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# AYODHYA: A HISTORICAL WATERSHED

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Following is the final chapter of Mr. Giri Lal's book, "The Hindu Phenomenon".  
AYODHYA: A HISTORICAL WATERSHED

1992 will doubtless go down in Indian history as the year of Ayodhya. This is so not so much because recent events there have pushed into background all the other issues such as economic reforms and reservations for the 'other backward castes' as because they have released forces which will have a decisive influence in shaping the future of India.

These forces are not new; they have been at work for two centuries. Indeed, they were not even wholly bottled up. But they had not been unleashed earlier as they have been now. It is truly extraordinary that the demolition of a nondescript structure by faceless men no organization owns up should have shaken so vast a country as India. But no one can possibly deny that it has. These forces in themselves are not destructive even if they have led to some violence and blood-letting. They are essentially beneficent. They shall seek to heal the splits in the Indian personality so that it is restored to health and vigour.

Implicit in the above is the proposition that while India did not cease to be India either under Muslim or British rule despite all the trials and tribulations, she was not fully Mother India. And she was not fully Mother India not because she was called upon to digest external inputs, which is her nature to assimilate, but because she was not free to throw out what she could not possibly digest in the normal and natural course. This lack of freedom to reject what cannot be assimilated is the essence of foreign conquest and rule. The meaning of Ayodhya is that India has regained, to a larger extent than hitherto, the capacity to behave and act as a normal living organism. She has taken another big step towards self-affirmation.

All truth, as Lenin said, is partisan. So is mine. I do not pretend to be above the battle, or, to rephrase Pt. Nehru, I am not neutral against myself. But partisan truth is not demagoguery and patently false propaganda, which is what advocates of 'composite culture' have engaged in. Two points need to be noted in this regard.

First, no living culture is ever wholly autonomous; for no culture is an airtight sealed box; Indian culture, in particular, has been known for its catholicity and willingness to give as well as take. It withdrew into a shell when it felt gravely threatened and became rigid; but that is understandable; indeed, the surprise, if any, is that Indian culture survived the Islamic and Western onslaught at all.

Secondly, a culture, if it is not swallowed up by an incoming one, whether by way of proselytization or conquest or both, as the Egyptians

and Iranians were by Islam, or if it is not destroyed as the Aztec was by the Portuguese and Spaniards, must seek to recover; even Indians in Latin America have not given up the effort. Surely, since no one can possibly suggest that Indian culture was either swallowed up or destroyed; it is only natural that it should seek to recover its genuine self. Surely, this is neither an anti-Islamic nor anti-Western activity.

Pt. Nehru almost never used the phrase 'composite culture'. His was a more organic view of culture and civilization. He believed in, and spoke of, cultural synthesis which, if at all, could take place only within the old civilizational framework since Islam did not finally triumph. Pt. Nehru also wrote and spoke of the spirit of India asserting itself again and again. Surely, that spirit could not be a composite affair. In the Maulana Azad memorial lecture he also spoke of different cultures being products of different environments and he specifically contrasted tropical India with the deserts of Arabia. He even said that a Hindu-Muslim culture synthesis had not been completed when other factors intervened. Apparently he was referring to the British Raj.

This should also dispell the impression that the Nehru era was a continuation of alien rule intended to frustrate the process of Indianization of India. This charge is not limited to his detractors. It is made by his admirers as well, though, of course, indirectly and unknowingly. They pit secularism against Hinduism which is plainly absurd. Hindus do not need the imported concept of secularism in order to be able to show respect towards other faiths. That comes naturally to them. For theirs is an inclusive faith which provides for every form of religious experience and belief; there can be no heresy or kufr in Hinduism.

For Nehru, secularism, both as a personal philosophy and state policy, was an expression of India's cultural-civilizational personality and not its negation and repudiation. Secularism suited India's requirements as he saw them. For instance, it provided an additional legitimizing principle for reform movements among Hindus beginning with the Brahma Samaj in the early part of the nineteenth century. It met the aspirations of the Westernized and modernizing intelligentsia. Before independence, it denied legitimacy to Muslim separatism in the eyes of Hindus, Westernized or traditionalist. If it did not help forge an instrument capable of resisting effectively the Muslim League's demand for partition, the alternative platform of men such as Veer Savarkar did not avail either. After partition, it served the same purpose of denying legitimacy to moves to consolidate Muslims as a separate communalist political force.

Pt. Nehru's emphasis on secularism has to be viewed not only in relation to the Muslim problem which survived partition, but it has also to be seen in the context of his plea for science and India's need to get rid of the heavy and deadening burden of rituals and superstitions, products of periods of grave weakness and hostile environment when nothing nobler than survival was possible. Seen in this perspective, the ideologies of socialism and secularism have served as mine sweepers. They have cleared the field of dead conventions sufficiently to make it possible for new builders to move in. Sheikh Abdullah exaggerated when he charged Pt. Nehru with Machiavellianism, but he was not too wide off the mark when he wrote in *Aatish-e-Chinar* that Nehru was "a great admirer of the past heritage and the Hindu spirit of India.. He considered himself as an instrument of rebuilding India with its ancient spirit".

The trouble is that self-styled Nehruites and other secularists are not able to recognize that India is no longer the convalescent she was not only when Gandhiji launched his first mass movement but also when she achieved independence with Pt. Nehru as the first prime minister. The two leaders have helped nurse her back to health as have their critics in different ways. That is the implication of my observation that the energies now unleashed have been at work for two centuries.

Only on a superficial view, resulting from a lack of appreciation of the history of modern India, beginning with Raja Rammohan Roy in the early 19th century, can the rise of Ramjanakbhoomi issue to its present prominence be said to be the result of a series of 'accidents': the sudden appearance of the Ramlalla idol in the structure in 1949 and the opening of the gate under the Faizabad magistrate's orders in 1986 being the most important. As

in all such cases, these developments have helped bring out and reinforce something that was already growing - the 200-year-old movement for self-renewal and self-affirmation by Hindus. If this was not so, the 'accidents' in question would have petered out.

Similarly, while it cannot be denied that the RSS, the VHP, and the BJP have played a major role in mobilizing support for the cause of the temple, it should also be noted that they could not have achieved the success they have if the general atmosphere was not propitious and the time not ripe. Indeed, not to speak of Gandhiji who aroused and mobilized Hindus as no one had before him, fought the Christian missionary assault and successfully resisted the British imperialist designs to divide harijans from Hindu society, it would be unfair to deny Nehru's and Indira Gandhi's contributions to the Hindu resurgence that we witness today. A civilizational revival, it may be pointed out, is a gradual, complex, and many-sided affair.

Again, only on the basis of a superficial view is it possible to see developments in India in isolation from developments in the larger world. Nehru's worldview, for instance, was deeply influenced by the socialist theories sweeping Europe in the wake of the First WW and the Soviet revolution in 1917. By the same token, this worldview, which has dominated our thinking for well over six decades, could not but become irrelevant in view of the collapse of communist regimes in eastern Europe, and the disarray in the Soviet Union itself. This cannot be seriously disputed even on rational grounds. Intensification of the search for identity in India today is part of a similar development all over the world, especially in view of the collapse of communist 'universalism'. But if it is a mere coincidence that Ramjanabhoomi issue has gathered support precisely in this period of the disintegration of Soviet power abroad and the decline of the Nehruvian consensus at home, it is an interesting one.

At the conscious level, the BJP, among political formations, has chosen to be an instrument of India's cultural and civilizational recovery and reaffirmation. As such, it is natural that it will figure prominently in the reshaping of India in the coming years and decades. But others too will play their parts in the gigantic enterprise. VP Singh, for instance, has already rendered yeoman service to the cause by undermining the social coalition which has dominated the country's politics for most of the period since independence.

When a master idea seizes the mind, as socialism did in the twenties, and as Hindutva has done now, it must usher in radical change. In the twenties and the decades that followed before and after independence, conservative forces were not strong enough to resist the socialist idea. Similarly, conservative forces are not strong enough today to defeat the Hindutva ideal. There is a difference, though, for a while the socialist ideal related primarily to economic reorganization and was elitist in its approach by virtue of being a Western import, Hindutva seeks, above all, to unleash the energies of a whole people which foreign rule froze or drove underground.

When a historic change of this magnitude takes place, intellectual confusion is generally unavoidable. The human mind, as a rule, trails behind events; it is not capable of anticipating them. But it should be possible to cut through the mass of confusion and get to the heart of the matter.

The heart of the matter is that if India's vast spiritual (psychic in modern parlance) energies, largely dormant for centuries, had to be tapped, Hindus had to be aroused; they could be aroused only by the use of a powerful symbol; that symbol could only be Ram, as was evident in the twenties when the Mahatma moved millions by his talk of Ramrajya; once the symbol takes hold of the popular mind, as Ram did in the twenties and as it has done now, opposition to it generally adds to its appeal.

An element of subjectivity and voluntarism, typical of a modern Westernized mind, has got introduced in the previous paragraph because that is the way I also think. In reality, the time spirit (Mahakala) unfolds itself under its own auspices, at its own momentum, as it were; we can either cooperate with it, or resist it at our peril.

Historians can continue to debate whether a temple, in fact, existed at the site of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya; whether it was, in fact, a Ram temple; whether it was destroyed; or whether it had collapsed on its own. Similarly, moralists and secularists can go on arguing that it is not right to replace one place of worship by another, especially as long as the foregoing issues have not been resolved. But this is not how history moves and civilizational issues are settled.

Pertinent is the fact that for no other site have Hindus fought so bitterly for so long with such steadfastness as over Ramjanambhoomi in Ayodhya. There is no rational explanation for this and it is futile to look for one. All that is open to us is to grasp the fact and power of the mystery.

In all cultures and societies under great stress flows an invisible undercurrent. It does not always break surface. But when it does, it transforms the scene. This is how events in Ayodhya should be seen. The Patal Ganga, of which all Indians must have heard, has broken surface there. Human beings have doubtless played a part in this surfacing. But witness the remarkable fact that we do not know and, in fact, do not care who installed the Ramlalla idol in the Babri structure and who demolished the structure on 6 December 1992.

While almost everyone else is looking for scapegoats, to me it seems that every known actor is playing his or her allotted role in the vast drama that is being enacted. We are, as it were, witnessing the enactment of a modern version of Valmiki's Ramayana.

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