, Sarsanghchalak of the RSS. He made a short speech on the occasion, reciting only a single shloka from the *Manusmriti* in Sanskrit

*From a first-born (i.e, a Brahmana), born in that country*

Let all men on earth learn their respective duties.

The choice of both shloka and text are significant as is the occasion which was an important milestone in the journey of the Sangh Parivar towards its objective of establishing a Manuvadi Hindu Rashtra.

The journey continues to be one marked with violence, deceit and growing attacks on minorities, dalits, women, workers, farmers and the tenets of the Constitution. It is one in which the Sangh Parivar has been

helped by many forces, several of which are outside its immediate fold. It has been helped by the adherence of many, including its victims, to the Code of Manu; it has been helped by many in the administration and judiciary who have betrayed their oath to uphold and protect the Constitution; it has been helped by the political opportunism of many who swore by socialistic and secular principles; it has also been helped by the leaders of the capitalist class and by feudal exploiters who have placed their wealth and the media that they control in its service.

It is also true, however, that this journey has not yet attained its destination and that it is possible to block its way. The strength of popular movements of recent times, especially the farmers' movement, have revealed the depth of popular discontent with the policies of the BJP Government. This discontent is growing and will continue to grow as the BJP resorts to greater attacks on the common people and their livelihood. Anger against the BJP's attacks on federalism and cultural diversity is also growing. There is growing apprehension among many sections of society that their basic rights are under threat. The challenge is to bring all this discontent, anger and opposition together to thwart the onward march of the Sangh Parivar. This can only be done if an ideological exposure of their agenda can be made in a way that is convincing to those discontented, angry and in opposition to their policies.

Like other fascistic forces, the Sangh Parivar tries to blame the minorities for the unemployment, poverty, hunger and insecurity that is plaguing large sections of people. It incites violent attacks on these minorities in order to shift attention away from the real reasons for these problems and its inability to deal with them effectively because of their class policies.

As Aijaz Ahmad says, "They raise, in other words, the issue of mass misery only to suppress and willfully misrecognize the sources of that misery. The real alternative is to speak precisely of that misery, to make manifest the causes of that misery, to present a credible and comprehensive answer to that misery."

This is the task that all those opposed to the Manuvadi Hindutva project of the Sangh Parivar must undertake. It is the Communists who have to take the lead and play an important role because it is they who are uncompromisingly opposed to all aspects of this project – economic, social and ideological. The true significance and the true horror of the 6 December demolition has to be understood widely by workers, farmers, women, dalits, adivasis, minorities and all those committed to a secular, socialist democracy as not only an attack on a place of worship but as an attack on their hopes for a just and equal society.

## NOTES

1 This account is based largely on “Ayodhya, the Dark Night” by Krishna Jha and Dharendra Jha.

2 *Based on articles by Arun Anand in ‘The Print’ of August 4 and 13, 2020.*