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The Battle of Kishanganj!

A defeat in an election is part of the game. One should take it in one's stride. But my defeat in Kishanganj raises questions which every Muslim political activist must sit up and seriously consider.

My defeat resulted from the ground reality of total communalisation and consequent polarisation between the BJP and the JD, with the latter under the leadership of Laloo Prasad Yadav being recognised by the Muslim electors as the sole 'protector' and defender of the Muslims against the BJP! This left no space for any third candidate to operate.

In a tactical sense, the Muslim voters of Kishanganj, a sensitive border constituency with 60% Muslim majority, spread over the three districts of Kishanganj, Araria and Purnea, acted on **my** advice to the secular voters all over the country to vote for the strongest candidate against the BJP, rising above all other considerations. So they rose above all considerations and voted for the JD candidate Taslimuddin, whom they perceived as the strongest candidate - with the backing of his sub-community, the support of the JD and of its leader Laloo Prasad Yadav and the requisite muscle and money.

In the process they forgot that the battle against the BJP does not begin and end in May 1996 nor is it limited to Kishanganj. The war began with the foundation of the RSS and is being fought all over the country, on many fronts political, parliamentary, academic and mass media by many progressive parties, organisations, associations and individuals. But it is futile to expect the politically simple and generally illiterate people of Kishanganj to have this wide perspective or to take in the whole phenomenon in their calculation.

My defeat, they do not realise, is the biggest victory, the BJP could have hoped for; as a BJP spokesman said in Kishanganj; Shahabuddin's voice has to be silenced for our objectives to be fulfilled and, therefore, it made an all out effort to defeat me.

There is a positive aspect in this communal polarisation. The difference between the Barelvis and the Deobandis was kept aside; the conflict of interest among the Kulahyas, the Bengalis, the Bhatias and the Shaikhras was swept away; the commitment to other political parties was forgotten - in a massive, frenzied move to defeat the BJP which had won 2 Muslim majority assembly seats in 1995 Elections due to division of Muslim votes.

The polarisation of Hindu votes, was a natural consequence of their 'minority' status. The BJP campaign was marked by a low profile, inactivity to the point of dullness but borne on the wings of an underground 'religious' crusade symbolised by distribution of 'Supari' and 'Sindoor' through door to door visits in the darkness of the night. The BJP also played the usual game of extending financial support to other Muslim candidates, inflating their 'football', wherever necessary, supplying oxygen when at the point of collapse. Ironically, the BJP also propagated its second tactical line of possible support to Shahabuddin as a good man, if Taslimuddin, the bad man, appeared to have an upper hand, thus further alienating the Muslim voters from Shahabuddin. BJP has many tricks in its bag and played all as it realised that it can only win the seat, if the Muslim vote was divided and the Hindu vote was consolidated. But Shahabuddin's defeat was its primary goal - no matter who won!

How to explain the rejection of Shahabuddin, a sitting member, by a Muslim majority Constituency in his home state? Can any general inferences be drawn from this episode?

Everyone admitted that Shahabuddin was by far the best candidate: A man of integrity, in more than 10 years of association with the people of the Constituency he had not taken a paisa from any one, neither in the name of Sifarish or Pairvi, nor as percentage or commission from contractors or engineers, nor as 'rangdari tax' or forcible donation. Shahabuddin in his parliamentary and public activities had become identified with Kishanganj and had given the people of Kishanganj an identity, a sense of pride, and brought Kishanganj international recognition and the gratitude of the entire community all over the country. Shahabuddin had not made any distinction between the Hindus and the Muslims of his Constituency, had served them all equally and treated Hindu-majority Panchayats and marginalised Hindu communities like Rajbanshis and Dalits with special care. Shahabuddin had always rushed to resolve communal situations and Hindu-Muslim disputes by timely intervention and by evolving a just and mutually acceptable solution and kept communal peace for 10 years despite all sorts of provocations by Hindu communal forces, in his Constituency, which was a special target of the Sangh parivar as a 'haven' of Bangladeshi 'infiltrators'.

Yet, Shahabuddin was rejected by the electorate, even after one discounts the pro-JD role of the subservient district administration, particularly the R.O., and the Polling Teams and the placement of chowkidars to guard sensitive booths, the large scale capture of booths and massive stamping/rigging indulged in by the workers of both the JD and the BJP candidates. This raised the poll level to an average of 60% (while no enthusiasm among the electors nor any queues in any booth were visible) and abnormally high 75% and above in a large no. of booths. The R.O. refused to disclose the number of booths with high voting level and the Observers rejected the request for their separate counting. There is also the possibility of substitution of ballot boxes and of cheating in counting

For months before the campaign, the supporters and sympathisers of Asrarul Haque Qasmi, the Dy. S.G. of the A.I. Milli Council and Mohammad Taslimuddin, both vying for Laloo Prasad's favour had launched a whole series of lies among the people.

* **That he is a Panchhma, an outsider and therefore, not readily available; he is a 'Qadiani' and a 'Samdhi' of L.K. Advani!**

The facts are that I do not belong to Kishanganj but have intensive contacts with the region since 1980 when I took up the case of the Bhatias for recognition as citizens; that rein or shine, I have visited the Constituency for 7 days, regularly every other month, to visit any village affected by fire or flood and all development sites, to meet the people, to take note of local problems and

grievances, to monitor the progress of central and state Schemes and to discuss them with the block officers (all 13 Blocks) and the district administration (3 of them), subsequently to take up in writing the petitions or applications received from individuals with the block/ district authorities, the state and the central governments. Perhaps no other M.P. has travelled as widely in the Constituency on foot, wading through streams and rivulets, on bullock carts, cycles, motor cycles and jeeps, in dust or heat. Thousands of letters from the Constituency were replied to, sometime by hand.

* **That no development had taken place during the last 10 years.**

The fact is that the systematic approach had paid off and it was admitted that more development (keeping the financial constraints of the State Government in mind) had taken place in this Constituency in the last decade 1986-1996 than in any earlier period. Every paisa of the MP's Fund or the LDAS grant was used beneficially. Yet no legislator, MP or MLA, can substitute for a State Government, which ever pleaded financial crisis for not meeting even the minimum needs of the people in terms of education and health, roads and bridges, relief and welfare.

* **That he had no time in Delhi for visitors from Kishanganj and had been rude to them.**

In fact during the last 5 years, hundreds of visitors from Kishanganj were helped and assisted, even financially, if in difficulties. But some real or imaginary incidents from the past were systematically propagated. No doubt, by virtue of the status accorded by the voters of Kishanganj, I operated on a much wider horizon, responded to situation all over the country, brought out a research journal, wrote articles and letters to the editors, took up the grievances of the minorities and the other downtrodden sections , visited sites of mass violence, to the neglect of my own health and family responsibilities. I have no hesitation to admit that I had no time for gossip or small talk or for hospitality but only for business and that I do tend to lose patience. During the campaign I was touched by the voluntary declaration by various electors on the positive and fruitful help or assistance rendered by me or my office in Delhi to those who came to us with any problem.

Yet my defeat has a lesson for those for whom politics is not an end in itself, nor is a seat in the Parliament. In the present system, with a majority of the electorate being illiterate, unable to distinguish between the Executive and the Legislature and, therefore, capable of making all sorts of demands on local MP/MLA and with use of unlimited money power and muscle power during elections, it is difficult to maintain a balance between the private demands of your electors and the public demands on your time and energy as a national legislator, to benefit only the people of your Constituency and to work for the people of the country as a whole or even a section thereof, scattered throughout the country. There is a contradiction between the local role and the national role - a gap it is difficult to bridge. Perhaps either you have to be in the Government (to get things done) or shift your Constituency in every election!

I lost, secondly because of my inclination to trust all those who had worked for me during the last 5 or 10 years and leave the organisation upto the booth level to them and my consequent inability to cope with last-minute desertion and treachery I was particularly anguished by the organised hostility of Mr. Azeemuddin, a former JD Minister, who neither supported his party candidate nor me, a family friend, but a third person! I still fail to see his logic. I had to depend wholly on strangers some of whom were double agents, most of whom were mercenaries, rejected by the JD/Congress(I) or even Mushtaq, who offered much better emoluments for election work. In any case, a few exceptions apart, there was hardly anyone local working with a commitment to the cause; **like Laloo Prasad Yadav, they had all turned into 'Gowalas', out to milk the electoral machine!**

As a Muslim, I believe in the Will of Allah. I worked as had as it was physically possible for me - harder than in any election in the past - yet I did not win. Had I won, I would have thought that Allah willed me to continue to work on the parliamentary front; I have lost. Perhaps He has chosen another front for my exertions.

Yet I must admit that my faith was not strong enough. I began believing in 'omens' as sign of Divine Will. Asrarul Haque Qasmi did not the JD ticket, Md. Mushtaq did not get the Samajwadi Party ticket; the Congress party did not put up Rafique Alam but a very weak candidate; the stupid and unnecessary, perhaps malafide, objection to my voters' certificate raised by the R.O. was resolved in time, the digit 5 was particularly propitious for me!

In rejecting me, the people of Kishanganj have not covered themselves with glory; It is a disgrace for them, not for me. My rejection is my liberation from the moral bondage of commitment to them. I have before me the prospect of broadening my horizons, getting out of the narrow grooves of community (not communal) politics, striking out in a new direction and adding a fresh dimension to my experience (after all I have nearly completed 20 years in politics), perhaps taking up writing. I have been twice out of Parliament but have continued to work usefully.

But my experience has also a sad lesson for those who are prepared to sacrifice themselves for a cause. **At the end, you are alone; no one cares a dime; no one has a tear to shed, it is a thankless task; it is like ploughing in the ocean.**

Yet the cause - the cause of Social Justice, the Cause of Equality and Dignity for All - matters. Human beings fail; situations fail, circumstances differ, but

* No one is the last man in History.
* The Battle goes on.
* The Cause is Supreme.

A Just Cause will ever inspire some one, somewhere, to work for it, without wanting any return, without expecting any appreciation, without asking for gratitude.

This is my hope.

New Delhi
10 May, 1996

(SYED SHAHABUDDIN)

BJP: Election Manifesto, 1996

An Agenda for Change

... We will abrogate Article 370 of the Constitution, which puts Jammu & Kashmir on a separate and separatist pedestal, for the State's full and final integration with the Union. ...

The BJP is committed to Article 44 of the Constitution. We will adopt a Uniform Civil Code which will be applicable to every community and foster a common Bharatiya identity, apart from ensuring gender equality. Regressive personal laws will cease to have legal validity.

Shri Rama Mandir at Ayodhya

The BJP is committed to the concept of one nation, one people, one culture - our nationalist vision is not merely bound by the geographical or political identity of India, but defined by our ancient cultural heritage. From this belief flows our faith in 'Cultural Nationalism' which is the core of Hindutva. That, we believe, is the identity of our ancient nation - Bharatvarsha.

Hindutva is a unifying principle which alone can preserve the unity and integrity of our nation. It is a collective endeavour to protect and re-energise the soul of India, to take us into the next millennium as a strong and prosperous nation. Hindutva is also the antidote to the shameful efforts of any section to benefit at the expense of others.

We hold that only by recognising the limitless strength of **cultural nationalism,** can the nation be moulded. When the BJP joined the movement for the construction of the Shri Rama Mandir at Ayodhya, it was to strengthen just these foundations.

On coming to power, the BJP Government will facilitate the construction of a magnificent Shri Rama Mandir at Janmasthan in Ayodhya which will be a tribute to Bharat Mata. This dream moves millions of people in our land; the concept of Rama lies at the core of their consciousness.

Foreign Policy

... Pakistan continues to follow a policy of fomenting insurgency, seeking to create instability and unrest in India. The BJP stands committed to thwarting all these attempts. In this context, we state:

(a) The BJP affirms unequivocally India's sovereignty over the whole of Jammu & Kashmir, including Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir; and

(b) The BJP declares that it will not accept any interference in our country's internal affairs.

In our relations with Bangladesh, illegal immigrants into India from that country has proved a major irritant. This issue has cast its shadow on our bilateral ties and needs to be resolved early. ...

Jammu and Kashmir

The absence of political farsightedness and clarity of national objectives has resulted in our nation continuing to have to pay a price even 50 years after Jammu & Kashmir became a part of the Republic. The failure of successive Congress Governments to formulate a Jammu & Kashmir policy that takes into account the State's internal problems has led to a situation where this strategic border State has emerged as the principal challenge to Indian nationhood. The BJP realises the magnitude of the challenge and dedicates itself to the task of not only solving the internal problems of the State but also reclaiming the portion of our territory which has been illegally held by Pakistan for nearly five decades. Without repeating the mistakes of yesteryears and merely reacting to Pakistan's moves, we will:

1. Immediate strengthen the civil administration by inducting able and honest administrators;
2. Provide a free hand to our security forces to deal with the menace of terrorism and induction of men and arms from Pakistan, while ensuring that democratic rights are not violated;
3. Cleanse the local police and administration of malcontents who have aligned themselves with the terrorists or are pro-Pakistan;
4. Declare Doda a disturbed area and invoke the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act to prevent this district from becoming a haven for mercenaries and terrorists;
5. Launch a massive welfare programme for all regions of the State and ensure there is no seepage;
6. Hold free and fair elections in the State after terrorism has been brought under control and every person, including the Pandits who have been forced out of the Valley, is provided with an opportunity to participate in the polls;
7. Rehabilitate all persons displaced from terrorism-afflicted areas of Jammu and Kashmir; and
8. Set up regional councils for Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh.

Illegal Immigration: Demographic Invasion - A Threat to Our Security

We believe that illegal immigration from our neighbouring countries, especially Bangladesh, has a direct impact on our nation's security and has an unsettling effect on our demography. Given the sheer dimension of numbers - there are as many as 1.7 crore illegal immigrants, the bulk of them Bangladeshis, living in various parts of the country - illegal immigration is not only transforming the geography, but the sociology, the economy, indeed even the politics of this country. India is facing an explosive issue. If our demographic balance is

allowed to be disturbed by inept policies and political considerations, various demographic entities are bound to come in conflict, thus adversely affecting our security environment. The invasion of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh has led to an alarming growth in a section of the population in our North-East, in Assam, in West Bengal, parts of Bihar and Delhi. In certain areas, a section of the population has grown by almost 100 per cent.

The BJP proposes to:

1. Complete barbed wire fencing along the India-Bangladesh border, beginning with the plains, to prevent infiltrations.
2. Detect illegal immigrants, delete their names from voters' lists and arrange for their deportation without any further delay;
3. Declare all property deals between Indians and illegal immigrants as null and void;
4. Amend immigration rules and other laws to impose stringent checks on illegal entry into India; and
5. Expedite the issuance of identity cards to all citizens of the country.

... Enact a law that will debar those with more than two children from holding elected office, with 1996 as the cut-off year. ...

Our Minorities

Wherever and whenever the Bharatiya Janata Party has been in power, it has ensured peace and security for all sections of society, irrespective of their religious identity. The BJP is committed to further strengthen this achievement. This is in stark contrast to the insecurity faced by minority communities under Congress rule. We have been steadfastly opposed to appeasement as state policy since it benefits only those sections which profess regressive and retrograde social norms in the guise of protecting their religious beliefs. The BJP will be guided by its policy of "justice for all, appeasement of none". A resurgent India will enter the 21st century with the resolve of one nation, one people and one culture. To achieve this goal, we will:

1. Guarantee all minority communities equal opportunity for economic development;
2. Lay stress on education and vocational training;
3. Provide incentives to those who are self-employed, especially artisans, and those who want to set up their own business enterprise;
4. Launch community programmes to create awareness among women members of minority communities;
5. Ensure equality for all and discrimination against none on grounds of religion in matters of education by amending Article 30;
6. Disband the Minorities Commission and entrust its responsibilities to the National Human Rights Commission;
7. Set up special courts for speedy trial of those accused of participating in communal riots;
8. Protect wakf property from being usurped and misused by unscrupulous individuals and organisations and help wakf boards to become self-sustaining bodies so that they do not have to be dependent on Government doles;
9. Set up trusts along the line of the Tirupati Temple Trust with official nominees for managing the affairs of dargahs;
10. Ensure that no religious property is misused or usurped;
11. Ban all foreign funds irrespective of the organisation which is the recipient;
12. Make fraudulent conversions, including those done by holding out the promise of economic or social benefits, a punishable offence and introduce a system of registering all conversions;
13. Ban the publication of job advertisements that mention religious identity as a criterion; and
14. Set up a Commission of Inquiry (similar to the Neogi Commission) to inquire into the activities of foreign missionaries and other organisations that have been receiving foreign funds. ...

Shahabuddin's Letter to Chandra Shekhar On Bhondsi Conclave, 20 February, 1996

I thank you for including me in the invitation list for the proposed meeting at Bhondsi on 24-25 February, 1996. However, I find that the meeting is co-sponsored by a prominent leader of the Sangh Parivar. In my view, the Sangh Parivar has been constantly endeavouring, in various ways, to obtain respectability, overlooking its pernicious ideology. At least for them, the Bhondsi meet appears to be a part of such an exercise.

You are aware of the deep respect I hold for you and while I am at your personal back and call at any time, I regret my inability to join you at Bhondsi for this meeting.

(Contd. from page 202)

Movement Coordination Committee (BMMCC) which amounts to 'rabble-rousing' or 'shrieking and crying'. From the very beginning, the BMMCC adopted the strategy of peaceful and democratic agitation in support of its demand for 'settlement by negotiation or by adjudication'. Can anyone find anything wrong with this demand? The only alternative strategy was to remain a silent spectator and to let Hindu chauvinism sweep all historical mosques away, as it indeed intended to. It is easy to be wise with hind sight! I do not recall any advice by Mr. Malik to the BMMCC between 1986 and 1992 to change its course or its strategy or its demand or even to forget about the Babari Masjid or to sign it away!

BJP: Sangh Parivar's Appeal to Voters to Defeat Anti-Hindutva Forces

... The country's unity, integrity, sovereignty and security are beset with dangers from all sides. Pakistan's ISI has spread its tentacles far and wide and is building up caches of arms ad ammunition at various places in the country in a big way. This has led to bomb blasts at several places.... Insurgency is raging throughout the Kashmir Valley and ... approximately three hundred thousand Hindus (have been) chased out of the Valley...

... Since a majority of the Muslim masses continue to be in the stranglehold of extremist mullah-moulvis they hardly accept any restriction for population control. As a result, in India the population of Muslims as compared to that of Hindus is increasing 8% faster. Again, infiltration by Bangladeshi Muslims continues unabated. A number of border districts have since become Muslim-majority areas which, incidentally, have turned into smuggling dens for illegal arms and narcotics...

The Christian Church rooted in foreign lands has been expanding its evangelizing activities... The Church from beyond the seven seas has made India its special target. In pursuance of the same policy the Christian institutions are agitating to wangle the facilities of reservation meant for the scheduled castes for the dalits who are converted to Christianity... It will cut into the quota meant for the scheduled castes belonging to the Hindu society and will increase conversion among them. ...The country's worrisome condition is the result of India's politics being divorced from the pure indigenous Hindu nation. For 2500 years the word Hindu has been used to describe this people's nationality. Every person who regards this land as his mother, its heroes as his ancestors and this culture based on unity in diversity as his own is a Hindu, a national of this land irrespective of his mode of worship. Recently the Supreme Court has once again accepted Hindutva as a liberal, all-assimilative way of life... The nationalist people of this land... failed to be fully conscious of their right to vote in a democracy. As a result they had to bear the cross of an anti-Hindutva political leadership...

The coming election is going to be a test of to what extent our countrymen have grown vigilant and enlightened with the right appreciation of Hindutva. **We, therefore, appeal to you with great feeling that you too should contribute your time and mite to the fullest in this popular awakening which actually is God's work, so that our politics eclipsed by anti-Hindutva thinking can come out and shine forth.**

The hopes and aspirations of countless heroic men and women and martyrs who made all kinds of sacrifices, performed brave deeds and laid down their lives for India's freedom, have not yet been realised. Let us all come forward to fulfil their unfinished mission and perform so brilliantly in the coming elections that we may have the privilege of witnessing the dawn of national resurgence.

Rajendra Singh,
Sarsanghchalak, RSS
Usha Chati,
Pramukh Sanchalika,
Rashtra Sevika Samiti

V.H. Dalmia,
President, VHP
Jagdevram,
President, A.B. Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram

RSS to the fore?

Editorial, The Hindustan Times, 11 March, 1996

... Freed of any inhibition in the espousal of its basic tenet, thanks to the Supreme Court verdict that it is not communal, the RSS has chosen to combine cultural nationalism with national security as the main plank to aid the BJP's prospects... The Pratinidhi Sabha... appealed to ''Hindus in general and Hindutva workers in particular'' to mobilise support only for those parties and persons ready to fight the perils confronting the nation, drawing ... inspiration... from their belief in the cultural content of Hindutva. Though the BJP was not mentioned by name, the exhortation to work for a state for ''our Hindu society embracing all sections'' made it clear which party qualified as a repository of patriotic values. The appeal... formed an integral part of the RSS annual report presented by General Secretary H.V. Seshadri...

The shift of the venue of the meeting from ... Nagpur to Lucknow... underlines the stakes... for the BJP in the State. It is meant to shore up the upper caste support base of the BJP, which may have suffered some erosion because of the ... advocacy of the backward caste interests as a fallout of the Mandalisation of UP politics. The presence of the representatives of all front organisations, including the VHP, the HMS and ABVP, suggests the resolve of the RSS to deploy its massive manpower to make an all-out bid to spur the BJP's march to Delhi...

How far the active canvassing of the RSS, which has chosen to shed openly the garb of a ''cultural organisation'', will help the BJP in retaining the support of uncommitted and liberal... voters, who turned to it out of disgust with the Congress brand of politics, is a moot point....

If Mother Teresa really wants to serve humanity she should stop converting Hindus to Christianity.

- Nischalananda Saraswati Maharaj, Shankaracharya of Puri

JD-SP-CPI(M)-CPI-RSP-FB Platform for Secular Democratic Alternative

Introduction

The country is faced with an all-round crisis due to the policies pursued by the Narasimha Rao government and the divisive communal politics of the BJP.

The economic policies of the Congress(I) government have eroded economic sovereignty, provided a bonanza for big capitalists and foreign multinational corporations and heightened the sufferings of the people.

The BJP by pursuing its communal agenda poses a threat to the secular fabric of our society and national unity. Equivocation by the Congress(I) on secularism and the BJP's enthusiastic advocacy of liberalisation have brought out their proximity.

Together both these parties have institutionalised corruption in the highest echelons of power as seen by the record of their governments. The hawala transactions have exposed not only high level corruption but also collusion with anti-social and anti-national elements.

The discrediting of the Congress(I) and the BJP in the eyes of the people has set the backdrop for the most significant elections to the Lok Sabha in recent times. The people want to replace the present government with an alternative which is secular and democratic.

It is the forces representing the secular, democratic and left opposition which can present a coherent and effective alternative to both the Congress(I) and the BJP.

The National Front-Left Parties, the Samajwadi Party and their allies today stand for preserving national unity, unalterable progress towards social and economic equity in all spheres, defence of human rights, with their commitment to the values of secularism, federalism and social and economic justice. it is this alternative which the people aspire for national rejuvenation.

Social Justice

Empowerment of the deprived and underprivileged segments of the society through reservations in public employment, education and other departments of social life shall be effected. The reservation of 30 per cent elective posts in local bodies for women will be extended to union and state legislatures.

Steps will be taken to ensure increased avenues in public employment and education for them. Measures will be adopted to promote and ensure gender equality in property and conjugal rights.

Secularism

Attempts of communal forces to erode the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of our society will be strongly resisted. While deploring the winding up of the Srikrishna commission enquiring in Bombay riots, steps will be adopted to hold enquiry in these riots and the guilty will be punished.

Stringent steps will be adopted to implement the places of worship act. The contentious issue of Babari mosque-Rama Janmabhoomi temple will be resolved by referring it to the supreme Court under Article 138(2) of the Constitution.

Freedom of all religions will be guaranteed. Religious minorities will be assured enjoyment of the fullest protection and opportunities to pursue their religious beliefs and develop their religious, social and educational institutions.

Uniform or common civil code will not be enforced on any community against its will. Gujral Committee recommendations on Urdu will be implemented. Legislation will be enacted to prevent use of religion in politics.

A Humane Society

Right of elementary education will be made a fundamental right. Prasar Bharati act will be implemented. Electoral reforms bill and bills for judicial reforms introduced by NF government in 1990 will be adopted.

Indian penal code will be reviewed to remove all provisions which violate human rights. UN Conventions on torture and refugees will be adopted. All states will be required to appoint human rights commissions.

Jammu and Kashmir

The Jammu and Kashmir problem will be resolved on the basis of autonomy. Article 370 of the constitution will be respected. Free and fair democratic elections will be guaranteed.

Appeal to Like-minded Parties

India is in the midst of a major transition in economic, social and political life. It is a transition which should be guided by the principles of democracy, secularism, federalism, socialism and social justice. The ethos of our humanist traditions and the aspirations of independence struggle would inspire it. In the building of this new India of equality, justice and fraternity we seek the fullest participation of like-minded Parties and groups. The common approach outlined above is recommended to all of them for adoption jointly with us.

(Source: The New Age Weekly, 21-27 April, 1996)

(Contd. from page 200)

religion, language or caste for any purpose. The minorities have equal rights in this country and these rights must be protected and promoted in every manner permissible under the Constitution.

4. "Adequate safeguards and incentives to promote the education of the minorities as laid down in the Constitution of India".

(Source: The Radiance Viewsweekly, 28 April-4 May, 1996)

Election Manifestoes on Minority Issues

Janata Dal

1. Through a constitutional amendment, if necessary, reservations may be provided to Dalit Christians.
2. The JD thinks an independent commission ''desirable'' to provide reservation to certain religious minorities without disturbing the arrangement in place for the backward sections among them.
3. The JD manifesto says, ''The act adopted by Parliament in respect of religious shrine will be fully respected. All disputes relating to religious shrines including Ayodhya dispute will be referred to the Supreme Court to be settled under Article 138(2).

Congress (I)

1. The Congress reiterates its commitment to protect and safeguard minorities and states that there should be no imposition of any change in the personal law of any community.

The party also commits itself to provide them special help needed for their upliftment. ''The Congress will leave no stone unturned to secure the life and liberty of all the people including minorities, the manifesto says.

It has listed various welfare and financial schemes that have been launched for the economic and social development of the minorities.

2. On J&K the manifesto blames the V.P. Singh Govt. for worsening the situation there. It says the Congress believes that elections howsoever difficult are the only way break the deadlock in that state.

BJP

1. As for its dispersion towards minorities, the BJP promises full protection to the rights of minority communities but has ruled out a ''policy of appeasement'' which, in its view, has ''stood in the way of their integration with the national mainstream''. The BJP will strictly adhere to its policy of ''justice for all and appeasement of none''.
2. In J&K, the manifesto talks of separate regional development councils for Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.
3. Facilitating construction of a ''magnificent Ram Temple at Ayodhya''.
4. Abrogating Article 370 of the Constitution to end the special status to Jammu and Kashmir.
5. Introducing the Uniform Civil Code.

Samajwadi Party

Laws shall be enacted to protect the rights of minorities. For the safety and protection of all the sections of society, stringent steps will be taken. Legal action will be taken against those who harm the places of worship of any religion notwithstanding how big and powerful the person. All the places of worship of all religions which are under Archaeology Department and worship has been stopped, will be opened for worship. Legal action will be taken against culprits of Sikh riots of 1984 and the guilty people of riots which broke after the destruction of Babari Masjid in 1992. Those who suffered losses during the riots, will be compensated.

Like UP, the 'Shanti Surksha Bal' will be formed at the national level, in which people from every religion will represent. Srikrishna Commission will be revived for probing the Bombay riots or a new commission will be formed by the Central government. Sufferers of riots will be compensated properly. Misuses of TADA in Bombay and other parts of the country will be probed.

Foreign Policy: A confederation of India-Pakistan and Bangladesh will be formed. The Kashmir problem is complex by Congress rule. The Samajwadi Party believes that after the organisation of India-Pakistan and Bangladesh confederation, the Kashmir problem as well as border issues will be solved automatically.

Indira Congress (T)

1. ''The problem of Kashmir is due to utter lack of appreciation of sentiments and aspiration of the citizens of that area by an unresponsive and unimaginative administrative set up that a sense of alienation has become fairly widespread.

J&K is an integral part of our country and the people of India look upon it as the crucible where secularism, tolerance and unity were born during the most trying times when the partition of India took place. We believe that it is this national character of this region that must be strengthened and fortified so that it continues to remain and example for the rest of the country''.

''The Indira Congress is of the firm believe that this vicious circle has to be broken boldly by adopting policies and postures which on the one hand restore law and order, bring about peace, ensuring the life and liberty of every citizen and on the other hand renounce meticulously the reasons that have led the alienation of the people. This can be brought about openly by a frank and candid dialogue to bring about a truly participative administration which provides an atmosphere for the democratic functioning of the institutions provided for by our Constitution''.

2. To give reservation to ''Dalit Christian'' at par with Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the Indira Congress adopts the ''Dalit Manifesto'' incorporating the rights and entitlement of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes''.
3. Communalism has been the bane of Indian politics and poses the greatest danger to the future of democracy itself in this country. The Indira Congress(T) gives a solemn commitment to the nation it shall fight relentlessly against all communal, divisive and sectarian principles and ideas that are bedeviling the Indian polity today. The party will work to bring about an atmosphere of amity and goodwill among all communities of the country. We are opposed to the exploitation of

(Contd. on page 199)

Samata Party (Shahabuddin Group): Statement on Dissolution, 31 March, 1996

"The Samata Party was born out of Janata Dal in June, 1994 in protest against the maladministration by Laloo Prasad Government in Bihar and the abdication of responsibility by the national leadership. When the Party President George Fernandes, in violation of the Party's Constitution and Ideology and Resolutions of Foundation Conference and National Executive entered into negotiation with the BJP in November, 1995, there was a split in the Samata Party. Our group, christianed as Samata Party(S), then enjoying the support of 8 out of 14 MP's, approached the National Front on 19 November, 1995, for admission to the Front. All the leaders of the Janata Dal as well as those of the Left Front repeatedly reassured us of a positive response. However, the matter was never considered formally by the National Front which has been in disarray since the passing away of its Chairman, N.T. Rama Rao.

Our request was considered by the PAC of the Janata Dal and rejected summarily on 23 March, 1996.

This decision was bereft of all ideological considerations and reflected political vindictiveness at its worst and betrayed the utterly anti-democratic working of the Janata Dal. Apparently on becoming President, Shri Laloo Prasad Yadav has introduced his own characteristic - arbitrary and whimsical - style of functioning in the Party affairs.

On 29 March, 1996, the Election Commission of India decided to recognise the Fernandes Group as the real Samata Party on the ground that it enjoyed the support of 8 out of 14 MP's. The Election Commission was kind enough to express readiness to register us as a new political party. But to register a political party when the election process had already begun appeared to have little meaning and purpose. We have, therefore, **decided to dissolve Samata Party** (Shahabuddin), so as to leave our workers free to join a party of their choice.

I take this opportunity to thank all my colleagues in the Parliamentary Party particularly our leader Shri Chandrajit Yadav and in the National Executive as well as our workers in various States and districts for extending to me their full cooperation and support. I have every hope that all those associated with the Samata Party(S) shall continue to work for strengthening the forces of Democracy, Secularism and Social Justice.

I fervently appeal to the secular voters to rise above religion, caste and party to adopt **TACTICAL VOTING, and support the strongest winnable candidate against the BJP in each Constituency and thus defeat the BJP's game plan."**

Shahabuddin On Kishanganj Contest

On a personal plane, in keeping with my repeated promise to the people of my Constituency Kishanganj, Bihar to contest the next election from Kishanganj and Kishanganj only, I propose to file my nomination in Kishanganj Parliamentary Constituency on 2 April, 1996.

Thanks to the kindness of my old friend Dr. Subramaniam Swamy, President of the Janata Party, I shall be contesting on the symbol of the Janata Party - 'Farmer with a plough within a Circle' (Chakar Haldhar).

In 1991, the BJP was the runner-up in Kishanganj. Therefore, my contest is against the BJP. My political record is an open book. I have consistently opposed the BJP since its creation in 1980 as I consider its ideology to be divisive, anti-democratic and anti-secular. Today for the first time, it has entered the political arena on its own with the claim of forming the next government at the Centre. I, therefore, appeal to all secular parties to extend me their support, and **withdraw their candidates in my favour**, in order to consolidate the secular vote and defeat the BJP in Kishanganj.

New Delhi, 31 March, 1996

Shahabuddin's Views On National Code for Minorities

...The term minorities in the Indian context should be applied to any identifiable social group, whether based on religion, language, caste or race, which at a given decision making level is numerically inferior.

... There are five operational levels in our country, namely, the Centre, the State, the District, the Block, and the Panchayat at which decisions are taken which affect the life of the people living in their respective jurisdiction. Therefore, minorities have to be identified at each of these levels.

Since there are no homogeneous states or districts or blocks or panchayats in the country by any criterion, every religious, linguistic, caste, racial or geographical community in the country forms a pattern of majority in some jurisdiction at some level, and of minority in many other jurisdictions and levels. So every community will be a minority.

What is therefore needed is a National Minorities Code which should apply to all groups of people in all jurisdictions at all levels where they form a minority. The code should apply equally in their favour wherever they have legitimate grievance against the state, the administration, or their neighbours.

In this view of the matter, minority rights emerge as legitimate human rights as applied to groups and entire minority problems in decommunalised.

(Source: Letter to the Pioneer, New Delhi)

Mohammad Sayeed Malik on 'Muslim' Politics

It is an insult to the intelligence of the Indian Muslim community in general, and Muslim voters in particular, that they are sought to be fooled again and again over a touchy issue by a section of their co-religionists who claim to be the community's 'real' well wishers. The phenomenon is not confined to any particular quarter but is almost uniformly spread across the spectrum.

This hypocritical solicitude comes mainly from two categories: those whose irresponsible belligerence in the past had landed the community into the emotional trauma of December 6, 1992 and those who lacked the moral courage to stand up and be counted when it might have made a healthy difference.

In the first category there are the ... leaders of the two ... Babari Masjid Committees; in the second, Ghulam Nabi Azad, C.K. Jaffer Sharief and the other Congressmen whose ostensible community-consciousness seems to be patently misplaced. ...

Azad and Sharief are not known to have made any effort, to say nothing of taking the plunge, to assert their representative positions towards averting the ugly occurrence. Evidently, their personal ambition got the better of them, just as is happening today, three years after the demolition of the Babari Masjid structure.

Were it not so, Azad and Sharief would not have behaved so very similarly in the wake of the December 6, 1992 demolition - and so differently at this point of time. Azad is apparently in two minds about whether an 'apology' to the Muslims by the Congress and its government is called for; Sharief, on the other hand, has swung to the view that the ruling party leadership does owe an apology to the minority community.

Not that Azad does not mention the incident while courting his co-religionists: only that his breast-beating sounds odd, coming as it does so belatedly. Nor, for that matter, does his shrill charge that 'the BJP is the only culprit', carry any conviction. In a different sense, Sharief too seems to have discovered his community-consciousness rather late in the day.

Far from evoking any response or securing Muslim votes for the Congress, this myopic approach comes as an affront to the commonsense and political intelligence of the minority community. The community has made it clear, more than once, whom it believes to be responsible for the demolition and why ...

Congress leaders ... might have retrieved their credibility with the community to which they feel compelled to turn to today, had they just stood up and said a word or two when it was not a sin to do so and when it would not have hurt their individual ambitions. Even after the demolition they could have safely done so in the tone and tenor in which they are trying to do now and rendered a service to their party. Instead, they had put up a pathetic performance at the most crucial moment.

The Union cabinet held its first meeting after the demolition around 6 pm on December 6, 1992. Azad did not utter a word as if it were of no concern to him. Sharief merely expressed his sorrow. The two cabinet ministers, one of them also a member of the Congress Working Committee, did not think it obligatory to tell their colleagues of how the situation of their party and government could be redeemed. On the other hand, the three-and-a-half hours long cabinet meeting saw Makhan Lal Fotedar eloquently assessing the situation and also suggesting the possible damage-control measures. Madhav Rao Scindia supported Fotedar's suggestion that all the BJP-controlled state assemblies should be dissolved and the state governments dismissed immediately. V.C. Shukla wanted only the Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh assemblies to be dissolved. ... Arjun Singh did not speak at the cabinet meeting on that fateful day. It was much later that Singh mooted the idea of the government and the Congress party tendering an apology to the Muslims....

... Fotedar's outspokenness on December 6 eventually cost him his ministerial post. That, however, is a different question. Azad and Sharief might have managed to save their jobs - the latter though only for some more time - but they have forfeited their credibility with the minority community...

Yet when they or their ilk seek to venture into the ... inhospitable terrain, under electoral or any other compulsion, it is undoubtedly going to be a losing bargain for the party to which they belong. As the wise old adage goes, successful salesmanship goes hand in hand with credibility.

(Source: The Sunday Observer, 25 February, 1996)

Shahabuddin's Reply to The Sunday Observer, 1 March, 1996

Mr. Mohd. Sayeed Malik's article ''Muslims Let Down By Co-Religionists'' is an eloquent condemnation of the 'Muslim' representatives in the Government and the ruling Congress but, to balance the record, he also attacks the Babari Masjid Movement for 'landing the community into the emotional trauma of December 6, 1992'. The Babari Masjid Movement came into existence as the Babari Masjid Movement Coordination Committee in February 1986; in October, 1988, there was a parting of ways with the formation of the All India Babari Masjid Action Committee. Basically this was a split between the hawks and the doves. Mr. Malik has criticised the Babari Masjid Movement, as a whole, without any evidence. Can he cite a single statement by the Babari Masjid

(Contd. on page 197)

CPI(M): Politbureau Statement On Need for Third Force , 4 March, 1996

The hawala scandal has so far claimed seven union ministers of the Rao government. Never before have so many central ministers been indicted for corruption. This alone warranted the resignation of the prime minister for presiding over such a corrupt regime. More important, the name of the prime minister himself figures in the case. The fact that for four years, the CBI under the prime minister's charge refused to act is the most serious indictment against Shri Narasimha Rao. The defection of the JMM MPs by bribery is another serious charge which has to be investigated. In the light of the latest directive of the Supreme Court asking the CBI not to report to or receive instructions from the administrative authority in charge of the CBI, the prime minister should resign by the principle of accountability and conforming to elementary standards in public life.

The hawala case has not only exposed the Congress(I) leadership as the fountainhead of corruption but has also devastated the BJP's image. The indictments of its president, L.K. Advani, its chief minister in Delhi, Madanlal Khurana, and other leaders have resoundingly forfeited the BJP's claim to be a party which can provide an alternative to the Congress Equally serious are the BJP's links with the underworld. The arrest under TADA of its Gonda MP, Brijbhushan Sharan Singh, for sheltering Dawood Ibrahim's men has dramatically illustrated this.

The Shiv Sena-BJP government's decision to wind up the Sri Krishna Commission's enquiry into the Mumbai riots is a brazen step intended to cover up their complicity in the anti-minority violence. This is another instance of the BJP's willingness to trample upon the rights of the minorities.

The discrediting of both the Congress(I) and the BJP has created a situation favourable for the Left, democratic and secular forces to rally the people. The Polit Bureau underlined the urgency of sorting out the problems in constituting the third force. The Polit Bureau requested the Janata Dal president to immediately take the initiative to cement the alliance with the Samajwadi Party. The rally organised by the Samajwadi Party in Delhi shows that such an alliance will meet with good response from the people.

(Source: The People's Democracy, 10 March, 1996)

Narasimha Rao wants to see a BJP government ruling the country.

- Kalimuddin Shams,
Minister in the West Bengal Government

Republican Party: Views of Prakash Ambedkar, MP

On Muslim Vote

In fact, the Muslims have to form their own group in order to protect their votes from division. It is upto them to support anyone, even if it is the BJP or the Congress but they must do so in the form of a group, unitedly with all their strength. This is the only way of getting their views accepted.

On Babari Masjid

The Babari Masjid will not be reconstructed on its original site, not even if the Third Force come to power. This is my personal opinion. You need time to resolve any emotional issue. Just like the problem of Marathwada University in Aurangabad. The Babari Masjid question will take time to be resolved. Only when there is proper atmosphere, then the Masjid question will be resolved.

(Source: The Urdu Times, 9 February, 1996)

Collapse of the Front-runners Editorial, The Pioneer, 25 March, 1996

... The very concept of a third front has been flawed from the start. This is because the proposed political entity was based on the fallacy that mere radical rhetoric could bring together such disparate groups as the Janata Dal, Samajwadi Party and the BSP to make common cause with the Left. There was also considerable naivete in the assumption that a mythical rainbow coalition between the Backwards, Dalits and Muslims would force politicians to forget their partisan ends and wage a holy war against the Congress and the BJP. The fact of the matter is that an overwhelming majority of leaders of the proposed third front have scant regard for ideology or principles. Nor do they have even the basic political horse sense to work out limited compromises for the sake of power... The nation may well be grateful that the third front has collapsed before it came to power.

MUSLIM INDIA

Expresses its Grief at the Demise of its Advisory Editor

Professor Rasheeduddin Khan

Scholar. Political Theorist. Academician. Parliamentarian Fighter for World Peace. Social Justice and Secular Order

and

Conveys its deep condolences to the Bereaved family and to all his Friends, Colleagues and Students all over the Country.

May his soul rest in eternal Peace. Amin!

New Delhi
1 May, 1996

Syed Shahabuddin
Editor

Seema Mustafa
On Token Secularism

... After ... Independence ... Kidwais and Azads were replaced **with Muslim leaders having little to no links with the grassroots.** This generation of Muslim leaders depended largely on government largesse and patronage for survival and did more harm than good to the community as a whole. Muslims remained backward, their real problems unsolved while individuals from the elitist families, under Congress patronage, became presidents, ambassadors, governors, head of various minority institutions. **The Muslim Personal Law Board is one notorious example of government patronage.**.. The rampant corruption in the Waqf Board and the Haj Committee - full of government appointees is another. The ghettoisation and intense politicisation of Muslim-run educational institutions is a third.

The demolition of the Babari Masjid woke up the Muslims to their actual state of affairs... The effort now is to see how they can change the agenda for themselves, and how they can ensure that the real issues of the community are addressed meaningfully... At one stage is the initial reaction of anger and hostility which manifests itself emotionally in the kind of demonstrations... against the Congress Party by the Muslims in Bareilly and more recently at Kanpur...

At the second level is a general disillusionment with the so-called Muslim leaders and the clergy and a growing awareness that secularism is necessary for the development and progress of the community as a whole...

At a third level is the hesitant secular and intellectual activity among Muslim liberals which is gaining momentum... In between are the other signals that can retard this progress besides creating havoc.

There is the demand of political parties, led by the Congress of course, for reservation for Muslims. But all political leaders, with one eye on the Muslim vote are falling in line with this demand. Even the so-called secular centrist parties...

Urdu of course, remains a favourite political pastime and is projected ... as an essentially Muslim issue.

There is murmuring of a Muslim president, or at least a Muslim vice-president. The Congress has already appointed Muslims as PCC chiefs in at least two states - the habit of tokenism certainly dies hard.

The BJP has taken full advantage of the recent Congress forays into minority politics... And between the Congress and the BJP it is very easy to forget that the lot of Muslims in India needs to be addressed as a real issue. That nothing has been done, in concrete terms, to improve the lot of the country's largest minority. It is true that the Muslims themselves, particularly those with better education and better means have remained largely indifferent themselves, but now there is a distinct change. And it is imperative that political parties claiming to have the Muslims interest at heart, do not just realise this but address themselves to this very significant change. Secular efforts to promote education, reform, rights within the community must be supported and encouraged. This cannot be done by ... **evolving a real agenda directed towards the growth and development of the minorities.** This approach... will ... help the minorities grow out of their ghettos, and ... deprive the Hindutva brigade of its most potent weapon, namely, minority appeasement... Secularism is the only answer, and a concerted effort by all is required. The state must realise its responsibility. Unfortunately, there is no indication of a change of policy... a change of heart. The president of secular India recently visited the Somnath Temple and "dedicated" it to the Nation. Secularism at work?

(Source: The Asian Age, 13 January, 1996)

Makarand Paranjape
On Religion and Secularism

... We Indians have made a fetish out of the word (Secularism). It is not only included in the Preamble to our Constitution, but is today at the very vortex of a long-drawn political dogfight. The word caries more weight in India than commoner political epithets like liberal, conservative or socialist, which are the usually invoked political self-definitions elsewhere in the world.

Nowhere else will a person proudly declare that he or she is secular. Nowhere else will a Government try its level best to prove 'its secular credentials'. Nowhere else will a major political party make either secularism or its absence its main electioneering plank. Nowhere else would the charge of 'pseudo-secularism' be hurled as the ultimate political abuse upon one's opponents. Nowhere else will a whole civilizational crisis hinge on the conflicting and contrasting definitions of this ... world.

The world itself has come to acquire several shades of meanings in India... A definite connotation of the word, relevant to debates in India, is that it is not just non-religious, but opposed to religion, what my friend, Avijit Pathak, who works at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, JNU, would call 'hard' secularism.

Some go to the extent of alleging that there is a systematic secular agenda to modernity because the latter cannot prevail without a destruction of traditional, religious world views. Gandhi said as much in Hind Swaraj (1909) when he accused modern (Western) civilization of being ungodly.

The hard secularist sees religion as the hothead of superstition, intolerance, and oppression... Fundamentalism is not exclusive to religious, but also extends to secular fanatics who are totally and uncompromisingly critical of religion.

There is also a 'soft secularism'. Normally, a 'soft secularist' would not be necessarily anti-religious, but just non-religious. However, in India such soft secularism has gone even further, implying an equal respect for all religion or sarva dharma samabhava: in fact, an Indian secularist is a religious person who, in the best traditions of Hinduism, is tolerant to other religions. That is the sense in which people consider Gandhi to be a secularist...

(Source: The Pioneer, 3 March, 1996)

Imtiaz Ahmed on Muslim Vote

For nearly four decades, the belief has persisted that Muslims vote en bloc in elections...

There is evidence that in the first three elections, the Muslim vote indeed tended to be monolithic. However, by 1967, Muslim consolidation in favour of the Congress began to break down. Under the umbrella of an elite Muslim formation - the Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat - the Muslim vote split both regionally and among a broad spectrum of political parties left of the centre. Since then, the Muslim vote tended to behave very much life the national vote. It split among a number of different political parties when the national vote was similarly fragmented. It consolidated in favour of a single national party or alliance of parties when the national vote was similarly consolidated. Such a consolidation was most prominent during the 1971, 1977 and 1984 general elections.

After the demolition of the Babari Masjid, the Muslim political opinion in the country was greatly alienated from the Congress for the manner in which the Central Government helplessly watched the demolition. Some even accused Prime Minister Narasimha Rao of complicity with the BJP...

Leaders of Muslim opinion realised that anti-Congressism favoured the BJP, whom Muslims see as their primary enemy. Consequently, long before the 1996 Lok Sabha elections were declared, a section of them started to bring Muslims on to a communal platform. Issues of job reservation for Muslims were raised so that Muslim political support could be consolidated under a common umbrella. Unfortunately, neither job reservation nor the projected threat to Muslim identity in the face of the BJP-inspired campaign for a uniform civil code elicited a unified response. On the contrary, on each of the issues Muslim response varied and remained fragmented.

... Muslims have been greatly affected by the processes of social change and economic development which have been underway during the past three decades. One consequence of this social transformation has been an inversion of the traditional social structure.

On the one hand, the traditional Muslim elite has lost out in both position and power; on the other, the lower groups have done well economically and socially and are no longer willing to submit to the domination of the elite Muslims. One strategy adopted by the elite to dominate the lower Muslim groups has been to prop up communal issues... It worked initially, but gradually these lower groups have begun to see through this game.

... Transformations within the Muslim community have two implications in the context of the forthcoming elections. First, the Muslim vote is not likely to be monolithic in favour of any single political party or alliance of parties. Nor is it likely to be entirely anti-Congress. Wherever a viable third forces does not exist, the Muslim vote will go in favour of the Congress no matter what might be their sensibility about the Congress' role in the demolition of the Babari Masjid.

... Second, Muslim vote will split along caste-class lines with the elite Muslims reverting substantially to the Congress and upwardly mobile backward Muslim groups voting in tandem with similar groups fro the political parties raising the slogan of social justice. Therefore, this election may well explode the myth of a monolithic Muslim vote unless communal trends again reinforce consolidation along community lines.

(Source: The India Today, 30 April, 1996)

BJP: Views of A.B. Vajpayee

I publicly expressed my anguish after the demolition of the Babari Masjid. The demolition at Ayodhya was never a part of either the BJP or the RSS plan of action. There were other BJP leaders, including Advani, who expressed distress.

We have not diluted our stand on Hindutva. In this election, issues such as corruption, national security and criminalisation of politics have come to the fore.

We will try to reach the minorities and explain to them the real meaning of this term (Hindutva).

We have always been dubbed anti-Muslim. The so-called secular parties have been raising the BJP bogey to keep their Muslim vote bank intact. But some sections of the minorities understand us better. Sikhs have been voting for us in large numbers after being exposed to the communal face of Congress during the 1984 riots. In the last assembly elections, in Gujarat and Maharashtra, a section of the Muslims voted for us.

When the Maharashtra Government wound up the judicial commission probing the Bombay communal riots, I was not happy and said so publicly. Surprisingly, many Muslims wanted the commission would up. They felt it would open old wounds.

The BJP has not given ticket to a single Muslim is accidental. In ticket distribution, the chances of a candidate's victory is the main consideration....

(Source: The India Today, 30 April, 1996)

Asghar Ali Engineer
On Muslim Voters

... It is very interesting to note that in the post-Babari Masjid demolition period there has been a great change in the attitude of Muslims. They have considerably sobered down and no longer respond emotionally to various issues as they did before December 6, 1992. They have very well understood that the Muslim leaders raise emotional issues only to exploit them for their political games. They have understood that religious issues are played up deliberately by the leadership and that for such opportunist games and adventurism it is the poor Muslims who pay dearly, not the leaders.

All such emotional appeals are now coolly ignored by the Muslims. Even the appeal for reconstruction of the Babari Masjid does not find much response as it is likely to lead to another disaster. The Muslim leaders also hardly talk about it. They have sensed the Muslim mood. The Shahi Imam and the leaders of his ilk have fallen by the roadside. There is no one even to regret their sorry plight.

It is also heartening that the Muslims in general have realised that their future lies in making sincere efforts to better their plight through educational and economic progress. Many organisations have sprung up in the last couple of years to promote education and economic well-being. Some Muslim intellectuals are also trying to promote social reform, including reform in Muslim personal law...

Thus today it is much more difficult to sway Muslims by throwing some emotional bait before them as the political parties and Muslim leaders used to do earlier. it is, therefore, an important question today which way the Muslim vote will go. One thing is, however, certain. Muslims continue to be deeply alienated from the Congress in general... The Congress will find it very difficult, though not impossible, to induce Muslims to vote for it at the all-India level...

... It is an utterly simplistic proposition that the Muslims have been a vote-bank for any party whether it 'appeases' them or not. Muslim masses have voted very intelligently right from the first general elections in 1952...

There is another myth which also needs to be exploded. It is maintained by some that the Muslims vote according to the firman or fatwa. The Muslims actually vote according to their own perception of the situation and context...

... Much will depend on the unity of the National Front-Left Front combine. If there is a viable unity among them the Muslims might opt for it... But if there is no such unity in the NF-LF, Muslims will vote differently in different States... They may not be any all-India pattern at all. However, what we have stated here refers only to the general pattern. There is likely to be variations according to the credibility of candidates too ...

(Source: The Mainstream, 16 March, 1996)

Wahiduddin Khan
On Prospects for a Muslim Prime Minister

... Today the country is beset by serious problems to solve which new blood is required. And this new blood, according to the predictions of Swami Vivekananda, can be found among the Muslims. On June 19, 1898, he wrote:

I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with Vedanta brain and Islam body.

To put it quite plainly, this would mean having a Hindu President and a Muslim Prime Minister for our great democratic system. Today the formation of such a government has become an inescapable necessity. The Swami's dictum of one hundred years ago would appear to be an ideal proposal in terms of present circumstances. It is not just playing with ideas, it is rather making a cool assessment of the country's present condition. More than 80 per cent of the problems faced by our country today relate directly or indirectly to Muslims. Would not an able and patriotic Muslim Prime Minister deal with them with greater insight and efficiency?

Let us look at what India's most serious problems are, given its central position in a huge chain of Muslim countries stretching to its east and west. The most difficult problem to be solved is that of Kashmir. Then there is the normalization of relations with the West Asian countries, with whom innumerable matters of national interest are at issue. Other problems include securing the support of the issue. Other problems include securing the support of the Muslim members in the United Nations; the normalization of relations with Pakistan, which for us is of prime importance; the establishment of a corridor through Bangladesh to joint northern India with the rest of the country by road or rail, and the formation of a federation of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as a permanent political solution to the problems of the subcontinent, besides the internal normalization of Hindu-Muslim relations, and so on.

Serious problems like these have become obstacles in the path of our progress. Our journey as a nation has reached a dead end. In such circumstances, an able Muslim Prime Minister may effectively lead the caravan of national progress out of its present state of impasse. ...

... Our Muslim leaders ... indulge in wishful thinking. (do not) make an in-depth study of circumstances and then make plans of proven feasibility...

It would be ridiculous to suggest, of course, that a few articles published in the newspapers should suffice for a Muslim to be offered the post of Prime Minister.

(Source: The Times of India, 7 December, 1995)

R.K. Roy
On the Sears of Ayodhya

... The plain speaking by the clergy ... before the UP Governor in Bareilly... that they would not forgive the Prime Minister, Mr. Narasimha Rao, for the demolition of the Babari Masjid, till it is rebuilt, underlines the Muslim psyche.

The Muslim community has never voted unitedly for any political party, but largely lent its support to the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, where it constitutes about 16 per cent of the electorate. The community voted solidly against the Congress in 1977, angered by the forcible sterilisation programme and the party lost every single Lok Sabha seat in the State. And its attitude has remained anti-Congress since 1989 - Shilanyas in Ayodhya. The demolition of the Ayodhya structure anguished it further, although no political party - even Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party or the Bahujan Samajwadi Party - openly supported the demand for rebuilding the mosque. The community is in a quandary now, after the elation in 1993, when with its support... the SP-BSP ... formed the Government in UP

The BJP's strategy of working on the deep anguish within the BSP helped it to part ways... The Muslim community made numerous appeals for a rapprochement between the two, but to no avail. And today the community is confused as never before...

The SP and the BSP are regional outfits but they contend that no Government could be formed at the Centre without their support, making it clear that their options remain open, in case of a hung parliament. Both the parties, in the Lok Sabha poll context, therefore do not project themselves as serious contenders for power...

Understandably the saffron party has the biggest stake in Uttar Pradesh and is proceeding cautiously...

The fact that Ayodhya, Kashi and Mathura issues were sidestepped by the RSS Central Pratinidhi Sabha.. in Lucknow, which gave a call to its volunteers to help pro-Hindutva candidates, demonstrates the post-poll calculations of the Sangh Parivar...

The fact that the Congress which was battered in three consecutive elections in Uttar Pradesh, has been relegated to the fourth position explains why there are fewer aspirants for its ticket... The Congress(T) led by Mr. N.D. Tiwari has lost its momentum and would appear to be sliding down. However, at the district level the impact of the split is more pronounced.The Centre's failure to announce its promised package for Uttarakhand with its 4th Lok Sabha seats has created another situation.

The open call for the boycott of elections by the Joint Action Committee and The Uttarakhand Kranti Dal has created a law and order situation. The state administration will have to deal sternly with the agitationists to conduct a peaceful poll there. All the four seats were taken by the BJP in Uttarakhand in the 1991 Lok Sabha poll, with a leader like Mr. N.D. Tiwari losing to a lightweight.

(Source: The Hindu, 24 March, 1996)

Home Minister Chavan's Statement
11 March, 1996

The Centre would rebuild the Babari mosque at the same spot at Ayodhya **if the Supreme Court gave its opinion that there was no temple prior to the disputed structure.** ... **(Source: The Pioneer, 12 March, 1996)**

Shahabuddin's Reply to Chavan
12 March, 1996

The press has attributed the following statement to you on the Babari Masjid question ''The Centre would rebuild the Babari mosque at the same spot at Ayodhya **if the Supreme Court gave its opinion that there was no temple prior to the disputed structure''.**

The Supreme Court has not been asked nor is it called upon to give an opinion on a question of fact which has got no legal implication. The Supreme Court has asked the Special Bench of the Allahabad High Court to decide of title. The Government is bound by law to execute the judicial order/judgement of the Allahabad High Court or of the Supreme Court in its appellate jurisdiction, on the question, of title.

Assuming that a temple existed on the site some time in the past before the Babari Masjid was constructed in 1528 or even if a standing temple was demolished in 1528 to build the Babari Masjid on that site, there is no law under which the Babari Masjid can be replaced by a temple.

We are, therefore, surprised by your statement which once again as in the case of the misleading reference made to the Supreme Court shows that the Government continue to support the reactionary and illegal stand of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its allies. We, therefore, request you to kindly clarify the stand of the Government in the matter whether it shall be bound unconditional, by the judicial order/judgement on the question of title to the Babari Masjid, which is called the disputed structure by you, and the site on which it is stood.

No More Ayodhyas
Editorial, The People's Democracy,
10 December, 1995

... The remembrance of December 6 requires constant vigilance to be maintained to ensure that the forces of majority communalism do not succeed in the nefarious game of heightening communal tensions by resorting to religious devices to rouse passions. The Hindutva forces are now engaged in an Ayodhya-type exercise at Mathura and Varanasi to foment communal passions...

The growth of the communal danger and the compromising attitude of the Congress(I) to it, are both inextricably connected with the Ayodhya dispute. It is essential, on this third anniversary of the crime at Ayodhya, that the democratic and secular forces firmly demand that the dispute be referred for a judicial verdict... It is an occasion to rededicate themselves to combat communalism in all forms...

Amnesty International: Open Letter to Political Parties on the Occasion of the General Elections, 1996

... India is the largest democracy in the world and one of the strongest and most dynamic political forces in the Asia-Pacific region. It sets an example to other nations with its vibrant press and long-established legal system. Indian governments have often stated their commitment to human rights, and recent positive initiatives include the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission. As India assumes a greater role on the world stage, Amnesty International urges it to take a lead by taking forceful steps to advance respect for human rights domestically and internationally. ...

Human rights violations affect most sections of Indian society, with people from some groups, particularly the socially or economically disadvantaged, being especially vulnerable. In a complex society of approximately 920 million people, speaking dozens of languages and dialects, living in 25 states and seven union territories, not everyone has equal access to justice or an equal chance to be allowed to live in safety and with dignity.

Amnesty International believes that provisions in India's legislative framework that do not conform to international standards and permit human rights violations need to be amended. Amnesty International promotes the rights enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments, which India has also promised to uphold. We therefore urge the new government in India to withdraw limiting declarations made when ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights, specifically those made with regard to Article 22 of the Constitution of India which allow for preventive detention in India. Amnesty International also calls for a review of the laws which derogate from international standards. ...

Amnesty International continues to call for the eradication of torture, including rape, and deaths of prisoners in custody. Some methods used by the police, army and paramilitary forces in the course of law enforcement activities are of concern to Amnesty International as they have led to torture, including rape, and other forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, as well as to extra judicial killings and "disappearances". A.I. urges the new government to review the mechanisms that monitor the forces of law and order, and to strengthen initiatives aimed at ensuring that the forces of law and order are made fully cognizant of human rights concerns and are provided with human rights training.

... Amnesty International calls for clear lines of command to be maintained and full accountability to be ensured at all levels in order to guard against abuse of the powers vested in the police and security forces. Amnesty International also urges the new government to ratify the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, thereby honouring an intention expressed by previous Indian governments.

All past human rights violations and abuses should be investigated as a matter of urgency, in a thorough and impartial manner. Anyone found guilty of perpetrating human rights violations should be brought to justice promptly, giving a clear message that human rights cannot be violated with impunity. ...

Amnesty International urges the new government to continue to seek to ensure that the rights of vulnerable groups of people are protected through the implementation of the standards it has ratified. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Amnesty International also calls on the new government to ratify the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. ...

(Source: AI Index: ASA 20/13/96, April, 1996)

Jalil Andrabi's Assassination Demand for a High-Powered Probe, 31 March, 1996

We express our deep pain and anguish at the shocking incident in Srinagar wherein Jalil Andrabi, advocate and human rights activist of Kashmir, was killed in cold blood in mysterious circumstances after being picked up allegedly by the security agencies on March 9, 1996.

This incident, which has evoked worldwide revulsion, is yet another instance of the brutal suppression of human rights in the Valley.

This strengthens the impression that he government's policy is to throttle every voice of dissent and defiance in Jammu and Kashmir.

In this setting we demand the immediate appointment of a high-powered committee comprising persons of integrity and credibility to investigate into this incident.

Rajni Kothari	Nikhil Chakravartty	Kuldip Nayar
S.K. Ananth	S.M. Bagai	S. Srinivasan
K. Chandramouli	Suhas Borker	N.D. Pancholi
	Sumit Chakravartty	

Resolution of AIDWA National Convention on Equal Rights, Equal Laws New Delhi, 9 - 10 December, 1995

... Six months before the general elections, the slogan for an immediate uniform civil code (UCC) has been raised, as a campaign issue, by the BJP and the so-called Hindutva platform. In response, the platform of Muslim fundamentalists has strongly opposed it and the Prime Minister has also declared the government stand of non-interference. ...

This Convention totally rejects the framework for the issue as sought to be determined by the fundamentalists... Their arguments, either for or against the UCC are limited to a framework of uniformity between communities... They deliberately ignore the crucial aspect of ''uniformity'' within communities i.e., between men and women, whereas we emphasise the latter.

The Convention condemns the propaganda of the BJP for an immediate uniform civil code which is directed against the Muslim community. It protests against its hypocritical claim that it is motivated by concern for women's rights, in this case Muslim women. It is this very political platform which in its earlier incarnation as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Jana Sangh had led the opposition to any reform in Hindu laws leading to an opportunist compromise at the cost of women's equality. It is the BJP which has to share the responsibility, along with the then Congress Government for the unequal position of Hindu women in matters of property, custody, guardianship , adoption, bigamy, etc. Nor has there been any change in its position from those days. Today the BJP rules in many states. It is the largest opposition party in Parliament but it has not taken a single step to ameliorate the legal inequalities and infirmities faced by Hindu women under Hindu personal law. ...

This Convention holds that the BJP demand for the uniform civil code is nothing but a garb for imposing a Hindu code on all the religious minorities, in line with its commitment to establishing a Hindu Rashtra. Its current stance of taking the best of all laws as the basis for the UCC is also flawed, since, as far as women's rights are concerned, the best of all existing laws are still inadequate and full of loopholes and will still be a bad law for women. An umbrella legislation combining existing laws as advocated by the BJP will be nothing but uniformity of male privilege.

This Convention also expresses its opposition to the BJP's attempt to convert the proposition of a uniform civil code into an instrument to impose uniformity on a particular community in the name of national integration or national unity. We believe that it is not uniformity but equality which has to be the basis for national unity and integration. In any case, in every other sphere such as criminal law, there is uniformity. However, the BJP by its rabid communal propaganda against the minority communities, in fact poses the greatest threat to national unity.

This Convention calls upon all women and all secular forces to strongly combat the BJP propaganda on this issue as it is motivated by its hidden agenda of rousing hostility against the Muslim community and thus is harmful for the country, apart from being inimical to the interests of Indian women.

The Minority Fundamentalist Platform

This Convention strongly protests against the stand taken by minority fundamentalist platforms, principally by the Muslim fundamentalists, that interference in personal laws is an attack on the religion itself. This argument is used not only against the concept of uniform laws, but also against any reform within personal law itself. It is this completely indefensible and objectionable stand of the fundamentalists within the community which has resulted in the reality that Indian Muslim men have more privileges in many areas vis-a-vis Muslim women than in any other country in the world, including Islamic countries. In particular, the arbitrary nature of the male right to divorce through the triple talaq system as well as the right to polygamy as practised in India to deeply against the very concept of human rights. This Convention notes that Islamic scholars and Muslim women have argued that the privileges appropriated by Muslim men in India go against the spirit and text of the very religion they seek to protect. It also welcomes the recent conferences held by such scholars which have stressed the need for reform in the personal laws.

This Convention asserts that the present perception of the minority community and some political parties excludes one half of the community, that is the female half. Laws which are oppressive to women are defended by the fundamentalists as being sacrosanct, but practices which are alien to the community and religion are never opposed by them. For instance, the vile system of dowry... Attempts to extend their control over women were also seen in the recent fatwas by certain sections of the clergy prohibiting Muslim women from contesting elections on grounds of being unislamic. Women rejected this call as being an unwarranted interference in their democratic rights as citizens... Just as in the case of the Hindu fundamentalists, those of the minority community also are basically opposed to the concept of women's

rights and dignity which is masked by reference to religious mandates. ...

This Convention disagrees with the position adopted by certain sections of secular forces which seek to downplay the positions taken by fundamentalists in minority communities on gender issues, on the grounds that it will weaken the main struggle against the Hindu communalists led by the RSS-BJP combine. While undoubtedly, fundamentalism of the majority community is always more dangerous, secular principles cannot be defended by compromising with fundamentalists in the minority community. ...

This Convention strongly criticises the total hypocrisy of the Government's stand on non-interference, on the ground that it should come from within the community. This seemingly reasonable position supporting community involvement for change, actually conceals the thoroughly opportunist positions of the government and ruling party of directly interfering in the community in favour of the most fundamentalist and patriarchal forces for narrow opportunist political considerations. ...

This Convention condemns the government and the Congress party for equating minority communities with the fundamentalists. There are important reformist sections within the communities, including women, whose opinions and voices have always been ignored by the Government...

This Convention demands that the Government reverse this policy and mandatorily consult these sections in matters concerning the community... Today, the debate for a uniform civil code and for personal law reform has to be taken out of the realm of communal propaganda. ...

* This Convention advocates a step by step approach to strengthen the common legal ground for women of all communities by bringing in legislations in specific areas with immediate effect. This will provide benefit to all Indian women in important spheres as well as strengthen their unity. At the same time the existing personal laws of all communities need drastic reform to make them more equal. It is a combination of both these efforts which will strengthen at least two essential aspects of gender justice of equality and common laws. This in turn will help women to come closer to their demand of equal and uniform laws for all women in all areas including those at present governed by personal laws.

* This Convention resolves to push forward the frontiers of secular, equal laws by launching agitations for reform in specific areas. For instance, the incidence of desertion and abandonment is increasing in all communities. Apart from the question of maintenance, another important question is that of the property acquired after marriage. At present, in a substantial number of cases the male is the earning member and the female is responsible for the unpaid domestic work, which since it is not measured in cash terms in rarely recognised. The expenditure of the family saved through this work and the dependance of family welfare on it is also not calculated. The property acquired after marriage is considered a part of male earning and is almost invariably in his name. If the marriage breaks or the woman is deserted her share of the property by virtue of her unpaid labour is denied to her. This happens in all communities. What is urgently needed is a law which will guarantee equal rights to women in acquired matrimonial property. This will strengthen the rights of women of all communities.

Another example is that of registration of marriages. At present the only limited form of compulsory registration of marriage is among he Muslim community through a nikkah nama. Women of all communities are adversely affected by the lack of a legal provision for compulsory registration of marriages. For example, the increase in bigamous marriages among Hindus is difficult to prove because of lack of registration.

The question of child marriage in different communities could also be more easily prevented by compulsory registration. Such registration will in no way affect the religious rituals or practices of different communities but would be in the same manner as registration of births and deaths of all citizens of all communities. With the opportunity provided by panchayati raj institutions, births, deaths and marriages should all be registered at the panchayat level. This should apply to all communities.

A third example is that of domestic violence. The incidence of violence within the family is one of the major areas of deep concern to women. At present there is no comprehensive law against domestic violence. Although this would come technically under the purview of criminal law, it actually relates to the family and family relations... A democratic family code needs to be brought on the agenda of Indian women, but as an immediate step, at least one aspect of family relations, that is, oppressive mental or physical behaviour or actions against women within the family, should be taken up immediately as an area for legal intervention.

More such areas can be identified. While joining hands in this struggle for secular laws, women of different communities will have to take the initiative in alliance with male reformers within their respective communities to push for reform in personal laws. While it is true that women's equality would require going far beyond the limited framework provided by laws based on religion, this aspect of reform is an essential part of the

(Contd. on page 216)

Reform of Personal Laws, Yes; Uniform Civil Code, No

With the uniform civil code having become one of the most contentious issues on the social agenda, many women's groups which started out by asking for a common code have rethought and revised their stand to press for a more gradual process of reforms within communities.

A consultation of different women's groups from around the country will be held in the city on March 2 and 3, 1996 to share ideas and work out a minimum agenda for change. This will be presented to different communities for discussion.

Views of Ammu Abraham, Convener, Joint Meeting Organised by the Women's Centre and the Insaaf Women's Commission, 2-3 March, 1996

Women's groups have not been able to speak very coherently about family laws since 1985-86, ever since the Shahbano judgement. Before that... we used to routinely suggest a uniform civil code as part of the feminist demands for crucial changes within the family structure. ... But after the Shahbano judgement, it struck many of us that... we hadn't yet applied it to the real lives of ordinary women, who live in different communities, who come from different classes, who belong to different castes. So some of us began to feel that perhaps something was missing from our starting point - and that something was the concrete experiences and situations of different groups of women to which we must connect our organising principles...

... Shahbano was (not) the first Muslim woman to have succeeded, despite ''backward'' Muslim personal law, in getting a court order passed ordering her husband to pay her maintenance under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code... Section 125 .. is intended to prevent destitution of dependent family members. Under this section, thousands of poor Muslim women had received maintenance over the years without any protest.

Some of the remarks of the supreme court in the case were quite unprecedented and portrayed the Muslim community as a privileged one. The idea that the Muslims are a ''privileged and pampered'' community was picked up and promoted by the Hindutva parties, using the Shahbano case as an illustration. They managed to create a misplaced sense of injustice among Hindus to consolidate a vote bank.

In this way, the terms of the debate about family laws was shifted; the issue was no longer women's rights but the privileges of Hindu males versus Muslim males. Communal politics and the 'demonisation' campaign against Muslims culminated in the demolition of the Babari Masjid in December '92 and the subsequent riots. Many Muslim women ... now perceive the uniform civil code as an integral part of the ideology that threatens the democratic rights of minority communities.

... The majority of women in India do see their communities very much as a part of their identities. You can't get away from that. For example, during the Bombay riots, who was there to protect Muslim women? They suffered along with their community and whatever protection they had came from their community. However, Muslim women certainly see that there is a contradiction between them and the men of their community. That's something that they try to tackle and balance... Criminal acts of violence against women - such as sati, female infanticide, dowry deaths, harassment of wives in the home - must be banned and condemned. Here the law can play a progressive role and force the pace of reform to some extent.

But when it comes to civil matters, which are seen... by most people as being connected to their culture, you have to take women along with you. So we must first learn how women of different communities look at life, ... at their children, ... at their own womanhood, and ... at gender relations. Without this understanding, those who work for social change cannot make much of a difference. Advocating internal reforms is not a passive position. It can work. Take the case of the Christian community. Through a process of consultation within the community in which both women's groups and church authorities were involved, a Christian Marriage Bill was prepared. it is lying in the PM's office awaiting presentation to Parliament.

Within the Muslim community too, there is now a process of questioning and dissent. In fact, there is also an emerging women's leadership - as a result, ironically, of the intimidation they regularly face in the wake of the riots and bomb blasts. ... This gives them a voice in the community and they are being heard to some extent.

Many of them are also studying their religion today. They see Islam as a liberating religion but feel those very aspects have been denied to them, especially in India. We have seen women who are learned in the Koran sharing their insights with other women and holding discussions.

... Over the last one-and-a-half year, the Women's Centre, which supports women through counselling and legal aid, has seen in increasing number of Muslim women coming for help with marital disputes. What is more interesting is that wherever possible, they make it a community issue, involving the jamaat and bringing community elders to the Centre.

... All women's groups agree on joint ownership of property, adequate maintenance, women's right to live in the marital home, protection from domestic violence, and equal rights for women in custody and guardianship matters. Participants are bringing their knowledge and experience of what women ... think about these issues. Based on that, we hope to formulate recommendations for different communities.

(Source: The Times of India, 29 February, 1996)

A.G. Noorani on Muslim Personal Law

... The National Convention of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) in New Delhi, on December 9 and 10, 1995 which adopted resolutions on uniform civil code whose significance has been little appreciated. ...

The existence of a separate personal law does not imply the two-nation theory any more than a separate criminal law in Scotland implies the negation of the United Kingdom. It has its own judicial system, criminal and civil law. Even the Bar is separate - all in a small island. India's is a plural society of continental dimensions. As an authority, G.W. Bartholomew, noted, "It is a common feature of common law jurisdictions in Africa and Asia that systems of personal law apply to various religions and racial communities in respect of certain matters alongside the general common law." India is not the only non-Muslim country to recognise Muslim personal law. So do Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Singapore, to mention a few.

Therein lies the relevance of the resolutions of the Convention of AIDWA. One of them said, "This convention condemns the propaganda of the BJP for an immediate uniform civil code which is directed against the Muslim community. It protests against its hypocritical claim that it is motivated by concern for women's rights, in this case, Muslim women. It is this very political platform which in its earlier incarnation as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Jana Sangh had led the opposition to any reform in Hindu laws leading to an opportunist compromise at the cost of women's equality... Today the BJP rules in many States. it is the largest Opposition party in Parliament but it has not taken a single step to ameliorate the legal inequalities and infirmities faced by Hindu women under Hindu personal laws". ...

A resolution on "Hindu Laws and Women" said, "The Bharatiya Janata Party's constant critique of Muslim personal law and demand for a uniform civil code has sought to obscure the unequal and discriminatory nature of Hindu personal law. Even a recent pronouncement by the Supreme Court in Sarla Mudgal and others versus Union of India and others states that while Hindus gave up their personal laws after Independence, the Muslims have refused to do so. This is, however, far from reality. Hindu laws, in most key areas, continue to be based on various retrogressive features of old and dharmic Hindu law."

... (AIDWA's) Resolution on **"Women and Muslim Personal Law"** is extremely well-informed, makes allowances for religious susceptibilities and helps to crystallise the issues. Moreover, it has an added relevance which transcends the specific problem and relates to Muslims' contribution to the secular ideal, generally.

It has often been said, and with justification, that the Sangh parivar's insistence on a uniform civil code and the persistent anti-secular policy of the state drove Muslims into a shell, as it were, and made them fearful of any reform. An alienated minority is a conservative minority. But this very consideration imposes on Muslim leaders a duty to enlighten the community about the disgraceful state of what passes for Muslim law in India. It is not Islamic law (the Shariat), but Anglo-Mohammedan law. Opposition to a uniform civil code should be part of an effort for the reform of Muslim law.

AIDWA's Resolution on Muslim personal law is... of enormous significance. It rightly points out that there are various schools of the law, each named after a jurist of eminence - Hanafi, Maliki, Shafei, Hanbali, Jafari, not to forget the Ahl-e-Hadith who do not consider themselves bound by any of these schools and rely directly on the Koran and the Prophet Mohammad's percepts which constitute the second source of the Shariat; namely, the Hadith. Incidentally, so does reason, ijtihad, besides consensus and analogy.

The Resolution says: "The Holy Koran is considered as the divine revelation by Muslims and is, therefore, sacrosanct. But the interpretation of the Koran and the Hadith is not. The differences in Islamic jurisprudence are because of the differences in the interpretation by the Imams of these schools of thought. Before going any further let us remind ourselves that these Imams were eminent scholars, and devout Muslims. Would anybody ever say that anyone of them is less Islamic than the other?" This is the spirit of the resolution and the point it makes is simple - why not spurn the illiberal in the schools and, selecting the liberal features from each, move for reform?

The two major blemishes in the law which deserve to be removed immediately are the triple divorce (talaq) and polygamy at whim. The resolution proceeds to discuss both thoroughly and persuasively and concludes: "We demand that those who speak in the name of community, including the Muslim Personal Law Board, the Wakf Boards and the clergy as well as politicians, elected members of the legislatures, should accept: First, we demand an end to the practice of unilateral and arbitrary talaq, in which the consent of the women is not required, holding that it is not Islamic apart from being a violation of human rights. Secondly, we demand an end to polygamy on the grounds mentioned earlier. We also demand reform in the question of custody of children and proper maintenance. These demands can be framed and expanded through discussions."

Four books published last year will help in the discussions. Three of them are by one of India's foremost scholars on Islamic law, Dr. Tahir Mahmood. (Uniform Civil Code: Facts and Fictions, and Statutes of Personal Law in Islamic Countries, both published by India and

Islam Research Council, New Delhi... and Statute Law relating to Muslims in India, Institute of Objective Studies, New Delhi). Also relevant is Dr. M. Afzal Wani's book The Islamic Law of Maintenance of Women, Children, Parents and Other Relatives... Qazi Publisher & Distributors, New Delhi.

The work on the law in Islamic countries contains texts of statutes, their history and analyses. It demonstrates the contrast between reform in those countries and stagnation in India. Also included are the laws in some countries in which Muslims are a minority - Myanmar, Mauritius, Spain, Cyprus, the Philippines, Singapore, Tanzania and Kenya.

Tahir Mahmood points out that "As regards polygamy, a verse in the Holy Koran (IV: 3) says that though one could have four wives at a time, one who cannot treat co-wives with equality and justice should rest content with a single wife, adding that this (monogamy) would be better to keep men away from injustice (or to keep the family limited, as per the interpretation of Imam Shafi'i). The permission for polygamy is thus conditional, not absolute, and can therefore be restricted by an agreement or by the law. Accordingly, the Koranic conditions for polygamy have been enforced and, in order to prevent misuse of the law on this subject, further restrictions imposed in a number of Muslim countries." India can and should follow suit.

Muslim divorce law recognises various forms of divorce - talaq (pronounced unilaterally by the man); Khula (pronounced unilaterally by the wife); talaq-e-tafwid (divorce by the wife pursuant to a stipulation in the marriage contract whereby the husband delegated the power of divorce); mubaraa (by mutual consent); and faskh, tafriq or tatliq (judicial divorce).

He adds: "The Koran (II: 229) allowed a man to pronounce a talaq (revocable during idda (period of seclusion) and leaving room for a fresh marriage after its expiry) only twice in the whole of his life. On the basis of this scriptural rule the jurists had laid down that a third talaq would be final and irrevocable and leave no room even for a remarriage." It was a mandate rule and was abused.

Divorce used to be pronounced freely and revoked, leaving the wife in suspense. Jurists stepped in to declare that the third pronouncement would be irrevocable in order to protect the hapless wife. This was telescoped into one in the triple divorce - three pronouncements of the word talaq resulting in an irrevocable divorce. It is known significantly as talaq al-bida, the sinful divorce. Nearly a century ago Justice Batchelor of the Bombay High Court called it "good in law, though bad in theology". It is this un-Islamic divorce and polygamy, creatures of some jurists and utterly devoid of Koranic sanction, which the Muslim leaders seek to preserve in the name of "Muslim rights", while suppressing the woman's right to divorce".

In 1967 the Supreme Court of Pakistan ruled in Khurshid Bibi vs Mohammed Amin, that the wife is entitled to khula, as of right, if she satisfies the court that it will otherwise mean forcing her into a hateful union. An irretrievable breakdown of marriage, regardless of fault on either side, is good ground for khula or talaq. Section 2(x) of the Dissolution of Muslim Marriage Act, 1939, enables a woman married under Muslim law to obtain a decree for dissolution of her marriage not only on the grounds listed in Section 2 but also "on any other ground which is recognised as valid for the dissolution of marriages under Muslim law". Khula falls squarely within this clause. Why do not our courts enforce it as the Supreme Court of Pakistan did 30 years ago?

As Maulana Abul'ala Maudoodi remarked: "It is a great folly that we have practically withdrawn from our women the right of khula, little caring for the fact that denying them this right, on a footing equal to talaq, is absolutely un-Islamic." This, from the founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami. ...

But by far the most incisive and authoritative analysis was made by none other than the poet-philosopher Iqbal in the lectures he delivered in 1930 under the auspices of the Madras Muslim Association. They were published under the title Reconstruction of Religious Thoughts in Islam.

He noted: "In view of the intense conservation of the Muslims of India, Indian judges cannot but stick to what are called standard works. The result is that while the people are moving, the law remains stationary". His own position was stated unambiguously: "The claim of the present generation of Muslim liberals to reinterpret the foundational legal principles, in the light of their own experience and the altered conditions of modern life, is, in my option, perfectly justified."

(Source: The Frontline, 23 February, 1996)

Views of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

2 December, 1948

"I should also like to point out that all that the state is claiming in this matter is power to legislate. There is no obligation upon the state to do away with personal laws. Therefore, no one need be apprehensive of the fact that if the state has the power, the state will immediately proceed to execute or enforce that power in a manner that may be found to be objectionable by the Muslims or by the Christians or by any other community in India."

"We must all remember - including members of the Muslim community who have spoken on this subject, though one can appreciate their feelings very well - that sovereignty is always limited, no matter even if you assert that it is unlimited, because sovereignty in the exercise of that power must reconcile itself to the sentiments of different communities. No Government can exercise its power in such a manner as to provoke the Muslim community to rise in rebellion. I think it would be a mad government if it do so."

(Source: The Frontline, 23 February, 1996)

Madhu Kishwar on Uniform Civil Code

... Social peace is an absolute pre-condition for strengthening the rights of women. Whenever violence and bloody conflicts come to dominate a society, women tend to get marginalised and their lives become more vulnerable. At such times they are less able to resist their oppression or effectively protest against abuse. As long as the Muslim community continues to face the brunt of riots, as long as they continue to be ghettoised and fell despised and mistrusted, voices of reform within the community will continue to be marginalised and silenced...

Muslim women can be strengthened to fight for their rights as women only when they stop feeling insecure about their rights as Muslims. They will assert their rights as women more vigorously when they do not feel threatened on account of threats to their religious identity. Therefore, all those interested in the welfare of Muslim women ought to focus their energies on building effective communication channels between Hindus and Muslims so that they can resolve their mutual differences directly and amicably and build an atmosphere of mutual trust and peace. This is as much in the interest of Hindus as of Muslims. Those societies where minorities feel unsafe finally end up being unsafe for all. Safety is indeed indivisible, as the example of Pakistan shows....

A genuine democracy must have genuine safeguards against majoritarianism. Those who identify themselves as the majority community must not be allowed to run rough-shod over the sentiments of the minorities even when they are doing so ostensibly in the latter's interest. While one important component of a democracy is majority vote or opinion as the basis for determining policy, an equally important principle in well-functioning democracies is that majorities, no matter how they are constructed, no matter how preponderant, ought not to have the right to make certain decisions that affect minorities such as deciding whether the minority has the right to live within the boundaries of the territorial state, or to make decisions regarding curtailment of the latter's citizenship rights... By imposing a uniform civil code on the unwilling Muslim minority, we would be legitimizing the majoritarian authoritarianism of Pakistani and Bangladeshi politics, as well as that of the Kashmiri Muslim separatists.

... There is an element of crude majoritarianism in the insistence of the Hindu leaders that Muslims prove their loyalty to India. By creating further disgruntlement in the Muslim minority in the rest of India, we will only strengthen the majoritarian politics of Muslim separatists in Kashmir. A secure and confident Muslim community in India is the best refutation of the ... two-nation theory - both as practiced in Pakistan and as being currently exported to Kashmir through Pakistan-trained terrorists.

By resisting reform of many of its outdated social practices, the Muslim community is only harming itself. However, by insisting that the Muslim community be forcibly ''reformed'', the Hindu leaders are harming the entire society because they are using this issue to whip up anti-Muslim hysteria and promoting social strife and violence in the country.

In reality, diverse Muslim communities follow diverse customary practices, depending on their regional, class and caste status... The customs of Kerala or Assamese Muslims, for instance, are substantially different from those of Punjabi or Uttar Pradesh Muslims. By demanding a uniform civil code, the Hindu chauvinist leaders are only facilitating the task of obscurantist Muslim leaders who can then mobilise the diverse Muslim subgroups using the cry of ''religion in danger'', and pretend to lead them as an all-India monolith. Like the Hindu nationalists, the Muslim leaders are also averse to acknowledging that the Muslim community is as rich in cultural diversity as is the Hindu community.

... Most uniform civil code enthusiasts would lose their enthusiasm for a common civil code if it was optional for all citizens, genuinely egalitarian, and actually implemented. If the Muslim leadership in our country were not as shortsighted as they presently are, they would take the lead in the matter and find that the nationalist chauvinists are not really serious about strengthening the rights of women.

In a country like India, where people do not live atomised lives, where community identity (based on caste, jati, religion, language, village and so on) matter a great a deal, social opinion and customs determine social behaviour more effectively than government enacted law.

... The cause of gender justice can best be served by:

* sustained dialogue and discussion within each community as well as among various communities.
* providing viable options to women who feel they are being treated unjustly by their family or their community, as well as for those who simply do not wish to be governed by religious laws.

This latter purpose can be better served by enacting a genuinely nondisoriminatory civil code which is available as an option to any citizen on demand. The nation's secular courts should not be handling cases involving religious personal laws - be it those of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or Christians. Those who wish to be governed by their respective religious laws or biradari norms on civil matters should made their own arrangements and choose proper experts within their community for voluntary mediation or arbitration of disputes. If a group or community has the confidence to command the voluntary allegiance of its believers who wish to be governed by their religious customs and laws, the state or other

communities have no business to intervene, even if the mutually accepted settlement or judgement is not what the state would consider fair or egalitarian. It is important that the community concerned not be able to use the might of the State to enforce the allegiance of those who are unwilling to abide by their community leaders' or biradari elders' rulings and decisions.

Our secular civil courts must not entertain or decide disputes involving personal laws such as the Hindu Marriage or Succession Act nor Muslim or Christian personal laws. The jurisdiction of the secular state starts when a citizen chooses to exercise her option to present her case to be judged under the common civil code. This option should especially be available to persons who feels dissatisfied with the dictate of their community's religious laws or customs. ...

It starts with the realistic premise that in actual practice most people in India - Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, or Christians - continue to govern their family affairs according to their prevailing community norms. The state can do nothing if the women concerned do not approach it for help. Thus, a common civil code, even if it gets enacted, will come into effect only for those who seek its adjudication. However, by presenting it as an option available to any citizen - manor woman - on demand, rather than something forced on unwilling communities, the opponents of reform will have less legitimacy in opposing the enactment of an optional civil code.

Our courts will be freed of their overload to some extent if all those desirous of being governed by their religious or customary laws have to make their own arrangements and cannot demand that our secular courts adjudicate their religious laws. This will make it more likely that those who come to seek protection under the non-discriminatory civil code get speedier justice and better attention from judges. ...

If our civil courts actually begin to offer justice to those who opt for the non-discriminatory civil code, various communities will have an incentive to attempt to provide women with a better deal within customary religious laws, or else they will find women opting for the nondiscriminatory civil code. The availability of this option would create a continuing pressure for reform within each community to adapt their personal laws to be more fair to women. At present too many women are forced into surrendering their rights due to lack of viable options.

A Working Proposal

The broad principles of the code would be as follows:

When one argues that different communities should be allowed to retain the right to decide issues of personal law among believers who voluntarily accept their jurisdiction, one does not thereby imply that women be left at the mercy of men in their respective communities who are allowed to tyrannise women into submission in the name of upholding community customs or religious traditions. No one giving a judgement regarding a case in customary or religious law will have the right to invoke sanctions using the power of the State, or enforce their personal laws through physical violence or even threats of violence... Threatening or administering punishments by any other authority but the country's criminal courts is considered a criminal act and would be punishable as such. Similarly, the enforcement through violence of certain taboos among various Hindu communities regarding who one can or cannot marry would be impermissible. For example, there are a number of instances of daughters being done to death by their own fathers and other male relatives because they dare to marry a man of another case or religion. This power to kill, maim, or cause bodily harm cannot be allowed to biradari panchayats. In case physical violence is used on a dissenting member to ensure submission, the State would treat it as a cognisable offence - even without the person concerned complaining about it.

The common civil code would have to rule out gender discrimination, starting with the rights of daughters, and not just focus on relationships between spouses. For example, a father's will disinheriting a daughter would be considered an invalid legal document under the common civil code. Nor would the secular law courts be permitted to discriminate against women in the inheritance of joint family property - women will be equal co-sharers in their property and daughters have full coparcenary rights.

... When any party to a dispute chooses the civil court, the case must be governed by that person's decision. For instance, if an adult daughter feels aggrieved at being excluded from Hindu joint family property, she would have the option to come to court and demand that property distribution be made according to an non-discriminatory civil code so that her interests are protected. However, if she voluntarily commits herself to some other system of inheritance, and does not approach the court, the courts cannot interfere.

Similarly, a Muslim woman could sue her husband for bigamy through the civil courts if she feels that the Muslim personal law will not give her justice and that for her, it is more important to get justice than to submit to the decisions of her community's religious leaders. Thus, law would not be indiscriminately forced on all but will be applied only when the community is unable to satisfy both the parties in a dispute. This is bound to generate pressure within each community to adapt their personal laws to be less discriminatory and acceptable to resolution by consensus, rather than allowing women to be coerced into self harming situations due to lack of real options.

(Source: The Manushi, No. 89)

Balraj Puri on Uniform Civil Code

... Muslim personal law can be faulted on many grounds but it does not affect any other community. Why do Hindus feel so aggrieved over it? It is argued that it discriminates as it permits Muslims to marry four wives while Hindus cannot do so. If at all it is a privilege, it is at the cost of Muslim women. A graver apprehension, widely whispered and occasionally publicly expressed by many Hindus, is that polygamy - the only known provision of the Muslim law - will enable the Muslims to outnumber Hindus. The first premise of the apprehension that legal provision of polygamy leads to its practice is not substantiated by statistical studies. According to the report of the National Commission on Status of Woman, polygamy is actually less among Muslims than in other communities.

The second premise that polygamy would increase Muslim population faster is logically fallacious. For as number of child-bearing women is constant, many men may not be able to get wives if some of them marry more than one. A large number of unmarried men in any community in no way increases its procreative potential. Evidently four men with four wives are likely to produce more children than one man with four wives. Thus polygamy slows rather than hastens the rate of growth of population. ...

Muslim personal law does need reform... Their present law is not in conformity with the best interests of the community, the requirements of modern times and the spirit of the Quran and the Constitution. (But reform is possible) only after the issues of uniformity and reform are delinked and their legitimate right to preserve their identity and have their own personal law is conceded. This right is inherent in our commitment to a plural federal and democratic polity.

At a time when constitutional, judicial and political authorities are applying their minds in the advanced countries to devise means for the defence of their diversities, voices of uniformity from the political right are threatening the basic character of the Indian polity... The highest judicial authority ... in its non-judicial role, should (not) lend its support to such a threat without realising the widely recognised contradiction between unity and uniformity.

(Source: The Janata, 29 October, 1995)

It's not the common Muslims but the Mullahs and Maulvis who oppose a Uniform Civil Code.

- Atal Bihari Vajpayee

Haryana: Mosque at Narnaul Vacated

In February, 1996, a mosque in Mohalla Dakotan at Narnaul was vacated from the illegal occupation of one Shri Mohan Singh and restored to its original use. The mosque remained under adverse possession for a long time. After the vacation... for the first time the local Muslims offered Namaaz on February 9, 1996, (after) the Board had reached a compromise with the illegal occupant.

... In 1984... the Board filed a suit for possession against Mohan Singh and his licence was cancelled. In 1989, the case was decreed in favour of the Board in the lower court... Subsequently, the occupant went in appeal before the Addl. District Judge, Narnaul... His appeal was dismissed on July 28, 1994. Then (the occupant) went for a Second Appeal in the High Court Chandigarh. It was also dismissed... on 19.1.95 en limine. On the basis of the earlier judgement of the lower court, Narnaul, the Board filed execution petition... on 24.5.1995. After the filing of the execution petition by the Board, the illegal occupant had no way out but to compromise with the Board.

Since the mosque was in a dilapidated condition, the Board has undertaken its renovation...

During 1994-95, as many as 14 mosques at different places were got vacated by the Board.

(Contd. from page 210)

movement for equal and common secular laws.

* This Convention resolves to express active solidarity with women in different communities agitating for reform within their own personal laws.

* This Convention believes that the slogan of equal rights and equal laws is appropriate for the struggle of Indian women for gender justice in the present context of Indian political realities. It calls upon secular and democratic forces including women's groups and organisations to place this positive agenda before the people of this country and to mobilise mass support for it.

Not Uniformity of Male Privilege but Equality of all Men and Women!

Break the present uniform code of patriarchy through equal laws!

Women are also part of the community - Reform personal laws!

Ban the use of religion for political purposes!

Down with fundamentalism!

Strengthen the Secular Forces - Long Live Women's Unity! People Unity!

Strengthen the Bonds Between the Women's Movement and other Democratic and Progressive Movements for Justice!

(Source: The People's Democracy, 17 December, 1995)

Secular Organisations' Joint Memorandum to Government of India On Restoration of the Srikrishna Commission

The action of the SS-BJP ruled Maharashtra government in scrapping the Justice Srikrishna Commission investigating the carnages of December 1992 - January, 1993 reveals a scant respect for the rule of law and a direct admission of its guilt. Above all, the action shows moral cowardice... why else are the politicians who rule Maharashtra afraid of their actions being scrutinised in a court of law?

For a week in December 1992 and ten days in January 1993, a moral and physical collapse in the city's governance and law and order machinery had shattered the average citizen's faith in the system. Local leaders of the Shiv Sena (and in many cases even the RSS and the BJP), instigated by their leader, had led marauding mobs to loot, arson, rape and kill in targetted bastis.

Worse than the violence itself, was the brazen complicity and bias displayed in the conduct of the Bombay police. In the December 1992 round of violence, their trigger happy conduct had killed over 300 persons. Their refusal to intervene while rampaging mobs did their rounds in January - in some case even actively participation in the violence - had forced senior respected citizens to appeal to the President of India to send in the army. The streets of Bombay, in the words of an eminent jurist, resembled the streets of Nazi Germany.

In response to the city and nationwide outcry against the carnage, and to re-establish the people's faith in the system the then Congress-ruled Maharashtra government had then been compelled to set up a judicial commission of Enquiry.

Disbanding this Commission a few months before its report would have been made public robs the public of a legally authenticated document with prima facie evidence against the instigators of the violence. The People's verdict a correspondence report compared by Justices S.M. Dawood and Justice Hosbet Suresh (two retired judges of the Bombay High Court had after recording evidence of over 2,000 persons indicted 81 police officials and a few hundred others).

Many of the findings of this document had been re-affirmed during the examination of witnesses before the Srikrishna Commission. Deposition of members of the public and police severely indicated Shiv Sainiks (two of the rank of MLA) and officials of the Bombay Police. Eighteen police officials had been served notices by the Judge - establishing that a prima facie case had been made out against them.

The decision to wind up the commission is also part of a wider design of the RSS and other wines of the sangh parivar to manipulate public memory and distort the real sequence of events: the mobilisation for the kar seva, the ghantanand ceremonies in many temples of the city hours before the demolition, the demolition of the Babari Masjid, the December riots, the launching of the Mahaartis on December 26, 1992, the January riots (police complicity in this entire period) and finally, the bomb blasts.

The mainline media, by dropping regular coverage of the commission's proceedings and concentrating solely on the coverage of the bomb blast unfortunately fell in line with this design: to only remind the people of Bombay and India of the bomb blasts while conveniently burying the realities behind the Kar seva mobilisation and the riots from public memory.

Many times in the past three years when human rights groups have demanded PUNISHMENT FOR THE GUILTY, the police have sought protection from prosecuting their officials on grounds that the proceedings of the Enquiry Commission were on. Criminal prosecutions against rioters, murderers and rapists, too have not been lodged on the same grounds. Scrapping the judicial enquiry into the carnage of 1992-93 today is nothing short of a design to subvert the due process of law and to shield the guilty. It is, in fact, an undermining of the democratic process itself and bodes ill for the future of democracy in Maharashtra and the country.

Our Demands:

* Reinstate the Srikrishna Commission.
* Preserve evidence with the High Court to prevent it being destroyed.
* Launch criminal prosecutions against the guilty: Members of the public (politicians) and police.

Punish the guilty and re-affirm people's faith in the rule of law and democracy.

Communalism Combat
PUCL
Bombay Aman Committee
Ekta, Majlis
Bombay Sarvodaya Mandal
Nirbhay Bano Andolan
CPDR
Nari Kendra
Entre for the Study of Society Secularism

On Religion and Fanaticism

"It is the democracy of India that democratised the religion. It has liberated the religion from the dogmas and fanaticism. It is the democracy and democratic values which allowed the sprouting of different religions from within a religion. Its democratic values imbibed in the minds of Indian which allowed the pro-creation of religion and sects (sic) from within the religion. It is the peerlessness of Indian religiously (sic) that in the minds of Indians that the imported religious (sic) like Mohammadanism (sic) and Christianity have also developed in the Indian way."

- Chief Justice, Delhi High Court, M.J. Rao

Citizen's Committee Memorandum to Government of Maharashtra for Restoration of Srikrishna Commission, New Delhi, 29 February, 1996

The Shiv Sena-BJP Government in Maharashtra suddenly scuttled the Srikrishna Commission probing the Bombay riots on January 24, 1996. This is a grave attack on our secular values and democratic institutions, and makes a mockery of the rule of law. The Commission was scuttled as it was closing in on the guilty leaders and party workers of the ruling-combine. With this the process of identifying and punishing the guilty has received a serious setback.

The independent People's Tribunal findings and newspaper reports on the Bombay riots of December 1992 and January 1993 have clearly established the direct involvement of the Shiv Sena cadres and Sangh parivar in inciting and organising the riots. The role of the police and the administration during the riots was also blatantly partisan. The then Congress Government cannot be absolved of its complicity.

The Bombay riots had left a gruesome tally: 872 killed, 1829 injured and 443 missing - all official figures. However, the unofficial estimate is much more and the value of property destroyed in about Rs. 1200 crores. The Muslim community which bore the major burnt of the riots was left with a gnawing sense of insecurity.

The Srikrishna Commission had been appointed on January 25, 1993 with a clear and comprehensive mandate first, to find out not only the reasons for the riots but also whether an individual or group of individuals or any other organisation was behind the outrage; secondly, to inquire whether steps taken by the police to prevent the riots, and once they had broken out, to combat them, were right and proper; and thirdly, to recommend the short-term and long-term measures for the restoration of peace and harmony.

From the beginning attempts were made by administration to hinder the work of the Srikrishna Commission. Soon after the Shiv Sena-BJP combine came to power it enlarged the scope of the enquiry to cover the ''Bombay Blast''. This was one more deliberate attempt to delay the main probe.

The Commission was scrapped when it was about to complete its task. Evidence from only nine out of 32 police stations remained to be collected.

Therefore, the Citizen's Committee for Restoration of Srikrishna Commission... urges you to immediately restore the Srikrishna Commission of Enquiry.

We are hopeful that you will consider our demand and immediately restore the Srikrishna Commission of Enquiry.

Citizens for Democracy	People`s Rights Organisation
PUCL	PUDR
Gandhi Peace Foundation	Working Group on
Alternative	Nagrik. Adhikar Andolan
Strategies	
Forum for Democracy and	All India Lawyers Union
Communal Amity	Bandhua Mukti Morcha
AIDYO	Centre of Concern for Child
Sikh Forum	Labour
INSAF	Citizens for National
ABVA	Consensus
Radical Humanist Assn	Manav Ekta Bahiyan
V.M. Tarkunde.	AICCTU and others
Rabi Ray, MP	Rajinder Sachar
Ram Vilas Paswan, MP	S. Shahabuddin, MP
A.B. Bardhan	Malini Bhattacharya, MP
J.S. Arora, ex-MP	Shafi Moonis
Swami Agnivesh	Kuldip Nayar

CPI: On Termination of Srikrishna Commission

The Central Secretariat ... strongly condemns the decision of the Shiv Sena-BJP government of Maharashtra to dissolve the Srikrishna commission which is so close to complete its inquiry...

Many secular and democratic-minded individuals, like advocate Nilofer Bhagwat, representing CPI, helped the commission in its work. It brought out startling facts about the collusion of police and the administration with communalists.

It was a known fact that the Shiv Sena played havoc in the communal holocaust... Above all, Shiv Sena let loose a reign of terror, widened the gulf between Hindus and Muslims, and posed threat to the secular-democratic set-up of the country.

It was evident that the Shiv Sena and BJP instigated the communal strife, keeping an eye on political power. The decision to scrap the commission shows that they are afraid of the findings of the commission...

More than this, it shows their utter contempt for judicial and parliamentary democratic institutions. This must not be tolerated. The guilty cannot be allowed to go scot-free.

The CPI demands that the ... inquiry commission should be revived. Despite the decision of the Maharashtra government, the commission should place all facts before the nation to expose the vile and divisive-communal designs of BJP-Shiv Sena combine....

PUDR's Report: Recalling Bhagalpur

Victims of the 1989 Bhagalpur riots, in which 982 people were killed, have little hope of securing justice...

The People's Union for Democratic Rights has blamed... the Bihar C.M. for putting in cold storage the riot probe panel's strong indictments against the administration and police officers.

The Bihar government has 'deliberately' failed to table the Memorandum of Action Taken, PUDR secretary Suresh Vaid alleged, despite C.M.'s statement on the floor of the assembly that no one indicted by the majority of the three-member commission would be spared. ''My government will ensure severest punishment within three months... those found guilty of aiding and abetting the worst ever riot in Bihar,'' the chief minister had stated.

In its report titled ''Recalling Bhagalpur'', the PUDR said 11 months had passed since the probe commission submitted its two contradictory reports.

The PUDR has demanded that the Central Bureau of Investigation be handed over the cases closed by the police, and a high court judge appointed to look into the large number of acquittals.

Criticising the Bihar government's tardy action the PUDR has asked Yadav to come clean on why criminal cases had not been instituted against the officials indicted by the panel.

The PUDR has highlighted the fraudulent usurpation of farmland and the homes of certain people by a conniving nexus, which was one of the prime factors which sparked riots in the country.

The prosecution figures compiled from the annexures to the Bhagalpur Riot Enquiry Commission record apropos the PUDR report are as follows:-

* Just one case of conviction out of 406 murder accused, of 1,392 prosecuted on various charges. Trial is on against 961 accused, of whom 311 face murder charges. Acquittals total 381, including 94 murder accused.
* The families of 628 killed in Bhagalpur during the October-November, 1989 riots have no hopes of redressal as there is no FIR recording these killings as being crime-related.
* In 416 FIRs, police could not find any accused. Cases closed for 119 killings.
* Six years later, 87 cases against 921 accused are still pending.
* Of the 55 cases decided, 11 have ended in convictions in which 50 people have been awarded punishment.

(Source: The Sunday Observer, 11 February, 1996)

When did I say that I am going to have an alliance with the Congress?

- Farooq Abdullah, NC Leader

UN Research Project On Socio-Economic Status of Various Groups including Minorities

... UN agencies in India, especially the UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA together, have taken a pioneering step by funding a large research project focusing on human development parameters based on social, occupational, income and land size classifications. This research, for the first time in independent India, will provide estimates on levels and differentials on education, health and demography and material well-being parameters according to religion and notified caste groups. This research has the following broad aims:

(a) to identify the vulnerable, the depressed, the poor and the most needy;
(b) to help formulate policies and programmes and target them to the most needy; and
(c) to monitor the sustainability of the gains of development in terms of human development over a longer period of time.

Since formulation of a human development profile for India and its various states is the purpose, it has been achieved by resorting to multiple methods. The methods chosen are:

(a) are review of secondary data at the level of the district and state;
(b) a representative sample survey at the level of the state and all India, and
(c) village studies highlighting the role of qualitative dimensions, such as social structures, culture and public programmes in human development.

The primary data were collected during January-June 1994 from about 33,000 rural and 5,000 urban households. A stratified representative sample frame using social (religion and caste) and occupational groups was drawn from about 1,700 villages spread over 198 districts in 16 major Indian states. The results are representative at the level of states and all India.

Some of the population groups considered in this analysis are SCs, STs, minorities, landless and manual labourers, marginal and small farmers, female-headed households, slum-dwellers, women, children and so on. A detailed village and community profile for each village surveyed provides institutional and community level data much needed for formulating robust analytical models for multivariate analysis. An analytical report is under preparation which will be ready for circulation during the second half of 1996.

[Those interested may write to Dr. Abusaleh Sharief, Principal Economist, National Council of Applied Economic Research, Parishila Bhawan, 11, IP Estate, New Delhi - 110 002 - Editor].

(Source: The Economic and Political Weekly)

Views of Gopi Chand Narang on Urdu

I do not agree that Urdu is on the decline in India. Urdu is still very significant and plays a very crucial cultural role, but the problem is that Urdu is a victim of the politicalisation of the narrow minded power plane in the country. Urdu has, through the centuries, stood for secularism, for humanitarianism and has strongly opposed forces of orthodoxy in this country. Be it the poetry of Ghalib or Nazir or any other master it derides the narrow interpretation of religion, ridicules the Mohtasib (censor) or the Mulla (priest) or those who exploit religion for their class gains. Urdu has always been a progressive and forward-looking language of love and peace.

After the Partition it has fallen on bad days... its liberal genius has been completely overlooked. If such a language becomes a victim of narrow-mindedness and prejudice it is a national loss. This is one of the missions of my life. We must try to appreciate the true spirit of Urdu literature which manifests the building of bridges between the two major communities of India. If India has to stay as a culturally unified country allowing other languages and ethnicities to have their functional identities, I do hope that some of the misconceptions that surround Urdu today will be dispelled.

Every language with its system of orthography is a single whole. The relation between a language and its script, however arbitrary it may seem, is not so. Especially when a language develops through a particular script for a number of centuries that script becomes an integral part of that lingual system.

Urdu can be written in Devanagiri; it was written in Roman in the days of the Raj. So it is scientifically possible but socio-lingually and culturally it amounts to denying the rights of language to adopt its own script and develop it. In a democratic country like India there are almost two score major languages and each of them has a right to its script. There is no controversy about the script of any other language, so why raise one on Urdu. Many of the scripts have so much affinity to Devanagiri that they are interchangeable. If they can't be forced to change their script and adopt Devanagiri a demand made on Urdu to do so has a fascist motivation lurking behind it.

Since the number of readers who have been trained through Devanagiri is large and they want to read some of the Urdu classics and finest poetry you would see many of the Urdu masters' Diwans and large part of Urdu fiction being made available in Devanagiri script. It enlarges the circle of Urdu readership and at the same time Urdu does not lose its identity. So I have no objection to the forces of the market whereby Urdu literature is produced and published in Devanagiri. It amounts to enrichment of both. This is where the bonds of Urdu and Hindi become stronger.

But if a political demand is made that a particular language should change its script if it has to survive, it is based on the denial of freedom and is anti-democratic, short-sighted and lacks deeper understanding of the socio-linguistic aspects of how languages function.

The government is ... responsible in the sense that it is the ... Assembly in each State which has framed the Official Languages Act, ... if that Act does not reflect the concern of a bilingual society, if the State is bilingual, if by sheer misplaced national concern we think that a particular State is homogenised by imposing one language. In fact what is being done is adoption of totalitarian mannerism. This is where the government comes in - to amend the Official Languages Act, as it was done in Bihar - to give a place of honour, in a bilingual society, to the other language which is spoken with the main language. Then implement the three language formula honestly. There is nothing wrong in the formula but it has never been implemented honestly to give scope to the Urdu speakers to learn their language. This has resulted in further insecurities... and Urdu has been struggling to survive. In many areas schools to accord a rightful place to Urdu but the general picture still id discouraging.

On the other hand, no language stays alive just by government patronage. It is the Urdu speakers who have to see that if Urdu is not taught in schools then the language has to be taught by private efforts. If people themselves get demoralised and give up their language, the language falls on evil days. Undoubtedly on the one hand it is for the State governments to provide due protection and encouragement to Urdu, on the other it is for the ... speakers of Urdu to keep using and learning it.

This be a long drawn process... History has not corrected itself. it is we who have to accommodate and adjust... We cannot undo history... We have to live with it.... If Hindi has to develop to the full status of a national language, Urdu has to be developed in its own right and to strengthen Hindi

...Our Constitution in Schedule VIII lists a number of languages, now 18 of them, which are usually referred to as the national languages of India. In a plural, multi-lingual society it will not be a single monolithic language which could be called the national language. Of course Hindi, being close to Sanskrit, is a great storehouse of Indian heritage. it will have all the respect. Nevertheless, India needs associate languages to run parallel to Hindi and not counter to it, functioning alongside with Hindi, as languages of larger communication...

Being a powerful medium of poetry and elegant speech, Urdu has been adopted extensively by Bollywood and the image which has been developed and which does not do justice to Urdu in that Urdu is a language of Mushairas and Qawwalis. This is an image Urdu has to fight against... Urdu has to be given a rightful place as an Indo-Aryan language ... along with other languages and has to be accepted as a truly national language of the country... I am not yet disheartened.

(Source: The Hindu, 3 March, 1996)

A Report on Taleemi Caravan

8 - 26 December, 1995

Professor A.M. Khusro called it the Caravan of Life. Minister Sita Ram Kesri... compared it to Mahatma Gandhi's Dundee March that heralded, surely and unmistakably, the country's independence. Although encouraged by popular response and selective appreciation, the UP Rabita Committee chose to retain for the movement the modest label of Taleemi Caravan.

The genesis of the UP Rabita Committee, founded in 1991, was the felt need for coordinating effectively the activities of voluntary organisations in the fields of educational, social and economic uplift of Indian Muslims. The coordinated effort, it was felt, would ... optimise scarce resources by avoiding overlap. The purpose of the caravan was to break the ... ring of stagnation and inaction; its logic was to compel response by knocking at peoples doors and to bombard them with the collective and concerted ... attention of a large group of educationists, academicians, professionals and social workers. Their strength during the journey across the country vacillated between 30 and 40. There was renewal at every stage, some dropped out, others joined, and the caravan moved on.

Understandably, the UP Rabita Committee had made a beginning with UP (1992). It struck new grounds by initiating a caravan for a cause. Its motivation was sympathy, fellow-feeling and concern; its strength was mobility, its payload: message. Vitally important messages....

The All-India caravan had been rehearsed ten times over. The first state caravan that crisscrossed the vast and populous state of UP started on its pioneering journey in the summer of 1992.

... The awakening caused by the 1992 caravan was not allowed to be extinguished. There followed in unfailing succession smaller caravans, workshops, conferences refresher courses for teachers and membership drives.

... It obtained a mandate in the form of an appeal from ulema of diverse dispensations and schools who stressed, among other things, the importance of modern education and social reform.

Fortified by the ulema's mandate the caravan embarked on its countrywide tour on 8 December 1995. It was flagged off, after a meaningful meeting in the ... Aligarh Muslim University, by vice-chancellor Mahmoodur Rahman...

The first stage was Kanpur where at midnight the caravan addressed a mammoth meeting... This set the pattern... The caravan stopped at Patna, Calcutta, Cuttack, Vijaywada, Mysore, Madras, Hyderabad, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Bhopal, Ujjain, Jhalawar, Kota and Jaipur and ended in Delhi on December 25. ...

The caravan came back with the firm conviction that there is a perceptible awakening among Indian Muslims to the need for eradicating illiteracy and competing in the sphere of education. It appreciated the strides made in the southern states... Even in the South there did not appear to be any sizeable spread-effect of the educational endeavour. The general standard... is inadequate.

What is needed is a planned effort to spread literacy, set up new institutions and improve standards of the existing schools and colleges. Women's education is woefully inadequate and needs to be pushed up.

Wherever the caravan went, people emphasised the need for a central organisation which could prepare and implement the community's educational plan and establish a data-base... The new-born craving for education ought to be harnessed into a massive national effort. The caravan and its hosts have made up their mind to respond to the public demand and set up a countrywide infrastructure for improving the educational status of Muslims in a planned and scientific manner...

... The caravan may not have broken new ground, but the manner of its constitution, the magnitude of its effort, its trend-setting mobility, the unique co-operation between voluntary organisations in different states that it illustrated, and the comprehensiveness of its plan of upgradation of human resource, had a tremendous impact. It heralded a movement, a collective attempt at self-uplift.

(Source: The Nation and the World)

Maharashtra: Educational Statistics

I - SSC Examination Results for Nasik District

Year	Total Students appeared	Muslim Students appeared	%-age	Total Students passed	Muslim Students passed	%-age
1990-91	46,763	1616	3.45	19498	1040	5.33
1992-93	55,266	2130	3.86	27895	1130	4.05

II - H.S.C. Examination Results for Nasik District

1992-93	27662	1516	5.5	12926	712	5.5

Aligarh Muslim University: Certificates/ Diplomas/Degrees Awarded during 1993-94

S.No.	Examination	Total Passed
1.	Secondary School Certificate Examination	640
2.	Senior Second. School Certificate Exam.	1514
3.	B.A. (Honours) - Arts and Social Sciences	957
4.	B.Sc. (Honours) - Science, Life Science	363
5.	B.Com. (Honours) - Commerce	201
6.	B.Ed. (Theory and Practical)	182
7.	M.A. (Honours) - Arts and Social Sciences	496
8.	M.Sc. (Honours - Science, Life Science	256
9.	M.Sc. (Agriculture)	8
10.	M.Sc. (Bio-Technology)	8
11.	M.Com. - Commerce	55
12.	M.B.B.S.	75
13.	LL.B.	84
14.	D.B.A.	29
15.	B.U.M.S. (Tibb)	41
16.	M.D. (Ilmul Advia & Moalijat)	7
17.	M.D. (Kulliyat-wa-Ilmul Amraz)	4
18.	Diploma - Orth. Surgery, Gynaecology & Obstet. Anaesthesiology, Child Health & Ophthalmology	20
19.	Diploma - Engg., Electrical, Elect. Inst., Civil, Architecture, Mechanical, DDM, DCC, Electronics, TV Technology, CDDM, OASP	247
20.	B.Sc. - Engg. Computer, Electronics, Engg. Electrical, Mechanical, Civil & Chemical	269
21.	M.B.A.	20
22.	M.C.A.	27
23.	M. Th. (Sunni)	8
24.	B.L. & I.Sc.	41
25.	M.L. & I.Sc.	17
26.	M.Ed.	18
26.	Certificate and Diploma in Qirat	20
27.	Certificate in Functional Hindi	2
28.	Diploma - Orthoptics, Pisciculture, Radiology)	15
29.	Diploma - Steno Typing, Computer Programming and Company Law Banking and Insurance	23
30.	Certificate in Dental Hygiene	5
31.	Diploma - Horticulture & Pest Management	11
32.	Diploma - Criminology & Criminal Admn.	2
33.	Diploma - Cartography	2
34.	Diploma - Clinical Pathology	14
35.	Diploma - Applied Art, Journalism	17
36.	Diploma - Lab Law and Lab Relations	4
37.	Diploma - Computational Mathematics	2
38.	Diploma - Asian Studies	4
39.	Diploma - Teaching	20
40.	P.G. Diploma - Strat. Studies & Translation	9
41.	Post M.Sc. Diploma - Museology	2

Aligarh Muslim University: M. Phil/Ph.D.'s Awarded during 1993-94

S.No.	Subject	M. Phil.	Ph.D.
1.	Urdu	7	4
2.	Linguistics	3	4
3.	Philosophy	3	
4.	Islamic Studies	3	
5.	Political Science	5	8
6.	Psychology	3	4
7.	Commerce	6	3
8.	Strategic Studies	2	
9.	Zoology	4	5
10.	Bio-Chemistry L/Sc.	7	11
11.	Bio-Technology	4	
12.	Musiology	2	
13.	Operation Research	3	
14.	Agriculture	6	1
15.	Geology	5	1
16.	Physics	4	4
17.	Chemistry	16	13
18.	Botany	15	6
19.	Geography	11	4
20.	Stragetic Studies	2	
21.	Arabic	10	10
22.	Economics	3	6
23.	Education	2	
24.	Philosophy	2	
25.	Sociology	5	1
26.	App. Maths	4	
27.	App. Chemistry	2	1
28.	Sanskrit	2	5
29.	History	5	1
30.	App. Physics	4	1
31.	Malyalam	2	
32.	Hindi	1	5
33.	English	3	5
34.	Statistics	1	1
35.	Persian	1	
36.	Sunni Theology	1	1
37.	Mathematics	3	7
38.	Business Administration	--	3
39.	Anatomy	--	1
40.	Law	--	2
41.	Wild Life	--	2
42.	Rsacreg	--	1
43.	Chemical Engg.	--	1
	Total	**162**	**122**

Rajesh Ramachandran on the State of the AMU

... Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), (a) premier university of the nation... It was closed sine die on December 17 ... following violence on the campus including manhandling of teachers and burning of the Police Superintendent's car. The Vice-chancellor's house was also attacked.

In AMU, admissions was the issue. Alleging irregularities, Mirajudeen and Mohammed Aslam, former office-bearers of the student union, and their supporters attacked the staff association office, manhandled the registrar and created havoc on the campus. The two leaders along with 25 others were expelled.

Vice-chancellor Mahmoodur Rahman, an IAS officer who was additional chief secretary (home) of Jammu & Kashmir, says that the real reason for some students turning violent was that they could not get people admitted through the backdoor. ''Earlier some of them used to get 100 people admitted every year. I know of a student who owns a car and several flats in the city; he used to earn at least Rs. 1 lakh a year through admissions. The hostels had become safe havens for these anti-social elements. Some were staying in hostels and working in Delhi. To flush them out, I asked all the students to vacate the hostels and that has paid rich dividends.''

Alleging that irregularities in admissions were committed during the tenure of his predecessor, Mahmoodur Rahman points out that the recent unrest was the handiwork of those who have become desperate. ''They got in through the backdoor and were provided with artificial ladders. They got illegal promotions and passed out of the engineering and medical colleges taking up to the ten years in the process. When I removed the ladders, they had no choice but to agitate and get me removed. Now illegal entry and exit are things of the past and those who are stranded will have to toil to make the grade. Most of the students are with me and the professional colleges have started functioning peacefully.

Illegal occupancy is a (common) problem... Aligarh students are divided on the lines of Khan and Choudhary, and Sunni and Shia... Kashmiris fight Biharis... Even teachers take an active part in dividing students...

... The campus is becoming the hunting grounds for politicians. Says Saiyid Hamid, a former vice-chancellor of AMU and a former chairman of Staff Selection Commission: ''If the president of the student union takes interest in academic or co-curricular activities, he remains obscure and uncared for outside the campus. But if he mounts an agitation and creates disturbance, he becomes the blue-eyed boy of one political party or another. Such student leaders have been given tickets to the assembly and Parliament elections and quite a few have become ministers. There is an in-built premium on unruly behaviour''. According to him, ''any Muslim who has considerable clout in AMU is taken as representing the Muslim community. This makes our Muslim political figures back the wrong horses''. He also says that it is the insecurity of the average Muslim student, who feels that he is discriminated against in the job market, that makes him join anti-social elements. ...

The inherent flaws in the administrative structure of Aligarh also contribute to the unrest in the campus. The vice-chancellor is chosen through open debate among the 184 members of the 'court', the governing body of the university. They forward three names to the President, who is the Visitor of the university. Usually the President appoints the first person on the list.

This practice has led to lobbying. Once the vice-chancellor is appointed those who favoured him expect rewards while those who opposed him continue to do so, for their respective allegiances are well known. Saiyid Hamid had written to the President pointing out the lacunae of the system. ''It is a most indecorous way of selecting a vice-chancellor'', he says. ''The whole campus is divided into two or three groups. But the government refuses to do anything as the matter pertains to the minority community.'' The present vice-chancellor also feels that the system leads to unwarranted animosity between the staff and the vice-chancellor. ...

(Source: The Week, 4 February, 1996)

Delhi High Court on Non-Bailable Warrant Against Ahmed Bukhari

''It is coming to the notice of this Court in several matters that officers of subordinate judiciary, instead of addressing themselves to the sole legal or factual issues arising in the cases before them are unnecessarily indulging in making observations regarding matters which do not arise in the case.'' He added that it was becoming imperative to lay down certain guidelines in this regard.

''The order under challenge, instead of dealing with the specific issue before the magistrate, contains several observations not only against the police but also in respect of certain religious matters. Prima facie, it appears to us that the observations - nay a long lecture given by the learned magistrate - were absolutely uncalled for.''

''By making the uncalled for observations the learned magistrate has made his order vulnerable. Therefore, we are not at the moment going into the merits of the ultimate directions given by him, but we are on the manner in which the order has been pronounced and the likely prejudice these observations may cause to public at large.''

Saiyid Hamid on Reservation for Muslims

Muslims are the most backward community educationally, socially and economically. This has been admitted in government-sponsored documents such as Gopal Singh Committee's report, the report of the 43rd round of the National Sample Survey and the Programme of Action, New Education Policy - 1986.

* Although Muslims constitute 12 per cent of India's population, their proportion in the country's services does not exceed 2 per cent. They have thus been denied a share in the management and development of their country. Prospects of government jobs having receded after independence Muslims started neglecting education as infructuous.

* Representatives of Muslims in the Constituent Assembly had foregone reservation on the strength of the tacit assurance that their interests would be safeguarded. Later developments, however, belied the assurance and Indian Muslims went downhill at a staggering pace.

* Various steps announced by government by ameliorate the conditions of Muslims such as the Fifteen Point Programme (which curiously did not provide at all for education) and the Programme of Action remained on paper as revealed in the report submitted to the Ministry of Human Resource Development by an officially appointed evaluation group.

* Over the last about fifteen years Muslims made a concerted effort to compete for government jobs but to no avail. They could not, for example, go beyond 2.5 per cent in the Civil Services examination conducted by the UPSC. In lower services their representation is even poorer. They are similarly unable to compete for admissions to institutions of higher learning including professional colleges. The reasons are obvious:

a) A bias has been operating against them;
b) they are unable to compete because of the denudation of talent in the wake of the country's partition and because of a gnawing and incapacitating sense of insecurity kept alive by communal killings;
c) with expanding reservations, the area open to competition has shrunk and it is becoming difficult for Muslims to compete with the educationally and intellectually advanced groups.

* Given this situation it would be reckless as well as dangerous to leave Muslims to their resources and to aggravate their frustration! In the national interest they ought to be salvaged by giving them proper share in power and management. Reservations in government jobs for a limited period of 25 years is the obvious answer. This step has the advantage of being specific and implementable and accountable. It is also calculated to raise the morale of the community.

* The argument that a demand for reservation in services would invite a majority backlash and would create conditions similar to those preceding the partition is as puerile as it is cruel and undemocratic. For one thing, conditions now are entirely different; for another, a demand that is just cannot be stifled by raising phobias. You cannot threaten a group of people out of their rightful aspirations, at least not in a secular democracy.

* Leaders of some biradris among Muslims have expressed the fear that in case the demand for reservations for the Muslim community as a backward class is conceded the more advanced classes among Muslims will appropriate what has already been given to the more backward classes under the Mandal Commission's recommendations. In point of fact nothing has been given to them. They will soon discover that it is a mirage. They will have to compete with other backward classes which are far more advanced than them.

* It is curious that India's Constitution which is the bulwark of the minorities is being invoked to deprive the minorities of their rightful share. Was religion not taken into consideration when it was laid down that Scheduled Castes, if they forsook the Hindu religion, would be deprived of the concessions given to them including reservations in jobs and in the legislature? Did the Constitution stand in the way when Muslims in Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu were treated as a backward class and given reservation on that score? Is the inconsistency in the attitude not glaring? It surely cannot be the nation's intention to squeeze Muslims out of their abysmally low share in administration and reduce them to pariahs. Whey then this reluctance to concede a right that is overdue?

* The first Convention on Reservation was held in Delhi on October 9, 1994. The demand has gathered tremendous momentum ever since. Forums for Reservation have been constituted in a large number of states and Conventions and Conferences held. The demand has become irresistible and had better be conceded with grace.

(Source: The Nation and the World, 1 April, 1996)

(Contd. from page 232)

bringing about socio-economic development in the country as a whole and including her largest minority population.

Conclusion

If facts are rationally examined, the inescapable conclusion is that religion is not the primary and determining factor in population growth. The Hindutvavadi propaganda only indicates that there is ... total disdain for science and scientific enquiry. Indeed, all fascistic enterprises have this in common, appealing to the most chauvinistic and atavistic, among the people. The attempts to imbue demography with religion is clearly guided by the same dangerous motives.

(Dr. Mohan Rao is Professor in the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health, School of Social Sciences, JNU, New Delhi)

(Source: The People's Democracy, 24 December, 1996)

Masood Ali Khan on Reservation of Muslims

Status of Reservation in States:

Every state is attempting to enlarge the canvas of reservation to be extended to almost all backward classes of Indian society. Recently the All India Anna DMK Government in Tamil Nadu enhanced the quota of reservation and announced 69% to BCs... (In this enhancement of reservation the Tamil Nadu Government has ignored the Muslims of the State). Bihar has raised the quota to 83 per cent, UP 80%and AP 27% Similarly the Karnataka Government recently announced an increase in quota of reservation of the OBCs. (The Karnataka Government assured 6% quota of reservation to Muslims also in this 75% enhancement)... The (AP) Government announced reservations for Kapus, Muslims and 12 other castes in the Backward Classes List...

In fact, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are competing with one another to appease some powerful communities with an eye on the elections. Otherwise, what is the justification for including the Vokkaligas and Kapus in Andhra Pradesh in the Backward Classes List? If Karnataka's proposals are implemented there will be 80% reservation covering almost 96% population...This is nothing but the politics of recommendation. By increasing the number of BCs under reservation, politicians are trying to capture vote banks.... Ultimately the whole purpose of reservation for the ... depressed classes would be lost. The percentage would increase to a ridiculous level, resulting in a mockery of protective discrimination.

More and more people become Backward Classes in order to enjoy the benefits of reservation of government jobs.-Fine, but where are the jobs? The government departments are already overstaffed and sick public sector units are either closed down or handed over to the private sector. Will there be any jobs left for the 80 per cent people in the reserved list? Even now thousands of government posts are lying vacant because the Treasury has no money to pay the staff...

In fact, there should be some yardstick in including a community in the BC list... State Governments decision to increase the number of castes under the reservation umbrella seems to be more a political gimmick than an expression of commitment for the uplift of these communities.

Reservation for Muslims:

... Muslims who had 35 per cent government jobs before independence, were reduced to a paltry 3.5 per cent in 1982, further dwindling to one per cent in 1990. The condition of Muslims is now more precarious than it was in 1947. If we take a look at the general condition of Muslims in India, the National Sample Survey of 1988 reveals the following glaring facts:-

1) A total of 52.3 per cent Muslims are below poverty line (BPL);
2) The monthly income of Muslims is only Rs. 150 per month;
3) 50.5 per cent Muslims are illiterate;
4) Muslims educated up to high school are four per cent;
5) In Indian colleges 1.6 per cent Muslims are graduates;
6) In government services their share is 4.4 per cent;
7) For starting any business enterprise 3.7 per cent Muslims got financial loan;
8) 5 per cent of Muslims got bank loan from the scheduled banks;
9) Among Indian entrepreneurs who get industrial loans, only 2 per cent are Muslims.

The movement of reservation for Muslims was first started in West Bengal. During the Emergency a Muslim delegation met the Prime Minister at Raj Bhavan in Calcutta and demanded reservation for Muslims.

This delegation was headed by Zainul Abedin, who was then a Minister in the Siddhartha Shankar Ray Cabinet. (Now Zainul Abedin is in the Opposition). Siddhartha Shankar Ray was also present at that time...

In the beginning Muslims did not show much concern (for) reservation... Moreover, some sections of Muslims hold the view that begging for reservation will make the community dependent and allergic to face competition, which in turn will create an inferiority complex. The community will lose self-confidence and fail to develop talent and competency.

Keeping in view this situation, steps have been taken to improve their talent and competency through remedial measures... In spite of all these efforts the proportion of Muslims recruited through Civil Services examination has not increased beyond two per cent whereas Muslims constitute 12 per cent of the total population of India.

With enhancement of reservation quota for other BCs, the chances of even two per cent recruitment of Muslims in Civil Services are further blocked because of stiff competition. There is no way out, except through extension of reservation to Muslims for a specified period, say 25 years, in order to improve their economic and educational conditions. This reservation for Muslims should be based on the criteria of income and not the profession... Quota system to ensure proportionate representation in all areas and at all levels is the only solution to the problems of the minorities. Whether it is in the government or public sector or even in private sector, there should be adequate reservation for the minorities.

State of Reservation in Andhra Pradesh

... When Muslims in the neighbouring States of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala are included in the backward list, why not the Muslims in Andhra Pradesh? Why only the Muslims of one or a few States? ...

Since 1985, attitudes have emerged in several spheres of life and worked towards discrimination against Muslims in respect of government jobs especially at State levels in many parts of the country.

... Muslims ... bring down the overall percentage of literacy of the State and the nation too. In today's world of fierce competition for educational and economic opportunities, Muslims can find for themselves a place only at the end of a long queue and most of the time they miss the bus... If the Government of India and the State Governments do not immediately reverse the trend of denial of opportunity to Muslims, a massive wave of Muslim fundamentalism will create chaos. This is the context in which creating safeguards for Muslim by way of reservations has become a compelling necessarily. Muslims need these safeguards to ... come on a par with other citizens... Unlike other reserved categories, Muslims can respond better to such incentive and ... improve their arts and skills, efficiency and output, thus raising the GNP of India. Will this not contribute to the country's development? Owing to the above scenario the question of inclusion of all Muslims (because by giving reservation to certain classes among Muslims, the government will be creating casteism among Muslims, the government will be creating casteism among Muslims to divide their strength) in the list of Backward Classes has arisen and needs urgent attention.

The Andhra Pradesh Government took the decision to include the Kapus and the Qureshis (Butcher) Muslims in the backward classes in August 1994. A writ petition was filed against this announcement. The Court struck down the writ and gave a verdict in favour of the government...

The announcement... created apprehension... that the government may not be sincere in implementing the decision. The State Government wants to please the minorities by announcing some sop on the eve of elections. But once the elections are over, things will be back to square one. The other Opposition political parties are strongly opposing the extension of reservation to Muslims as a decision to woo the minorities on the eve of elections.

Opinion Poll on Reservation:

The large-circulation Urdu daily (42,000) Siyasat (1949), published from Hyderabad, conducted an opinion poll on reservation for Muslims during June - July, 1994... In all 1086 respondents were covered of which 102 elites belonged to other States and 460 elites hailed from Hyderabad city, belonging to different strata of society, and 524 were students.

From the above table it appears almost all respondents favoured reservations for Muslims. But the student category favoured it more strongly (93.9) compared to the elite (88.3).

The bulk of respondents favoured reservations on the basis of economic backwardness of Muslims and 20 per cent of them were of the view that as voluntary efforts for improving economic conditions of Muslims have failed, reservation is the only remedy.

A large number of students favoured more than 10 per cent share or percentages of Muslims particularly with regard to seats in educational institutions.

A total of 71.9% respondents favoured reservation on the basis of income and 28.1% respondents pleaded for profession as criteria of reservation.

On the whole 91% respondents favoured reservation for Muslims in general and nine per cent were against charity... However ... reservation ... is not a solution for all their problems.... Secondly, whatever may be the ... share ... of Muslims, this measure should not affect the share of the Other Backward Communities...

(Source: The News from India)

Quagmire of Quotas

Editorial, The Hindustan Times, 9 March, 1996

A disastrous consequence of Mandal has not only been the hike in the reservation quotas, to the detriment of those who have only merit to plead their case, but the scramble to get the backward label even among communities that are far from socially disadvantaged. The backward march of the nation has put a premium even on the tribal tag, completing the marginalisation of the primitive forest-dwellers originally put in the Scheduled Tribe list. Thus, in Karnataka, while the 35 lakh original tribes have hardly got any benefits from the five per cent reservation set apart from them, the "tribal" population has gone up more than ten-fold in two decades to stand at 38 lakh in the 1991 census... making light of official notifications to the contrary and the guidelines followed by the Anthropological Society of India... While the original tribes, cheated of their due, stand as mute witnesses to the charade enacted in the name of social justice.

This aspect of reservation, in which the benefits are cornered by a more assertive community and the resourceful even among deserving castes, is something that is conveniently overlooked by those engaged in the competitive espousal of Mandal purely for the electoral dividends it yields. The result is that with more and more clamouring to be categorised as backward or put in the schedule of castes and tribes needing special protection, the quota system has come to acquire a self-perpetuating character - a complete negation of what was envisaged in the Constitution, ... a short-term measure to enable the socially backward and exploited sections of people to stand on their own feet.

While the rationale for extending reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes every ten years may not be questioned because of the poor progress made in their upliftment, widening the scope to cover communities that hardly need such props is nothing but the height of inequity, which will only aggravate social tension by deepening caste division... The sensible recommendations made to put reservation on a rational footing - two-generation limit, income ceiling, periodic revision of the list and exclusion of ... promotion - have all been brushed aside by political parties whose vision does not extend beyond the next election. Reservation has ... become the biggest drag on the country's tryst with the next millennium.

Divide, Sub-Divide, Rule

Editorial, The Pioneer, 9 March, 1996

After a brief respite, the reservation juggernaut appears to have resumed its deathly yatra. And this time, there is not even a veneer of political philosophy; no attempt to drape its divisive purpose with the shroud of "social justice". The move to grant reservations to Dalit Christians is brazenly electoral (as) quid... pro quo (for) delivery of Christian votes to the Congress... on a platter...

Scheduled Caste converts to Christianity would appear to have a logical point though. If Neo-Buddhists, who similarly converted to another religion to overcome alleged Brahminical tyranny, are entitled to reservations, why not they? However... the fact is that the Christians can in no way be regarded as a socially and educationally backward class (SEBCs)... If anything, those who converted to Christianity both under the influence of India's erstwhile colonial masters and the efforts of missionaries... have benefited from their conversion...

... The largesse extended to Dalit Christians... is certain to spur more sections to demand similar privileges. Some populists are bound to ask, if Dalit Christians can get it, why not Dalit Muslims? The overzealous may even revive the claim for reservations for the entire Muslim community....

Shahabuddin's Reply to The Pioneer, New Delhi

Please refer to the editorial "Divide, sub-divide, rule" of 9th March, 1996. The editor is perhaps not aware of the unanimous demand of the Muslim community since 80s for reservation in public employment and higher education after the High Power Panel on Minorities presented its final report on Minorities to the then Prime Minister in June, 1983. This report took note of the educational, economic and therefore, social backwardness of the Muslim community and its poor level of presentation in public employment and higher education and recommended preferential measures.

Perhaps, he is also not aware of the fact that already Muslim communities in Kerala, Tamilnadu, Manipur and Karnataka have been recognised as backward classes as a community and assigned a quota in public employment at the state level. The demand for reservation for the Muslim community has gained momentum after the Andhra Pradesh government decided to include the Muslims as a community although the entire reservation scheme has been stayed by the Andhra Pradesh High Court on other grounds. Unfortunately, in other states, like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal, where together 50 per cent of the Muslims of the country live, while some Muslim sub-communities have been notified as Other Backward Classes (OBCs), the Muslim community as a whole has not been, ironically, in the states where they are much more backward compared not only to the other communities in those states but also the Muslim communities in Karnataka, Kerala, Tamilnadu or Andhra Pradesh.

Since 1992, the demand for recognition of the Muslim community as a whole as a backward class has picked up following the National Convention in New Delhi in October, 1994. The demand has been videly supported by the leaders of many political parties. In the next election, it is a major demand of the Muslim community. I wonder why your paper has been sleeping through these momentous development.

In the case of members of STs, they are entitled to reservation whatever be their religion. In the case of the members of SCs originally only if they were Hindus and Sikhs, but now Buddhists have been added and one must ask this question as to why and how Islam and Christianity stand on a different footing. Surely, no SC family on conversion to Christianity or Islam immediately shirks off its social disabilities or its economic or educational backwardness. Social justice demands that it should continue to receive protection at least for the life time of the convert and his immediate decendants. It is possible to argue that the Christian or Muslim dalits may not deserve the same degree of protection as their level of backwardness as social groups may not be the same as that of the Hindu SCs. The remedy then lies in having sub classification so that a quota proportion to their population and the degree of backwardness could be determined.

As for the Muslim community as a whole also a similar approach should be adopted one it is recognised as a Backward Class on the basis of same set of uniformly applicable educational, economic and social parameters. Once this is done, its quota based on population and level of backwardness can be determined separately for the country as a whole and for each state/ U.T.

Social justice translated into participation and power sharing will promote national integration. Persistent injustice will only breed alienation.

Muslim Indians: Multiple Identities of a 'Monolithic' Community

Overview by Mushirul Hasan

Post-'70s social science scholarship and historiography have generated new approaches and insights into different aspects of Indian society. Change, variety and differences have been highlighted under Marxist, New History, post-modern and subaltern approaches. But research on Muslims is still mired within traditional frameworks. Existing categories have been questioned but not changed; consequently, ideas and movements associated with Muslims are classified as 'revivalist' rather than reformist, 'communal' rather than secular 'separatist' rather than nationalist and, finally 'reactionary' rather than progressive. Thus, Syed Ahmad Khan and his associates are marginalised or dismissed as 'separatist', a derisive label for those who did not conform to the majoritarian view of nationalism. Syed Ahmad's stereotype as the architect of Muslim separatism, mesmerised by the British, remains unaffected by the knowledge of his contribution to introducing rational thought and English education. Similarly, Altaf Husain Hali, Nazir Ahmad and Shaikh Abdullah of Aligarh, pioneers in women's reform, find little mention in conventional or unconventional histories. The old explanations are presumed to unravel their conduct; they are all too readily ascribed ''reactionary'' tendencies. There is still talk of a ''Muslim mind'', a ''Muslim outlook'', and an inclination to construe Muslim identarianism around Islam. A sense of Otherness is conveyed thus.

Unchanging perceptions, derived from colonial knowledge and global Islamist assertions, express themselves variously. Time and again one is reminded of the pervasive impact of Islam on its adherents, their enduring transnational links and obsessive concern for Quranic values; one is persuaded their sole preoccupation is praying and visiting shrines. One is also told they, more than others, attach greater value to religio-cultural habits and institutions; hence they are more susceptible - from North Africa to the Philippines - to religious rhetoric. This is a familiar Orientalist view, based on the solidarity of the umma invoked to cultivate specifically Islamic ideas and defend Islamic symbols with vehemence. Thus, Kanpur Muslims protested when a mosque was damaged in 1913, the Khilafat issue caused outrage and interference in Muslim family laws (for example, the 1929 Sarda Marriage Bill) elicited stout resistance.

These are no doubt important facets but should not be overstated to discern a unified structure of consciousness or picture a community acting in unison; a general acquiescence in the actions of few should not be assumed. What, one may ask, is exceptional if some Muslims, falling prey to colonial definitions and their own fanciful theories, saw themselves as an indivisible component of a religious collectivity? Other communities had a similar self-image... The (Hindu) leaders were constructively rethinking 'Hindu' heritage to meet modern challenges. The Hindi-Urdu controversy and the cow question were evocative symbols of Hindu resurgence in the land of Aryavarta. Indeed, the crusade for Hindi in opposition to Urdu was as much linked to government employment as a 'Hindu' symbol. Finally, historian Romila Thapar has revealed how the emergent national consciousness appropriated the Orientalist construction of Hinduism - a requirement for political mobilisation and access to economic resources. The Muslim elite did much the same.

It was all very well to make noises about pan-Islamism or delineate the contours of a divinely-ordained community. In reality, this failed to obliterate internal differentiations. Religious bonds endowed a semblance of unity, but could not override other identities. Muslim groups' traditional links with other social classes, though occasionally strained proved demonstrably more enduring. Hindu-Muslim ill-will in the '40s weakened but did not destroy these cross-communal ties.

Secondly, a Muslim, like others, has diverse roles to play. He identifies to varying degrees with different groups/figures based on ethnicity, region, profession and so on. At no time is one boundary the sole definer of his identity, though for different issues there is a most relevant boundary that becomes prominent and defines the us them divide. He has, just as a Hindu or a Sikh, multiple identities. He is a peasant or a landlord, a worker or an industrialist, a Shia or a Sunni, a Deobandi or a Barelwi (as the Vaishnavites, the Shaivites or the Kabir panthis). Should we then harp on his Muslim identity to the exclusion of everything else, including the secular terms in which he relates to his immediate socio-economic needs and his wide interactions with his class? The depth and nature of this interaction may be disputable, but does that justify a discussion in terms of an absolute Muslim/Islamic consciousness? If, as we are told, centuries of shared experiences could not create composite solidarities how could a specifically Muslim self-consciousness emerge from their multiple experiences?

... Scholars, artists and creative writers, part of liberal-left formations, contested popular definitions of 'Muslim identity' and 'Muslim world-view' accessed through Islamic symbols - unfolding the past to discover elements of unity, cohesion and integration. These scholars carried forward the inconclusive post-1857 debates where the Ulema and the intelligentsia, confronted with the political and religio-cultural threat of colonialism, reflected the weaknesses within a tradition that had strong revivalist precedences as well as liberal tendencies. Key aspects in those debates... contemporary relevance, relating to the Muslim predicament in a world brutally shattered by Partition. ...

(Source: The Outlook, 18 October, 1995)

Gandhi's Image of Islam

(Extracts from Gandhi's Responses to Islam)

Gandhi developed (his) image of Islam as a result of conversations with his Indian Muslim friends, and from his readings...

... He read Thomas Carlyle'essay on Muhammad in the book Heroes and Hero Worship....

... Later, Gandhi read Shibli's biographies of Muslim heroes, books of Hadith, and Amir Ali's books on Islamic history....

... Carlyle and Shibli shared and an appreciation of Gibbon's great history of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire...

... Carlyle, in his famous essay, said explicitly that he was contesting the received idia in Western circles that Muhammad was a liar and an imposter. His argument was that a liar cannot elicit responses of trust and belief from masses of people over a long period of time... Carlyle maintained that a form of truth was emerging through Muhammad that was more honest and true to human experience than the strange metaphysical doctrines which came out of the debates of Christian theologians in the early Christian centuries. In his words:

> "Mahomet's creed a better kind of Christianity than the miserable Syrian sects with their janglings about Homoiousion and Homoosion - the head full of worthless rambling, the heart empty and dead".

... Carlyle had written:

> Islam devoured all these vain jangling sects; and I think had right to do so. It was a Reality, direct from the Heart of Nature once more ... and idolatrous Syrian formulas, whatsoever was not equally real, had to go up un flames - mere dead fuel, in various sense, for this which was fire.

... He envisaged the Islamic triumph over half the Christian world as another great revolution which had changed the conditions of human life...

Shibli's friend and fellow teacher at Aligarh, Thomas Arnold, in his book The Preaching of Islam had presented a similar perspective on the early Muslim victories...

Gandhi may or may not have read Thomas Arnold, but his close friends, the Ali brothers and Maulana Azad, were directly disciples of the perspective of Shibli had promoted at Aligarh and at the Nadwa-ul-Ulema. Therefore Arnold's approach to early Muslim history would have been mediated through Shibli, Amir Ali, Iqbal and other Muslim modernists. Gandhi was certainly aware of the idea that progress had been made in history when religious reform had challenged traditional religious authorities. This awareness helped shape one of his fundamental beliefs, namely that all traditions had grains of truth in them, but all had also been misdirected by the equivalent of 'vain, jangling' authorities. This is the reason why he so often asserted that anything anyone gets from any tradition should be accepted only after the individual has tested the material in his own experience.

His long struggle against untouchability in Hinduism was motivated by the conviction that that practice was a falsification of basic Hindu values... That truth comes in the experience of individuals, and not through blind adherence to the teachings of established religious authorities. In a sense, had again affirmed his conviction that the violent aspect of the Muslim tradition was a later accretion foreign to the basic truths of the religion. He wrote:

> Though, in my opinion, non-violence had a predominant place in the Qur'an, the thirteen hundred years of imperialistic expansion made the Mussalmans fighters as a body. They are, therefore, aggressive. Bullying is the natural excrescence of an aggressive spirit... I refuse to be lifted off my feet because of the scares that haunt us today. If Hindus would but believe in themselves and work in accordance with their traditions, they will have no reason to fear bullying. The moment they recommence the real spiritual training, the Mussalman respond. He cannot help it. If I can get together a band of young Hindus with faith in themselves, and therefore, faith in the Mussalmans, the band will become a shield for the weaker ones.

There are several notions implicit in this statement. One is that the Sufi understanding of Islam is closer to the Prophet's own religious life and intention than are the more militant expressions of the tradition. It is particularly in the Sufi tradition that the aspects of the Qur'an have been stressed that emphasise patience and personal self-discipline. Another idea is that Muslims will respond with spiritual affirmation to Hindus who show themselves spiritually strong; this conviction is certainly based on Gandhi's experience of winning Muslim followers to his movement in South Africa. He believed any Muslim tendency to bully would be overcome as a result of response to Hindu spiritual strength.

In a way, the idea is for Hindus to teach Muslims to recover the inner meaning of the Prophet's example. This might seem a kind of spiritual paternalism for one community to teach another the importance of its virtues. However, Gandhi does not see this process as a one way street, because, just as Hindus might help Muslims recover an appreciation of the Sufi aspect of Islam, so Muslims might help Hindus recover the egalitarian understanding of the Bhakti forms of Hinduism. So Muslims might deepen their understanding of non-violence from contact with Hindus, and Hindus might increase their understanding of equality from contact with Muslims. Brothers were to support and learn from each other. From Gandhi's perspective, the vain, jangling theorists in each tradition had worked against mutual

cooperation among believers.

> True it is that interested or fanatical priests in both religions have set the one against the other.

This is one area in which the Bhakti-Sufi distrust of religious authoritarianism from the fifteenth century of Indian runs in similar directions to the enlightenment tradition in Europe. Gandhi affirms many values from the enlightenment, not least the notion that force should never be used in religious matters.

> But in spite of many dark things of the modern times, the world's opinion to-day will as little tolerate forcible conversions as it will tolerate forcible slavery. That probably is the most effective contribution of the scientific spirit of the age. That spirit has revolutionized many a false notion about Christianity, as it has about Islam. I do not know a single writer on Islam who defends the use of force in the proselytizing process. The influences exerted in our times are far more subtle than that of the sword.

The vain, jangling fanatical religious authorities are condemned by Gandhi both because they falsify the original good teachings of the respective traditions, and also because their attitudes are incompatible with the good aspects of modernity. He quotes a poem from Goethe to underline his teaching that the basic affirmations of all human religious traditions are similar. In so doing, he is acknowledging recognition that one aspect of the European enlightenment had been a movement away from the wars of religion that had resulted from the characteristically modern notion that the world can in fact be changed. Although Shibli, for example, followed fairly closely the narrative of the Prophet's life contained in the writing of the eighth century author Ibn Ishaq, he gave a characteristically modern twist to his study by stressing the ways in which social and political life was transformed by the Prophet's leadership. Gandhi accepted this paradigm as a self-evident model for himself and his followers.

In addition to his interest in the example of Muhammad as a man who changed the world by puttin his faith into action, Gandhi also studied the Qur'an regularly. He wanted, as he often said, to know from the inside the hearts of his Muslim fellow-workers, and he believed that understanding their scripture was the way to understanding them. There were a number of areas in which he believed that he recognised similarities of themes between the insights he had gained from his understnding of Hindu scriptures, and the Qur'an. The word 'surrender' is one instance. This is the common English translation of the word Islam and is acknowledged to be the basic affirmation of all Muslim faith, namely surrendering to God, and to God alone. Gandhi felt that this was similar to the understanding of surrender he gained from an Upanishadic passage. Gandhi thought there was no significant difference between the Qur'an and the Upanishads on the issue of the necessity for total self-abandonment to God. Half-hearted self-giving was impossible for serious faith.

Another similarity he discerned was the teaching that one should respond to evil with good. This seems to have one of the earliest affirmations that he took very seriously to heart when he learned it from a Vaishnava hymn. There is a very similar moral teaching in the Qur'an.

...Gandhi siad that dharma meant firmness in upholding truth. This would be similar to his understanding of the Qur'anic imperative in Surah Fatiha to remain on the straight path, and not be led astry.

He also believed the teachings about the attributes of God to be very similar in the scriptures of the two faiths.

He speakes of Caliph Ali as a model of restraint, and thus as a model for those who would take up the method of satyagraha.

> You must know how to restrain your anger, if you desire to maintain non-violence in action for any length of time. Hazrat Ali, the hero of Islam, was once spat upon by an adversary; and it is my conviction that if he had not restrained his anger at the time, Islam would not have maintained its unbroken career of progress up to the present time.

Gandhi found in both Hindu and Muslim scriptures the notion of the inscrutability of the will of God.

> Inscrutable are the ways of Providence, I feel that I am dancing to His tune. I, therefore, feel light and buoyant in spirit....Whilst, therefore, no one may feel elated before the end, I feel secure in the faith that He in whose name the work was undertaken will also bring it to a successful issue.

A similar statement prior to one of his fasts indicates how he had internalised the lessons he had gained from the scriptures about self-abandonment.

> My claim to hear the voice of God is not new. Unfortunately, there is no way of proving my claim except through results. God will not be God, if He allowed Himself to be the object of proof by His creatures. But He does give His willing slave the power to pass through the fiercest of ordeals....The greater the surrender to Him, the greater has been my joy.

The theme that God would not be God if he answered to calls of proof from his creatures is Qur'anic, but also could be said to represent a characteristic awareness of serious religious consciousness generally . The Qur'an says unbelievers displayed their irreligious vanity when they tried to tempt God to work a miracle in order for them to believe.

...We can get some further clues as to how Gandhi understood the Qur'an by looking at the Commentary on the Qur'an written by Maulana Azad.

...The attributes of a good person, and the spirit of devotion and commitment to God Gandhi believed were necessary if a person was to become an effective fighter for a better world. The Mahatma was convinced that if persons would seriously internalise and act upon the imperative to return good for evil, just about everything else could be solved.

Repeal evil with that which is best.

Mohan Rao on Muslim Population Growth Rate

With elections looming around the corner, the BJP and its sympathisers among the intelligentsia, have lost no time in resurrecting an issue they have flogged often enough in the past. The issue is the ''Muslim rate of population growth'' (revived) by the publication of selected data from the 1991 Census.

That the Muslim rate of population growth is as much a chimera as the Hindu rate of economic growth, or the cow-belt rate of social progress, does not bother these propagandists. For what is being attempted is not to understand realities - the basis of all social sciences - but to project a fractured view of it for purely political purposes.

Preliminary results from the 1991 Census indicate that, excluding Assam and Jammu and Kashmir, the rate of growth of the Muslim population has been 32.8 per cent, whereas that of the Hindu population has been 22.8 per cent. However, what is crucial is that these data on growth rates by religious communities is not cross tabulated with their determinants: income and literacy for a start. The exercise then is meaningless...

The basic organised propaganda regarding a Muslim rate of population growth rests on the following four assertions, which are, as it were, articles of faith:

1. The law permits a Hindu male to have only one wife. A Muslim male, on the other hand, is allowed to have and tends to have more than one wife.
2. Islam, unlike Hinduism, forbids family planning. Muslims therefore do not practise family planning.
3. Muslims thus have a higher birth rate than do Hindus.
4. It follows therefore that Muslims will soon out-number Hindus in India.

What, however, do facts brought out by official and non-sectarian agencies have to tell us?

Nuptiality Rates

Let us look at the data on marriages - what are called nuptiality rates. The percentage incidence of polygamous marriages (i.e. one wherein a man has more than one wife) is 5.80 among Hindus. The percentage incidence among Muslims is, in fact, slightly lower at 5.73 per cent. These figures are from the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India and are to be found in the publication Polygamous Marriages in India - A Survey (Census of India 1971, Series 1. Miscellaneous Studies, Monograph No.4, New Delhi, 1971).

... There is absolutely no truth to the commonly propagated assertion that bigamy or polygamy is commoner among Muslims. Indeed the Census Commissioner and Registrar General states:

''In India as a whole the incidence of polygamous marriages is highest among the persons returning their religion as tribal religion (15.25 per cent), next come the Buddhists (7.97 per cent) followed by Jains (6.72 per cent).

What the data clearly reveals is that of all these religious groups, Muslims have the lowest incidence of polygamous marriages. What is equally important to bear in mind is that a high incidence of polygamous marriages do not serve to increase fertility - as is commonly propagated. Given the fact that the sex ratio (that is, the number of females per thousand males... in India is highly unfavourable to females amongst both Hindus and Muslims, more than one female marrying one male is not likely to increase fertility; on the contrary it is likely to have a fertility depressant effect in both these communities.

Religious Sanction of Family Planning

Similarly, there is no truth to the assertion that Islam forbids acceptance of family planning. In a study entitled Is Islam Against Family Planning?, Khan points out that (Islam) does not forbid family planning (Khan, M.E.Ed., Birth Control Amongst Muslims in India, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1978). What (Islam) does prohibit are abortions and sterilisations but even these are permitted on health grounds. Let us also note that the proportion of couples using contraceptives in predominantly Muslim countries like Turkey, Indonesia and Egypt is very high. In India too the percentage of Muslims practising family planning has gone up significantly: 40.7 per cent among Muslim women as revealed by Family Planning Practices in India: Third All India Survey, brought out by the Operations Research Group in Baroda in 1990. What is striking is that this percentage has gone up more than proportionately among Muslims from a figure of 23 per cent in the Second All India Survey conducted a decade earlier.

Fertility

The growth rate of the Muslim population is higher as the birth rate amongst Muslims is marginally higher than among Hindus. But this is neither the total nor the real picture.

Consider, for example, the data on fertility by religion provided by the Vital Statistics Division of the Ministry of Home Affairs in Fertility Differentials in India (New Delhi, 1976). It indicates that the difference in the total fertility among religious groups is less than that between the rural and urban populations. The total fertility rate for Hindus in rural areas is 5.7, while in urban areas it is 4.2. For rural Muslims it is 6.2, while for urban Muslims it is 4.9. Christians have the lowest total fertility rate of 4.4 in rural areas, and 4.0 in urban areas. For the population as a whole it is 5.8 in rural India, and 4.3 in urban India. This clearly means that other factors are more important than religion in explaining differentials in fertility.

The same document provides extremely interesting data on fertility in relation to monthly per capita expenditure. With a per capita monthly expenditure of Rs. 21 to Rs. 50, the total marital fertility rate among Indians is 6.8 in both rural and urban areas. With a rise in

monthly per capita expenditure to Rs. 51 to Rs.100, the total marital fertility declines to 5.8 for rural population and 4.3 for urban ones. At a monthly per capita expenditure of Rs. 101 and above, the total marital fertility rate drops to around 2.5 for both rural and urban populations.

The data, then, clearly indicate that decline in fertility is associated with, among other factors, increasing income. It is thus more than likely that the marginally higher fertility among Muslims reflects their relatively lower socio-economic standing. Indeed, this is substantiated by a host of findings by the National Sample Survey Organisation during the course of the 43rd Round which were published in 1990. ...

The same round of the NSS also provides data on monthly per capita expenditure by religion and rural urban residence. This reveals that whereas close to 53 per cent of Muslims have a monthly per capital expenditure of less than Rs. 160, the corresponding figure among Hindus is 36 per cent. In the highest per capita monthly expenditure group of more than Rs. 310, the proportion of Hindus was 22 per cent while that of Muslims was only 10 per cent. Indeed an earlier study in urban India - where the majority of Muslims live - conducted by the NSSO had concluded that:

Muslims in urban India are about 20 per cent below average in per capita monthly expenditure which makes them nearly as poor as the SC and ST communities... (Bhattacharya et al, ''Disparities in Level of Living Across States and Social Groups in Urban India During 1973-74'', Sarvekshana, Journal of the NSSO, Vol.10, No.2, 1986).

Socio-economic Determinants of Fertility

It is well known that acceptance of family planning - and perhaps birth rates - is dependent upon a host of socio-economic factors. Some of the major ones are income, occupation, education and skills, access to technology, child survival, the economic value of children and security in old age (Government of India, Planning Commission, Report of the Working Group on Population Policy, New Delhi, 1980). The significance of these lend further credence to the possibility that the Muslims have a marginally higher birth rate because they are relatively more disadvantaged in all these areas.

Data from the 43rd Round of the NSS, referred to earlier, substantiate this point. With reference to literacy for instance, data reveal that in rural India 51 per cent of Hindu males were illiterate. The figure for Muslim males was 58 per cent. The contrast is every more striking for urban India: 25.3 per cent of Hindu males were illiterate while among Muslim males the proportion was a significantly higher 42 per cent.

... On female education and employment... the NSS data reveals that in urban India as astonishing 42 per cent of Hindu females and 60 per cent of Muslim females are illiterate. Graduates constitute merely four per cent among Hindu females and a negligible 0.8 per cent among Muslim females. The illiteracy rates are of course much higher among women in rural India although there the difference by religion is not very marked. School enrollment rates and school continuation rates, at all ages in both urban and rural India are significantly lower among Muslims than among Hindus. The differences are more glaring among females.

Data on work participation rates reveals that they are substantially lower among females than among males. The female work participation rate among Muslim females in urban India is the lowest at 11.5 per cent. In rural India it is 19.6 among Muslim females and 33.7 among Hindu males.

... Neither Hindus nor Muslims are undifferentiated, homogeneous, communities and we do not have data on demographic indicators and their determinants, among comparable sections of these communities.

Will Muslims Outnumber Hindus?

Yet another myth that has been propagated is that given the higher growth rate among Muslims in India, they will soon outnumber Hindus. A study by P.S. Bhatia entitled ''Population Growth of Various Communities in India: Myth and Reality'' (Demography India, Vol. 19, NO. 1, January, 1990) looks into this issue. The study projects the prevailing growth rates among Hindus and Muslims into the next century. The Hindu population increased by 23.71 per cent between 1961-71 and by 24.71 per cent between 1971-1981. This is an increase of 0.71 per cent points. The Muslim population increased by 30.85 and 30.20 during the corresponding periods. This constitutes an increase of 0.05 per cent points, which is much less than that of Hindus.

Assuming the same rate of increase into the future, Bhatia found that in a hundred years from 1981, that is in the year 2081, Hindus and Muslims will record a decadal growth rate of 30.71 and 30.55 per cent respectively. In other words, the growth rates of Hindus will be higher than that of Muslims. it is simply not true then that Muslims will outnumber Hindus in India.

Further, data clearly indicate that there has been a decline in fertility among all communities in both rural and urban areas. Between 1971 and 1981 the general marital fertility for the Indian population declined by 19.2 per cent in rural India and 20.1 per cent in urban India. The decline was 20 per cent and 20.1 per cent among Hindus in rural and urban India respectively. The percentage decline among Muslims was 17.3 and 18.5 in rural and urban India respectively... This data is also from the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India and are to be found in the publication Census of India 1981, Series I, Part II.

What the data strikingly reveals is that there has been a significant decline in the fertility of the Muslim community in both rural and urban areas; the decline in the fertility among Hindus is only marginally higher. The trend in the fertility among the two communities is however similar. What this point to is the task ahead of

(Contd. on page 224)

Jayant V. Narlikar on Hindu Obscurantism

How much hi-tech and science did our forefathers really know? On the one hand, there are emphatic claims that they knew everything that modern science has taught us today and will teach us in the years to come. On the other, there are sceptics who would associate the dawn of science and technology with the West, dating back no more than a few centuries and would thus deny any knowledge to oriental ancients. The arguments ''for'' fall into three categories. The first line of argument takes to our puranas and the epics. In the Ramayana, we have the Pushpaka Vimana which clearly establishes the existence of helicopters and aeroplanes. What better example of a laser-guided missile than the Shakti with which Karna killed Ghatokacha in the Mahabharata? And the instant beaming of a living body across vast distances that you see in the futuristic Star Trek was routinely practised by our devas and rishis.

The next line of argument invokes ancient works like the Brihad Vimanashastra which describes different flying vehicles and methods of constructing them. Then there are interpretations of the Vedic Richas to show that they contain details of the nuclear fusion that powers the Sun. There is Vedic mathematics which is claimed to contain advanced mathematical concepts and methods. it has often been said that the philosophers of the Vedic and later times knew about quantum mechanics, gauge theory, unified field theory and so on which the theoretical physicists of today are grappling with.

The third argument brings forth examples of old tests like the Vedanga Jyotisha attributed to Lagadha which has astronomical discussions relating to the solar system, the Shalbha Sutra containing geometrical ideas, and the Charaka and Sushruta Samhitas which contain ideas on medicine and surgery. Surely these demonstrate that some science was known and practised in the ancient times.

... A case is weakened if some of its arguments are demonstrably refutable or are basically ill-formulated. The first two lines of arguments... fall in this category.

Thus to convince a scientist it is not sufficient to refer to descriptions of the epics and puranas. Absorbing and imaginative though they are they are a far cry from what constitutes a technical manual. Imagine that thousands of years later our descendants recover a cassette of Star Trek from an archaeological excavation and manage to view it. Are they justified in concluding on the basis of what they see that we ourselves were in possession of the kind of technology shown there? **Therefore, we can credit our ancients with giant leaps of imagination to have produced those works... but no more.**

... In our epics and puranas we see no description of electrical power that is the first significant step of high technology...

I had studied the Brihad Vimanashastra and failed to find in it a technical description of aeronautics. For example, a shastra should contain a basic framework of rules governing flying objects which then gets translated into technical reality. Basic principles of flying like... Bernoulli's theorem, the idea of lift and streamlines should be described. Even assuming that the ancients somehow bypassed these basics through some yogic insight, not available to the modern scientist, the actual description of construction is also vague and certainly cannot be used for making a real aircraft.

Vedic Mathematics

Much is made of Vedic mathematics... If it is looked upon as a system of carrying out quick numerical manipulation it has its merits. But as any mathematician of distinction will tell you, that does not constitute advanced mathematics.

... In interpreting ancient descriptions and with Vedic Sanskrit... the problem of interpretation is even more tricky, it is easy for the interpreter to read into a statement the meaning he.. wishes to read. This probably explains the post-facto nature of interpretations: only after modern science makes a discovery do claims appear that it is contained in such and such ancient time. In many cases, the antiquity of the statement may also be questionable...

Arguments in the third category, however, are worth taking note of and deserve further scholarly studies. For they are clearly documented, can be interpreted without ''personal'' ambiguities and do tell us that our ancient civilisation did have thinkers and experimenters of high quality. Thus Lagadha should be studied with as much care as his (much) later descendants like Aryabhatta (fifth century A.D.) and Bhaskara (12th century A.D.). The works ascribed to Sushruta and Charaka, unlike the speculations described above, are experimentally testable. The legacy of yoga as a discipline of mind and body is indisputable.

Our old texts are often examined for astronomical events like eclipses, comets and conjunctions. Another useful and hitherto unexplored line of investigation is supernovae. A supernova is an exploding star: an event which can be spectacular if it takes place in our galaxy. The Chinese and Japanese astronomers have recorded an event that was seen on July 4, 1054... Event like that would not have gone unnoticed on our subcontinent... Records wherever they may be, ... will be of enormous importance to astronomical archives. ...

I mention... the fact ... could be precise... to be so.

Let us stress examples of precision which is the hallmark of science rather than ambiguous personalised interpretations of what they said. Only then will we do justice to the achievements of our ancients.

(Source: Indian Skeptic, January, 1996)

Bhupendra Yadav on Hindutva: Encroachment on Hinduism

Hindutva is the 'in' thing these days. There can be no quarrel with this statement because khaki shorts march and saffron flags fly everywhere. In its recent judgement the Supreme Court has said that Hindutva is the 'done' thing also. Not stopping here, the Court added that Hindutva is in line with 'Indian ethos and culture'. Here some students of Indian history and politics... beg to differ.

If Hindutva were in line with the Indian ethos and culture, its natural constituency should have been the villages of India. But the BJP or the Jan Sangh (and the Hindu Mahasabha before them) have (or had) negligible influence in rural India. In fact, it is the uprooted, urbanised, modernised and half-westernised mofussil citizens who have been the traditional support base of Hindutva politics.

On the other hand, the political ideologies and parties which have had some influence in the countryside have no love lost for Hindutva. Be it Gandhi's Congress before Independence or Charan Singh's and Mulayam Singh's political outfits since then. It is no wonder, therefore, that all the three attempts on Gandhi's life were made by Hindutva lovers. And this hostility was not because Gandhi was not Hindu enough...

The reason for the hostility between Hindutva lovers and the Father of the Nation... therefore, is something else. Gandhi was very close to the traditions, the ethos and the culture of Hinduism in the way Hindutva lovers were not. Gandhi was a Sanatani Hindu, Hindutva lovers were cultural engineers trying to subvert Hinduism.

Ashis Nandy et al in Creating a Nationality find four faults with Hindutva's claim to represent the traditions of Hinduism.

At the outset it should be noted that Hindutva emerged in several spasms but its final author was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966). The context in which Hindutva emerged was the debunking of Hindus as an effeminate and cowardly people by colonial administrators, ... even evangelical missionaries. Hindutva lovers simply swallowed this assessment and began criticising Hindus for being too diverse, anarchic, irrational, un-modern, feminised, superstitious and, by implication, unfit to govern a nation-state.

On Hindutva's agenda, therefore, the first thing was to make Hinduism look like the ruler's religion. The local traditions of Hinduism were criticised, ignored and sidelined... Hinduism was cleaned, sanitised and pasteurised. So much so that except Ram all other avatars (incarnations) of Vishnu are sidelined and some avatars like Matsya (The Fish), Kurma (The Tortoise), Varaha (The Boar) or Narasimha (The Man-Lion) are almost forgotten.

Violence against the Hindu pantheon by Hindutva lovers was not so much to put Manuvad in command... as to invent a slim and trim Hinduism. The hope was that this slim-trim Hinduism will resemble Semitic religions like Christianity or Islam.

Secondly, the rambling Hindu faith was also sought to be converted into an ideology with certain basic tenets and clear-cut goals. Said Savarkar a Hindu is one whose Fatherland (not the effeminate Matribhumi or Janmabhumi but Fatherland as the Russians and the Germans call their land) and whose Holy land lies between the Indus and the Sea. The Christians and Muslims were thereby excluded by definition from adopting the territory of Bharatvarsha. As the president of Hindu Mahasabha in 1938, Savarkar declared that **Hindus and Muslims were two nations with deep cultural and political antagonism**. From this, it was a small step for Muslim League to demand 'separation' of the two nations which the League happily took in 1940. Left to Hindus India would be a bowl of diverse cultures but with Hindutva in command the diversities shall be put into a 'melting pot' a la USA and a national cultural mainstream forged.

Thirdly, Hindutva seeks to masculinise the Hindu and militarise Hinduism of which the khaki shorts and lathi drills are the most obvious expressions. Hinduism never propagates violence let alone praise it. So Gandhi's paeans to ahimsa were more in line with the Indian traditions. On their part, Hindutva lovers adore masculinity to avenge the alleged one-thousand year long domination of Hindus by Muslims and Christians. Gandhi, on his part, considered history (including that of alleged domination) a mithya and defeat allegedly at the hands of Muslims/Christians meant nothing to Gandhi. For Gandhi defeat was a problem for the victor, not the vanquished. Victory meant depriving someone else of something or hurting him/her. Depriving or hurting others should cause pangs of conscience to the victor, thought Gandhi. The wide grin on the faces of Hindutva lovers after demolishing Babari Masjid does not reflect any such qualm on their part.

Fourthly, Gandhi spun charkha whereas Hindutva lovers are uncritical supporters of modern science and technology. So, even an atomic bomb is necessary to them and the question they ask is when will we have ours? Not, why do others have such a dangerous thing? Explaining his reason for eliminating Gandhi, Nathuram Godse said he hoped that after Gandhi, Indian politics would be based on reason, it will be practical and India will be powerful... Why did he dislike Gandhian politics? Godse said that it was 'supported by old superstitious beliefs such as the power of the soul, the inner voice, the fast, the prayer and the purity of mind'.

Do these sentiments sound Hindu? Not to my ears. If anything, Hindutva lovers appear to be encroachers or poachers into Hinduism. And like encroachers they wear some Hindu symbols to proclaim their domicility in the Hindu tradition. But like poachers they do violence to the same tradition. ...

(Source: The Hindustan Times, 30 December, 1995)

Gaur: Monuments under Pillage and Depredation

Subrata Nagchoudhury in The India Today, 29 February, 1996

Salami Darwaza is an imposing gateway which was used for gun salutes during Sultan Barbak Shah's rule (1459 A.D.) at Gaur in West Bengal's Malda town. A prominent Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) notice outside declares it a "protected monument" and warns of strict action against any depredation... (Yet) the houses nearby, most of them - even the spanking new ones - have been built from the centuries-old bricks taken from this monument and those around it.

... (The ASI) itself had no option but to purchase bricks from villagers when it wanted to renovate a part of the famous Bara Sona Mosque's entrance. Built by Sultan Nusrat Shah in 1527 A.D., it originally had a gilded dome and hence the name. Gaur, once a flourishing capital of Bengal for several centuries and with 22 historical monuments to show for it, provides a rich hunting ground for rapacious organised gangs. A 10-sq. km area around the monuments with its new houses built from old bricks is proof enough of the wanton pillaging. And there is a brazenness about the entire exercise...

... The "Lakhauri bricks" of Gaur are known for their quality and strength. The same bricks were used in Delhi during the Sultanate period. The artisans belonged to Lakhauri in Uttar Pradesh and the compact size of the bricks ensured that they were properly made.

The bricks are much in demand... While locals remove them from old monuments, those staying away from the sites have to buy them and the orders must be placed a few days in advance... And there is no dearth of such bricks even in the fields surrounding Gaur. Enterprising villagers have learnt to be adept at locating sites where a single stroke of the shovel can unearth layers upon layers of bricks. A dealer ... says that the present rate is Rs. 5 per maund (40 kg.)... The supply is usually made in bullock carts. Orders come from nearby villages and at times from builders in Malda. Some supplies have been made to places in Bangladesh as well... where they are used for renovating or building new mosques. Some connoisseurs from Calcutta are said to have offered to pay Rs. 300 to Rs. 400 for a single enamelled brick.

...Deputy Superintendent, ASI, Calcutta Circle, does not deny that there is a plunder of bricks (and) blames local politics for the ASI's decision to abandon its renovation work for the past three years. The issue concerned the engaging of labourers having different political affiliations. Last year, conservation work could be resumed only after intervention by the local district administration... This being the case, the houses of Gaur will continue to be lined with centuries-old bricks.

On Gyan Vapi Masjid, Varanasi

... "The story regarding Vishwanath Temple is that while Aurangzeb was passing by Varanasi on his way to Bengal the Hindu rajas in his retinue requested that if the halt was made for a day their ranis may go to Varanasi, have a dip in the Ganges and pay their homage to Lord Vishwanath. Aurangzeb readily agreed.

Army pickets were posted on the five-mile route to Varanasi. The ranis made a journey in palkies. They took their dip in the Ganges and went to the Vishwanath Temple to pay their homage. After offering puja all ranis returned except one, the maharani of Kutch. A thorough search was made of the temple precincts but the rani was nowhere to be found. When Aurangzeb came to know of it, he got enraged. He sent senior officers to search for the rani.

Ultimately they found that the statue of Ganesh fixed in the wall was a moveable one. When the statue was moved, they saw a flight of stairs that led to the basement. To their horror, they found the missing rani dishonoured and crying. The basement was just beneath Lord Vishwanath's seat. The rajas expressed their vociferous protests. They wanted exemplary action. Aurangzeb ordered that as the sacred precincts had been despoiled, Lord Vishwanath may be moved to some other place. The temple be razed to the ground and the mahant be arrested and punished.

Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, in his famous book The Feathers and the Stones has narrated this as a fact based on documentary evidence. Dr. P.L. Gupta, former curator of Patna Museum, has also corroborated this incident."

(Source: The Nation and the World, 1 February, 1996)

Vijaya Ghose On Protection of Historic Monuments

...In New Delhi a hideous temple is built adjoining the rear wall of Purana Qila and like all temples and other places of worship. It continues to grow. Illegal marble shops near Jamali Kamali add to the rape of the ridge. The beautiful arches of Masjid Moth where I live are first of all used as public lavatories by the local people and then the pigs get into the act.

Since we do not seem to care about our precious heritage and profess we are too impoverished to 'waste' money on old buildings, why not auction all our monuments brick by brick or stone by stone to the highest bidder who will then reassemble the monuments on their shores? ....

(Source: The Patriot, 1 March, 1996)

Indian Chapter of Pakistan-India Forum People's March for Indo-Pak Amity in August, 1997

Press Release of the National Committee,

27 February, 1996

The National Conference of the Indian chapter of the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFPD) which met at the Constitution Club, New Delhi on February 25 and 26, 1996 pledged itself to an action programme to bring about the objectives that the Forum had set for itself in its two previous joint Conventions of Pakistani and Indian delegates which were held in Delhi in February 1995 and in Lahore in November 1995. ...

More than 100 delegates from all over India covering 20 States met in Delhi and pledged themselves to prepare for a People's March in August 1997 (commemorating 50 years of independence in both countries) to the Pakistan-India border as a symbolic statement of the deep and widespread desire of the people of India to live in peace, democracy and friendship with the people of Pakistan. The National Conference has also pledged to organise on the Indian side a mass signature campaign behind the joint Pakistan-India appeal that was formulated at the Lahore Convention, calling on the peoples of the two countries to put pressure on their respective governments to resolve all bilateral disputes peacefully and democratically and to promote all efforts at friendship and cooperation... A series of rallies, meetings, mushairas and other cultural events, as well as various forms of demonstrating solidarity between the peoples of India and Pakistan are proposed to be organised between now and August 1997.

The Indian chapter of the Forum will shortly be addressing a letter to all the major political parties asking them to incorporate the Forum's demands and resolution concerning the promotion of peace, democracy, friendship and cooperation between the two countries in their respective manifestos for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections.

... The Conference also set up a National Committee which will oversee the various programmes and plans of action that the Forum will be undertaking. It will also prepare for the third joint Convention of the Forum (expected to be the largest so far with an anticipated 250 delegates from each country) to be held around November-December 1996 in India. ...

(Source: The Mainstream, 2 March, 1996)

Those who worship dogs, cats, even stones will lose no time in worshipping social reformers like Periyar, once the Dalits come to power.

- Kansi Ram, BSP Leader

Swapan Dasgupta on Muslim Boycott of Religious Institutions in U.K.

There are fears of ethnic tensions in Yorkshire and the Midlands following a decision by the Muslim community to boycott religious education in schools. Already 1,500 Muslim school-children in some 40 schools... have opted out of RE classes in protest against having to learn about other religions, particularly Christianity. The protest, which is being organised from the local mosques... is in danger of spreading to Bradford and London. In its letters to parents, the Muslim Association of Batley, which initiated the protests, said: "It is unacceptable for Muslim children to learn about other religions because there is a possibility of corrupting their basic belief from learning from a non-Muslim teacher and through comparative studies." ...

... The 1988 Education Reform Act requires that the RE curriculum in schools should "reflect the fact that the religious traditions of Great Britain are in the main Christian, while taking account of the other principal religions represented in Britain."

However, the same Act permits parents the right to withdraw their children from religious and sex education classes on grounds of conscience. This is the first time the opt-out clause has been used in an organised manner. ...

Observers interpret the boycott as an attempt by the increasingly assertive fundamentalist lobby... to secure a place for the local Imam in the schools. As a compromise measure, the Muslim Associations will demand that a representative from the local mosque address Muslim children during RE classes on Islam.

... The fundamentalist lobby believes it will have the backing of the Labour Party which depends a great deal on the organised Muslim vote bank in the Midlands.

... The traditionalists are bound to attack any dilution of the predominantly Christian bias in the RE curriculum as being inimical to the interaction of recent immigrants. They also see in the boycott campaign the seeds of a larger move for separate Islamic schools with its distinctive curriculum.

Iran: Statement of Ayatollah Yezdi on Rushdie

... Because of a blatant crime, Salman Rushdie, has been sentenced to death on the basis of a fatwa issued by a senior jurisprudent and religious & Islamic Scholar but a fatwa is different from a judicial order.

... Its execution is on the shoulders of the world Muslims and whether the American or foreign media does, or does not, misuse this issue makes no difference for us. The Government of Iran will neither try to executive this fatwa... nor pay money to any body else to kill Salman Rushdie...

Anti-Islam Surge in the West

A Report in the New York Times

When Americans consider the safety of the world these days, many still seem conditioned to look for end-of-the-world threats that must be confronted. The end of the cold war sparked a kind of intellectual contest to identify the biggest and most credible new enemy. There was unfair trade. Global warming. Computer terrorism. The spread of weapons of mass destruction. Drugs. But none of these caught fire. Even ethnic hatred did not capture Americans' imagination...

But one threat has resonated in the public mind: Islamic Holy War...

... Powerful Islamic movements have sprung up to emulate Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's victory in Iran as they challenge Western allies in Algeria, Egypt, Kuwait, Bahrain, Pakistan. The greatest danger to peace between Israel and the Palestinians remains the Islamic radicals of Hamas. And Iran has tried repeatedly to export its revolution.

So there are many respected intellectuals who see the acts of terrorism and the ubiquitous Muslim diatribes against the West as part of a deepening conflict between an aggressive Islam and a defensive Western civilisation.

Take Bernard Lewis, the eminent historian from Princeton University, who wrote more than five years ago: ''The struggle between Islam and the West has now lasted 14 centuries. It has consisted of a long series of attacks and counterattacks, jihads and crusades, conquests and reconquests. Today much of the Muslim world is again seized by an intense - and violent - resentment of the West. Suddenly, America had become the arch enemy, the incarnation of evil, the diabolic opponent of all that is good, and specifically, for Muslims, of Islam.

But a number of other experts on Islam think it is a big mistake to see politicised Islam as a unified threat, rather than as a way of thinking that inspires local bids for power. Their argument goes something like this. Overstating the threat, and misunderstanding the role of religion in it, risks playing into the hands of the extremists by portraying Islam itself as the enemy. Algeria's Muslims don't answer to Iran, and there are inherent divisions between the Sunni and Shiite branches of Islam. What's more, the extremists represent only one part of Islamic theology - those who would mobilise religion to foment social revolutions, often against repressive, corrupt governments.

''Explosive headline events and acts of violence make it tempting to view Islam through the prism of religious extremism and terrorism,'' said John Esposito, director of the Centre for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University and author of a book titled The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality? ''But the demonisation of a great religious tradition because of the perverted actions of a minority of dissident voices remains the real threat''.

In fact, political Islam has become one of the hottest, nastiest debates in academic circles today, mirroring the old debate on how well-organised and monolithic the communist menace was. Supporters of the notion of fundamentalism as a global threat label their opponents simplistic and naive; opponents label the supporters simplistic and bigoted.

The Council on Foreign Relations, hardly a hotbed of radical thinking, has come under fire for its new monthly newsletter. Muslim Politics Report, a forum for a broad range of thought on Islam...

The Council President Leslie Gelb says: 'We consider the report a major contribution to let people know about a range of thinking by Islamic experts and leaders...

In Europe, the debate is even more virulent. America's European allies have been skittish about supporting the Muslim-dominated government in Bosnia in part because of fears about their own Muslim populations. The presence of 15 million Muslims in Europe, many of whom are poor and have refused to embrace the ways of the West, has fuelled prejudices and fears. Some French schools prohibit girls from wearing head scarves, and Germany has refused to give Turks citizenship.

... Last year Willy Claes... then NATO's secretary general, said offhandedly that ''Islamic fundamentalism is at least as dangerous as communism was''. ...

Bahrain's ruling family has put down demonstrations by the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain, blaming them on Iran. But American intelligence has found no evidence that the opposition is anything but locally organised - spawned by economic discontent, an uneven distribution of wealth and the absence of any political freedom.

The Islamic Welfare Party won a stunning 21 per cent of the votes in Turkish elections last month. But a pro-Islamic vote - for a party that has not been associated with violence - was the only vehicle for protesting the government's failure to tackle poverty and inflation.

Under pressure from Saudi Arabia this month, Britain ordered the expulsion of Mohammed al Massari, an opponent of the regime, to the Caribbean island of

(Contd. on page 238)

Annual Urs of Makhdoom Sheikh at Bihar Sharief

... Thousands of pilgrims from various parts of the country (come) here... to participate in the five-day annual ''Urs Mela in the memory of the Sufi Saint Makhdum Sheikh Sharafuddin Yahya Maneri, known as Hazrat Makhdum Saheb. ... Hazrat Makhdum Saheb is known as one of the great Sufi saints of the country.

The pilgrims offer silk chadars as a mark of reverence to the saint, whose mortal remains are enshrined in the Bari Dargah... The mazar of Hazrat Makhdum Saheb is the symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity and communal harmony... The annual Urs Mela starts on the fifth day of Id... Thousands of Muslim pilgrims (as well as) hundreds of Hindus offer prayers every day, chadars (also) different institution of this town including police stations, criminal courts etc.

... Huge copper cauldrons are installed in the premises by the organisations and cooked rice, vegetable and pulses which is to be distributed all along the five day celebration, among the needy and poor free of cost. ...

The mela started with the ''chadar poshi'' performed by Nalanda district administration on the February 25, 1996. ...

A Temple with a Muslim as Vishnu's Consort Nirupama Subramanian in India Today, 31 March, 1996

The Tulukka Nachchiyar, literally, ''the Muslim lady'', painted on the wall of one of the oldest Vishnu temples in India, Surathani ... is the consort of Lord Vishnu. Every day, thousands of worshippers stream into the Sri Ranganathaswami temple at Srirangam, 8 km from Tiruchi, filing devoutly past her. In all probability, this is **the only Vishnu temple in the country where a Muslim is venerated as a goddess.**

... On special days, the priests, after bathing the idol, wrap him in a red, checked tehmet, a Muslim apparel, instead of a white dhoti... Most Muslims living nearby (may) not even aware of her existence, for the temple's sanctum sanctorum is out of bounds for non-Hindus. ...

There are other temple practices... For instead, prasad is offered to the deity on a cloth....

Al-Ameen Educational Society

Chairman	:	K. Rahman Khan
Hony. Secretary	:	Irfan Razak
Address	:	Hosur Road, Near Lalbagh Main Gate, Bangalore-560 027

'Spirited' Devotees at Baba Rode's 'Samadhi'

Spirited devotees... throng the Samadhi of Baba Rode Shah (Fatehgarh Churian, Punjab), clutching bottles of liquor as offerings for grant of a boon. ...

The offerings are then distributed in the form of 'prasad' for which the devotees scramble... There is a general atmosphere of revelry as the devotees sing and dance in gay abandon to the beat of the drums.

However, the keeper of the shrine says only the people with impure intentions get drunk here while the others have their wishes fulfilled after drinking the 'holy' liquor.

This unusual bonhomie is witnessed at the annual fair held here during this month when devotees from Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Haryana, Punjab and Delhi come to pay their obeisance to the saint. ....

(Contd. from page 237)

Dominica. But the kingdom itself is an Islamic state that is being ruled by strict Islamic law; what Mr. Massari accuses the royal family of is corruption (which, he says, is unIslamic).

And consider this: the ''green menace'' (the new catch-phrase in the debate, after the colour associated with Islam) is a convenient way for a leader to explain away opposition based on a country's economic, social and political inequities... Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, president Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and then Prime Minister Tansu Ciller of Turkey all told President Clinton that the greatest threat to their governments came from globally linked fundamentalism... They risked sounding like one-time American friends, such as president Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines and Shah Mohammad Riza Pahlevi of Iran, who resisted reform to the very end, while presenting themselves as bulwarks against communism.

Israel's reconciliation with the Palestine Liberation Organisation has also helped cast Islam as a larger than life enemy. ''After the fall of communism, fundamentalism has become the greatest danger of our time'', Shimon Peres, now Israel's prime minister has said. The American Jewish Congress has replaced its ''Boycott Report'' on the Arabic economic boycott of Israel with a newsletter titled Radical Islamic Fundamentalist Update.

Islamic radicalism has also seized the imagination of some in Congress. House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who has warned about ''totalitarian Islam,'' led Congress last month to approve $ 20 million in covert aid to moderate Iran's behaviour....

(Source: The Times of India, 7 February, 1996)

Chronology of the Month

(16 March - 15 April, 1996)

NATIONAL POLITICS

* Supreme Court clarifies that its interpretation of 'Hindutva' in Joshi case does not permit any political party or candidate to seek votes on ground of religion. Agrees to reconsider its ruling **(16 Mar)**; Suggests new legislation on use of religion in politics; Refers case to Constitutional Bench **(22 Mar)**; H.C. quashes E.C. Order on non-registration of Hindu Mahasabha as a political party on ground of use of prefix 'Hindu'.

Congress (I):

* Congress President Narasimha Rao attacks BJP on question of Hindutva; holds firm on question of J&K poll and personal law at Sankalp Rally in Delhi **(24 Mar)**.

* Rao meets Muslim clergy and seeks support by offering "virtual apology" for past mistakes **(30 Mar)**. Ulema demand reassurance on reconstruction of Babari Masjid; Muslim leaders also demand reservation in public employment and non-interference in Personal Law. Ulema Council, Bombay, decides to support Congress in Maharashtra **(12 April)**.

* Rao presents Chadar at Dargah Sharif in Ajmer **(25 Mar)**.

* Prime Minister commits Congress to protection of rights of minorities.

* Jama Masjid Advisory Council defers decision on electoral support **(10 April)**. Shahi Imam calls upon Muslims to vote unitedly for secular candidates in their respective Constituencies who can defeat communal and fascist elements **(22 April)**. *Conference of Ulema and Mashaikh organised by Islamic Council of India supports Congress. *The All India Minority Front supports Congress and presents charter of demands **(30 Mar)**. Various minor Muslim organisations jointly call upon Muslims to strengthen hands of Prime Minister Rao **(12 April)**.

* Arif Beg resigns from BJP to join Congress (I) **(2 April)**.

Bharatiya Janata Party:

* Advani's Rath Yatra turns a damp squib; gets poor response in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh; Advani abandons Yatra **(18 Mar)**.

* BJP releases election manifesto **(7 April)**; Hindutva remains the cutting edge **(7 April)**. BJP uses Ram Mandir issue as major poll plank; Advani calls it BJP's top priority **(9 April)**.

* Samata Party (Fernandes) and Chandra Shekhar (SJP) merge and align with BJP **(17 Mar)** but alliance fails in Haryana. EC recognises Samata Party (George Fernandes group) as the real Samata Party **(29 Mar)**. BJP to contest 475 seats **(24 Mar)**.

Janata Parivar:

* JD organises Gharib Rally in Patna which calls for defeating Congress and BJP **(18 Mar).**

* V.P. Singh makes last effort for conciliation between SP and BSP and fails **(22 Mar)**. JD-SP alliance finalised for UP with JD as a junior partner with 16 seats only **(27 Mar)**.

* UP and Delhi JD units rebel against central leadership; several sitting MPs also rebel in Bihar **(30 Mar)**. JD dissolves UP and Delhi units.

Left Front:

CPI(M) releases manifesto and calls for defeat to BJP and Congress **(22 Mar)**. Jyoti Basu pleads for JD-SP alliance **(24 Mar)**.

BSP:

* BSP leader Kanshi Ram rules out tie-up with any party **(18 Mar)**. Woos Muslims and Dalits **(18 Mar)**.

* Muslim leaders try to unite BSP and JD but fails; Kanshi Ram rules out alliance with JD; Expresses readiness to alliance with BJP or Congress **(25 Mar)**. BSP General Secretary Mayawati rules out alliance with BJP or Congress **(27 Mar)**.

Muslim Politics:

* Talks between IMUL and INL fails for electoral adjustment in Kerala.

BABARI MASJID QUESTION

* H.M. Chavan promises reconstruction of Babari Masjid on original site if Supreme Court decides title suit in favour of Muslims **(10 Mar)**.

* Allahabad H.C. orders relaxation to 'facilitate' darshan and pooja by devotees at Ram Lalla makeshift temple on Babari Masjid site. Muslims appeal to Supreme Court against Order.

* Criminal Cases Special Magistrate defers hearing on Babari Masjid cases to 8 April **(16 Mar)**.

* Muslims plead for protection to Gyan Vapi Masjid under the Act of 1991 **(3 April).**

KASHMIR QUESTION

International:

* PM rules out mediation for Indo-Pak dialogue on Kashmir **(7 April).**

* Pakistan offers 'genuine dialogue' with India **(27 Mar)**. Pakistan fails to secure support of Muslim countries for resolution on Kashmir in UN HRC **(28 Mar)**.

Talks between Government and Militants:

* National Conference describes talks between Government and militants as a good gesture but Hurriyat calls it a futile exercise **(13 Mar)**.

* Militant groups confused on first phase of talks between some militants and government; JKLF leader Shabir Ahmed criticises All Party Hurriyat Conference for failure to represent the aspirations of Kashmir people and calls it a 'divided house' **(18 Mar)**. JKLF leader Amanullah Khan calls talks 'a waste of time, energy and money' **(19 Mar)**.
* Leaders of Al-Barq and Hizbul Mujahideen decide to stay away from second round calling it an election stunt **(22 Mar)**.
* Talks held at official level in Srinagar **(23 Mar)**.

Ground Situation:

* Violent encounter at Hazratbal; 11 killed **(24 Mar)**; Militants vacate shrine **(26 Mar)**. J&K Police takes control; normal service begins at Hazratbal **(27 Mar)**.
* Another encounter with militants at Hazratbal, at least 22 militants killed **(30 Mar)**. Demonstration in Islamabad **(21 Mar)**.
* Body of human rights activist and noted lawyer Jalil Indrabi, found in Srinagar **(27 Mar)**; Killing rocks Valley, JKLF declares 4 days strike **(28 Mar)**. USA condemns killing and demands serious investigation **(30 Mar)**. Government denies activists killing **(31 Mar)**.
* NHRC recommends admission of Amnesty International into Kashmir Valley **(26 Mar)**.

Kashmir Politics:

* National Conference decides not to align with Congress in coming election **(16 Mar)**; decides not to participate in Lok Sabha election **(29 Mar)**.'

MATTERS OF MUSLIM CONCERN

Personal Law:

* Bihar Muslim Intellectual Forum releases draft bill proposing changes in divorce and polygamy laws and establishment of Muslim Family Councils **(22 Mar)**.
* Muslim Women's Convention condemns demand for Uniform Civil Code but calls for making triple talaq illegal **(24 Mar)**.

Mosques:

* All India Imams Organisation rejects the government scheme for payment of salary to Imams submitted to Supreme Court **(16 Mar)**. * Delhi H.C. orders DDA to demolish illegally constructed Wazukhana in Jama Masjid within 2 weeks **(8 April)**.

Haj:

* Muslim organisations demand change in date of general election on ground of Id-ul-Adah; Supreme Court rejects demand **(28 Mar)**.
* Delay in finalisation of air charter and accommodation in Makkah disturbs Haj arrangements; However, 50,000 pilgrims from India perform Haj as scheduled **(27 Mar)**.

Communal Violence:

* National Foundation for Communal Harmony Governing Body meets to review progress; number of riot-orphanes receiving financial support rises to 1028 on 29.2.1996.

Cow Slaughter:

* Bajrang Dal launches nationwide, one-month long movement against cow slaughter **(20 Mar)**; Agitation fails to make impact.

AMU:

* University administration expels five students and suspends 13 teachers **(27 Mar)** * University Court meets to elect Hakim Abdul Hamid as the Chancellor and new members to fill vacancies of representatives of Muslim organisations and associations **(7 April)**.

Reservation:

* Indian Muslim Backward Classes Conference demands proportional representation in legislature **(23 Mar)**.
* JD leader Laloo Prasad Yadav promises reservation for poor upper castes as well as for minorities **(22 Mar)**.
* Supreme Court agrees to provide 25% interim reservation quota at post-graduate level in AIIMS **(28 Mar).**
* All India Christian Forum demands reservation for Christian Dalits **(22 Mar)**; Bharat Sadhu Samaj opposes it. * National Minorities Commission Chairman Sardar Ali Khan demands continuation of reservation for Dalit converts to Islam.

Urdu:

* Allahabad H.C. objects to use of Urdu in competitive test for recruitment to PAC.

Infiltration:

* Maharashtra Government again demands proof of citizenship from more than 100,000 Muslims in Bombay. JD leader Ram Vilas Paswan protest.

Bodoland Question:

* Central Government agrees to reconsider the Bodo demand for redemarcation of Bodoland area **(19 Mar)**.

Other Minorities:

* P.M. Rao assures Buddhist leadership of restoration of Mahabodhi Vihara in Bodhgaya **(16 Mar)**.
* National Minorities Commission recommends inclusion of Jains in list of national minorities **(20 Mar)**.
* Karnataka Christian body appeals to all parties for adequate representation to Christians among parliamentary candidates **(26 Mar)**.

Objectionable publications:

* Qureshi community of Aligarh demands ban on BJP leader Naraman's defamatory book **(18 Mar)**.
* Government lifts ban on Rushdie's ''The Moor's last Sigh'' **(9 April).**

Obituary:

* Eminent Urdu poet Nazir Banarsi, 87, passes away in Varanasi **(23 Mar)**.
* Eminent geologist and former Professor of AMU Fakhruddin Ahmed passes away in Aligarh **(26 Mar)**.