

The Genocidal Pogrom in Gujarat: Anatomy of Indian Fascism

Compromises on the road to Hell

Oppose the Shankaracharya's proposal! Oppose the Destruction of Democracy

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As riots flared across Gujarat, people started clutching at straws in the hope of saving something from the crisis. One result was that while the immediate cause, supposedly the Godhra carnage, was condemned, the real cause, i.e., the Ram temple issue, also began to be addressed very seriously, with a hope to the development of some sort of compromise. The proposal of Jayendra Saraswati, Shankaracharya of Kanchi (deemed to be a very Holy office) appeared to many as a voice of sanity by contrast with the rampaging mobs of the Viswa Hindu Parishad. The VHP and its ilk had destroyed a centuries old mosque a decade back. Now they were fighting to build a temple exactly on that spot. *Their* offer to the Muslims was simple: accept this meekly, and (for the moment) we will leave you alone (though we will later raise the issues of several other temples and mosques already on our agenda). By contrast, the Shankaracharya was suggesting that there should be a dialogue between the Hindu community and the Muslim community, as represented by the VHP and the All India Muslim personal Law Board respectively, and there should be some sort of guarantees to the Muslim community as well. So if we oppose this resolutely, we need to explain our reasons clearly enough.

For one and a half decade, the Ram temple has been at the centre of the fascist drive for power.² Between 1987 and 1992, a massive campaign was waged, to “prove” the authenticity of the Ram Janmabhoomi claim (i.e., that Ram, the hero of the myth Ramayana, had indeed been born in Ayodhya, in the spot where Mir Baqi, a general of Babar, had built a mosque. Allegedly, Babar had ordered the destruction of a temple in order to build the mosque).³ Hindus were urged to stand up as Hindus, and secularism was condemned as de facto pandering to minority communalism. In 1992, this stage of the campaign ended with massive communal mobilisations and the destruction of the Babri Masjid.

This was followed by dithering on the part of the Congress and then of the United Front governments, while the Far Right pressed ahead with its agenda. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the electoral arm of the combine, campaigned, and increased its parliamentary seats. Important sections of the Indian big bourgeoisie began to conclude that a) it was desirable to climb on to the BJP bandwagon; and b) a full-scale implementation of neoliberal policies required the prior atomisation of the working class, which in turn necessitated the empowerment of the BJP. At the same time, the fighting arms, like the Viswa Hindu Parishad, the Bajrang Dal, and so on, claimed to stand for all Hindus and to speak in their names, regardless of parliamentary ups and downs.

Thus the VHP and the “holy men” it gathered at times, went on focussing on the construction of a Ram temple. Contrary to the belief within sections of the left, this was not simply a ploy to garner votes. To think that the BJP is the *real* force while the rest are its adjuncts is to make a major mistake. The continuous harping on the Ram temple was a signal of simultaneously two kinds – it was a signal to the supporters that here was a political force which did not allow political exigencies to harm “core” political

¹ Edited and revised version of an article appearing in *Anva Swar*. The English version was prepared for a non-Indian readership so there are explanations which Indian readers may find superfluous, but which have been retained.

² For our characterisation of the RSS and its fronts as fascist, see Kunal Chattopadhyay, ‘The Fascist Upsurge’, in *Alternative Viewpoint*, No.2, 1993.

³ See Soma Marik, ‘History and the Politics of Hindutva’, in *Alternative Viewpoint*, No.2, 1993, for an examination of the political abuse of history and its crucial role in the construction of the Hindutva claims.

issues, and at the same time it was a signal to the ruling class that accepting a long term BJP government would entail the acceptance of certain political terms.

The aim of the VHP was to shift politics by force in the direction of the extreme right. The announcement of specific programmes, like the beginning of temple construction from 15th march 2002, were intended to keep the far right supporters and extremist activists at a temperature near the boiling point steadily.

However, the rhythm of this work was not **totally** unconnected with parliamentary political developments. In early 2002, four provinces went to the polls. Despite the Prevention of Terrorism Act targeting Muslims (including a one sided attack on Muslim communal organisations while leaving untouched the virulent Hindu communal ones), despite the blatant communalisation of the state apparatus, the BJP was also ran in all four state. In the Punjab, in Uttaranchal, and in Manipur, the BJP and its allies were firmly shown the door. But in UP, where a hung assembly was produced, the Central government and its local agent the State Governor started playing games. The Governor, Vishnukant Shastri, was reportedly a kar sevak in 1990.⁴ This man now demanded that the leader of the party with the biggest number of seats, Mulayam Singh Yadav, should prove his majority before the governor, rather than on the floor of the House.⁵ The increasing aggressiveness of the Hindutva brigade should *also* be seen in this context. They are aware that coming to power by basing themselves on a Hindu identity is impossible if the thrust is purely, or mainly, parliamentary. As with classical fascism, there is a bid to blend legal and extra-parliamentary, violent mobilisations together.

Godhra and the Gujarat Pogroms

Godhra is a powder-keg in the centre of Gujarat, India's most communally polarised state, and a Hindutva "laboratory". During the 1970s and 1980s, Godhra used to record violence or curfew on as many as 150 days in some years. The fact that the town had a Muslim majority population; the endemic rivalry between Muslims and the surrounding Adivasi (tribal) groups, and caste Hindus; sharp Hindu-Muslim competition over trading interests; and Hindutva's spread among the upper castes, all gave Godhra a special, incendiary, character. Only a thorough, impartial and credible inquiry can establish just what led to the gory Godhra incident in which 58 people were charred to death by a mob. This must investigate who was responsible for setting fire to the coaches of the Sabarmati Express on February 27, and determine the cause of failure of the intelligence agencies.

No such inquiry can ignore the relevant background: increasing harassment of Indian Muslims since September 11 and especially since December 13, and their maligning as the principal perpetrators or sympathisers of terrorism; growing communalisation of Gujarati society; the desperate tactics of the BJP and its associates in launching the incendiary temple-building campaign in Ayodhya just as the party faced an ignominious electoral defeat in four states; the mobilisation of thousands of kar sevaks from Gujarat; and their movement by rail, and the many instances of verbal abuse and manhandling of Muslims by them, reported in Faizabad's **Janmorcha** newspaper.

None of the foregoing constitutes a valid provocation for gruesome acts such as burning people alive. But they highlight the intelligence failure and warrant a serious rethink about whether Godhra was a 'cause' or a chain in a developing violence against Muslims, including through provocations. The February 27 carnage was preceded by numerous unpleasant episodes: karsevaks shouting militant Hindu slogans, taunting or cheating Muslim vendors, and verbally abusing their womenfolk. These "provocations" were seized upon by some extremists to perpetrate a totally barbaric act. The fact that a several hundred-strong mob was mobilised as early as 7 a.m. led many to assume serious planning and preparation carried out on the part of Muslim communalists. Even this interpretation would then suggest that their far

⁴ Kar seva means giving free service for a religious cause. In the present context, all the VHP volunteers going to Ayodhya, to perform the Shilanyas in the 1980s, to destroy the mosque in 1992, and to try to build the temple now, are called kar sevaks.

⁵ Yadav no doubt hoped to buy his missing MLAs from the second biggest party, the Bahujan Samaj Party. But if propriety was Shastri's main concern, he should have advised the dissolution of the newly elected assembly because it had no stability, and moved to fresh polls immediately. His game plan is to wait and allow a dialogue between the BJP and BSP develop.

more dangerous counterparts among the Hindu communalists looking for an opportunity then seized upon this. However, reconstruction of the Godhra incident, for example in the Citizens' Forum report, suggests that it was a spontaneous, rather than an elaborately planned, over-reaction to the daily harassment of local Muslims kar sevaks returning from Ayodhya. Had there been serious preparation for the attack on the Sabarmati Express, scheduled to reach Godhra at 2-55 a.m., there would have been a large crowd on the railway platform at dawn. There was not. When the train rolled in five hours late, there were only a handful of vendors, porters and passengers on the platform. An altercation broke out between the kar sevaks and Muslim tea vendors. It was only when a rumour spread that young Sophia Khan had been dragged into coach S-6 that a crowd gathered near Signal Fadia, a basti known for communal tension and criminal activities. (Though initially reported in many places, there is reason to doubt the authenticity of this rumour). Seven weeks on, the government has failed to provide credible evidence linking the Godhra episode to a "conspiracy" involving Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence or even an organised group in Gujarat or elsewhere.

What followed suggests both planning on the part of Hindu communalists and state collusion. For instance, according to information from Vadodara, lakhs of anti-Muslim leaflets were illegally printed on treadle machines -- which must have taken months. Bombs and trishuls were stockpiled over a period of weeks. If one excludes state complicity, one cannot even begin to understand the partisan conduct of the Gujarat police. In several gory incidents, it not only failed to deter or stop the violence; it actively encouraged it. The Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, virtually called on VHP – Bajrang Dal forces to commit murder and pogroms.

Just as in Bombay in 1992-93, the Gujarat police refused - in spite of repeated warnings and orders - to intervene in time, knowing this would result in mass murder. Worse, it itself participated in arson, abduction, armed intimidation and downright homicide, besides looting and destroying property. It takes more than passive acquiescence for the police to watch the stoning of the Defence Minister's car without stern action.

Ten times more Muslims have already been killed in Gujarat than the Hindus murdered in Godhra. For millions of citizens, Gujarat has turned into a veritable purgatory. Vishwa Hindu Parishad goons took over more than 30 cities and towns, and rampaged, burned and killed at will. Amidst their depredations, the police were nowhere to be seen. Once again, hardcore communalists suborned agencies of the state.

This has been the result of years of build-ups. A vast number of innocent Muslims were arrested under the (now defunct) Terrorism and Disturbed Areas Act (TADA). More recently, marriages between Muslim boys and Hindu girls have been excoriated, with claims flying around, like "Madrassas train Muslim boys in how to seduce Hindu girls" (this was a state VHP leader's assertion). This is exactly the kind of charge calculated to send temperatures soaring.

Unlike the unknowns in Godhra, there is little about its far bloodier aftermath that is in doubt, in particular the elaborate planning and preparations that had taken place well in advance of February 27, including the stockpiling of firearms, swords and trishuls. Already, there is overwhelming evidence of the involvement of agencies of the state in the escalation of violence, which began barely 24 hours after the Godhra incident. Consider the following information gathered through extended conversations with activists in Gujarat, and through the media:

* During the crucial interval between Godhra and the first targeted attacks on Muslims, the police failed, or were ordered to fail, despite mounting reports of the coming 'Hindu backlash', to go through the routine drill they have been trained to carry out for over 100 years, including special patrolling, rounding up 'bad characters' and communal goondas, setting up meetings of mohalla and residential colony representatives, etc.

* Early on, Narendra Modi gave out unambiguous signals that he did not want preventive action. He discouraged tough police measures even after the VHP and the BJP launched their virulent campaigns for arson and murder.

* In countless instances, the police stood and watched as Hindutva hooligans went about looting, burning and killing. Pande, the Commissioner of Police of Ahmedabad, even provided justification by saying that the forces under him were not separated from their social milieu. Many officers deliberately delayed despatching constables or summoning the fire brigade when Muslim localities came under attack--as a means of letting the “natural reaction” (read, extreme anti-Muslim hatred) work itself out. Soon, the police themselves started participating in these crimes. All this emboldened the pogromists. Thus, in Baroda, Prof. Bandukwala’s house, raided the first day, was burnt down the next day as police inaction showed that there was no danger in intensifying the attacks.

* After the first major day of violence, in which 150 people were butchered in cold blood, Modi expressed “full satisfaction” with the working of the police and the law-and-order machinery. This was a loud and clear message to the VHP, as well as to the extremely threatened Muslims, that the very apex of the state would remain complicit in the pogrom.

* Mobs of the Hindutva hooligans specifically and accurately targeted Muslim homes, buildings and shops--on the basis of the electoral rolls provided by the municipal or state election authorities. What happened from 28th February was not a riot as India has sadly enough been accustomed to. It was a pogrom, as in 1992-3. And Narendra Modi assertively defended the pogrom. His response to queries was that these riots were nothing more than Newton’s Third Law. When STAR channel tried to show the real nature of the communal violence, Modi’s government ordered cable TV operators not to show this particular channel on 2nd March.

The Long –term Dynamics of the Sangh Strategy

Despite the well-known connections between the VHP, the RSS and the BJP, a big chunk of the media has been putting up a pretence of big distinctions between these. So at this point, a detour into history becomes necessary. The fountainhead of all these Hindu communal organisations is the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. Founded in 1925, it bears a close generic resemblance to European fascism. However, there were also differences. From an early stage, the RSS had adopted what could be called a far right version of a Gramscian policy of establishing hegemony. The first attempt at switching to a war of manoeuvres came in 1946 – 48, just before and after partition and independence. This organisation, which had trained and drilled an immense number of members in 1925 –46, had kept them aloof from all forms of anti-colonial, anti-imperialist struggles. But in 1946 – 48 it sought to fan the flames of communalism and to set up what in retrospect looks like a premature fascist type bid for power. The murder of Gandhi, even though the murderer, Nathuram Godse, was formally not any longer an RSS member, was to deal a blow to these aspirations. It was at this point that the second supreme leader of the RSS, M. S. Golwalkar, wrote to the rightwing nationalist Home Minister Sardar Patel, offering him a united front in an anti-communist crusade. If the RSS were re-legalised, he promised, it would keep out of politics.

This deal did not mean the RSS withdrawing from politics. It evolved a whole series of organisations. Given the centrality of Gender in the Hindu communalist discourse (pre-dating the RSS) its first branch had been the women’s organisation Rashtra Sevika Samity. After 1947, its organisations included the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (labour), and the Jan Sangh (the first electoral outfit on an all-India level spawned by it). In 1977, the Jan Sangh merged with a number of other bourgeois and petty bourgeois opposition parties to form the Janata Party, which formed a government at the Centre. Immediately, the RSS started pushing its agenda. This led to a conflict and the break up of the Janata Party, and the subsequent formation of the Bharatiya Janata Party. After an initial lip service to an Oxymoron called Gandhian socialism, the BJP switched to a line of controlled, but steadily ascending Hindutva.⁶ Every time the non-Congress parties, including particularly the mainstream left, which had a serious

⁶ Hinduism is not a single, monolithic religion. Indeed, in pre-colonial times we find reference to diverse groups which would be clubbed together under the banner of Hinduism by “cultural nationalists” and open communalists in the 19th and 20th centuries. For a discussion, see Soma Marik, ‘State, Gender, Community: The Construction of Hostile Identities – Historical Roots of Contemporary Politics’, in *Jadavpur University Journal of History*, Vol. XIX, 2001-2.

responsibility as the major force within the working class, decided that in order to fight the Congress better an alliance with the BJP was needed, they strengthened the latter. Eventually they created a polarity where the BJP and the Congress, two right-wing parties, appeared as one of the two choices to which all other parties must drape themselves. The BJP by contrast appeared a model to its supporters -- a party which was unwilling to throw away its "principles".

Meanwhile, from the 1970s, other outfits had been created. The most important of these was the Viswa Hindu Parishad. It was initially formed in reaction to lower caste rejection of oppressive Hinduism and conversions to other religions. This has always been a sore point with the Hindu fundamentalists, and the VHP was formed to resist conversions. This element of the VHP agenda always remained, as in 2001, when the VHP and the BJP went all out to resist the mass conversion to Buddhism planned by Dalits. The VHP also took over the task of consolidating fundamentalist values among non-resident Indians (i.e., Indians living outside India, notably in the West). Minorities in alien milieus, many of these NRIs tend to clutch at an odd mix of archaic and modern values, and this is exploited by forces like the VHP. In recent years NRIs have been among the most enthusiastic of those promoting stuff like *Jyotish shastra*, *vaastushastra*, *vedic* mathematics etc.

In the last few years a separation of functions has been effected. The BJP has been increasingly accepted as a responsible party -- not, to be sure, because Vajpayee and Advani have turned over a new leaf but because the bourgeoisie, facing the unceasing decline of its traditional party, the Indian National Congress, has been compelled to look to the BJP. The RSS has been repainted by much of the media as a nice, sort of "cultural", organisation. It is only the VHP, and its purely thug like allies of the Bajrang Dal, (the present day counterparts of the SA) which are ostensibly "extremist".

This pseudo-division has a great advantage for the Sangh family. First, if the VHP can be portrayed as a distinct organisation, and an extremist one at that, then the BJP and the RSS can be called upon to mediate. Meanwhile, the VHP's allotted task is to create unified Hindu mobilisations through fomenting riots, pogroms, and the like. The role previously openly adopted by the RSS and the Jan Sangh passed on to the VHP, and this functional separation provided an escape route to those who wished to turn a blind eye to the real role of the BJP.

And yet, there was no ground for that. Commission of inquiry after commission of inquiry has established the role of Hindu communalists, notably the RSS and its fronts, in the organisation of riots. But once this fraud is accepted, a pattern can be and has been set up. The so-called extremists make an extreme demand, and then the liberal Vajpayee suggests there must be concessions on both sides. And so, a historic mosque was destroyed by a rampaging mob led by, or at least in the presence of, several people who are now ministers, and the country is then told that negotiations between those who destroyed the mosque and the victims is an essential ingredient of a lasting settlement. When respected historians and archaeologists protested against the myth of the Ram temple, they were accused of being people bought up by the Nehru-Gandhi family, or of being communists (after which of course, the academic content of their work need not be checked). During a television debate between West Bengal BJP Vice-president Tathagato Roy and myself in February this year, Roy made just these allegations, and proclaimed the right of the RSS to rewrite history freestyle, on the ground that too many historians had been leftists.

This was no academic matter. Rewriting history is a necessary component of the RSS story, that Hindu tolerance has always been abused by Muslims who have tortured and oppressed Hindus whenever possible. Central to Hindutva as a mass phenomenon is the development of a powerful and image of the Muslims as a perpetual Other, through appropriating stray elements from past prejudices, combining them with new ones skillfully dressed up as old truths, and spreading the resultant compound through the most up-to-date media techniques. The Muslim here becomes the almost exactly what the Jew was in Nazi propaganda. The Muslim in India is supposedly unduly privileged -- a charge even more absurd here than it was in Germany, where the Jews had been fairly prominent in intellectual, professional and business circles. In post-Independence India, Muslims in contrast are grossly underrepresented at elite levels, however defined. The alleged privileges, in the second place, are the product of 'appeasement' of Muslims by 'pseudo-secularist', and so very quickly the communal target starts broadening itself. In the pages of the *Organiser*, the RSS organ, one reads regularly about the Red-Green alliance, meaning a

combination of Muslims and communists. Remember, Hitler had likewise denounced communism as a Jewish conspiracy. The left, and all secular forces including bourgeois secularists, are accused of constant Muslim appeasement. As Sumit Sarkar wrote in 1993, "The stock examples of 'appeasement' in recent days have been the destruction of temples in Kashmir, allegedly never condemned by the 'pseudo-secularists', and Muslim personal law permitting polygamy. Desecration must be condemned, whether by Muslims or by Hindus, but it is a strange condemnation that uses it to justify or condone the wanton desecration of December 6. The destruction of numerous Muslim religious places in riots (at Bhagalpur, for instance) is of course never mentioned. The Kashmir temples issue, incidentally, became very prominent in conversation just after the destruction of the Babri Masjid, indicating a concerted whisper campaign as well as, possibly, an element of guilt suppressed through verbal excess." As for polygamy, the BJP in power has taken no step to make a law providing for compulsory registration of all marriages, which would place a damper before a very large number of illegal Hindu polygamies.

It is within the framework of this long-term strategy of consolidating a "Hindu" bloc that the RSS goal must be understood. This is not one more party among several seeking political power while serving the bourgeoisie. This is a party that is telling the bourgeoisie that it will deliver the economic goods (in the present situation, the economic policy of neo-liberalism, which was initiated by the Congress, but which neither the Congress nor the United Front could carry off smoothly), but in exchange it will refashion the political set up drastically. Already, it has succeeded in penetrating the coercive apparatus, sections of the lower judiciary etc, if not through direct recruitment, then through the permeation of its ideas.

The shift to a war of movement was substantially aided by the waning fortunes of the Congress. In the early and middle 1980s, came the efforts of Indira and Rajiv to play the "Hindu card", communalising the state apparatus on an unprecedented scale, first at the time of the Punjab crisis, then, after the murder of Indira Gandhi through the anti-Sikh pogrom of 1984 and the subsequent cover-up of the guilty. All this directly prepared the ground for the Ram Janmabhoomi blitzkrieg of the Sangh Parivar, now spearheaded by the VHP. It must not be forgotten that prior to 1989, the Ram issue had been sought to be utilised by the Congress. It was the Congress government that updated the Ramayana epic into a pseudo-nationalist TV serial. The idols installed inside the Babri Masjid in December 1949 had been placed there in collusion with a previous Congress regime. And it was Rajiv who made a series of catastrophic political moves. After the Shah Bano verdict, when a case of gender justice was substantially distorted into a case of communal verdict, the Rajiv Gandhi government brought in a bill that sought to appease Muslim communalists. To do a balancing act, he also tried appeasing Hindu communalists by allowing the shilanyas at Ayodhya. It was then that the RSS and its fronts went on the offensive, pressing into service the latest in advertising and audio-visual techniques on a scale and with resources never before seen on the subcontinent. Between 1989 and 2002, it has been sufficiently successful in shifting the discourse to the right, that even the proposal of the Shankaracharya of Kanchi for a settlement between the All India Muslim Personal law Board and the VHP/the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas appear "reasonable".

Proposals for the Destruction of Democracy:

By the time this essay appears in print, 15th March, the date of the next confrontation at Ayodhya, will have passed. One can predict what will happen. As yet, Vajpayee's government is dependent on restive allies like Chandrababu Naidu of the Telugu Desam Party, Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamul congress, and even the sections of the Janata Dal with the NDA. For these parties, Hindutva is no option. Naidu and Banerjee in particular hope for Muslim votes. And so, there will be once more a two faced approach. In parliament, the Prime Minister will give assurances. Outside, some kind of puja will be permitted to keep the pot boiling for the next confrontation a few months hence.⁷

⁷ In point of fact, the Prime Minister, through the Attorney General, requested the Supreme Court to allow puja within the land acquired in 1993. When the SC refused to oblige, a government official was instructed to take the foundation stone from the 'holy men' after the puja had been performed, thus allowing the VHP to affirm the government's acceptance of the puja and the consequent right of the VHP to build the temple exactly on the site they had chosen (i.e., the site where the mosque had stood).

To accept this proposal means to accept the claim of the VHP that it does indeed have the right to represent the Hindus of India. While less immediately troublesome, it equally means accepting the right of the AIMPLB to represent all Muslims of India. Once this is done, one might as well put up a signpost, saying, constitutional democracy ends here. And yet, many bourgeois democratic media and media personalities are working overtime to prove the reasonableness of the compromise on offer. According to them, VHP extremists like Giriraj Kishore have been isolated by it, while people like Ashok Singhal have emerged as moderates. Without stretching parallelisms too far, let us point out that repeatedly in history, attempts to block the fascists by focussing on real or alleged discord in their ranks and the consequent preaching of alliances with sections of them, rather than fighting them openly and resolutely, have been disastrous strategies. This was true of the rightwing General Kurt von Streicher's bid to cobble an alliance stretching from dissident Nazis to the most moderate of trade unionists. This was also true of the repeated Stalinist Communist Party efforts to steal the thunder of the Nazis by appearing as equally god national Germans, co-sponsoring strikes with the Nazi union NSBO, etc. To portray Vajpayee as a "good" nationalist statesman who has risen above the "petty views" of the RSS by inviting the mediation of Jayendra Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of Kanchi, is to court disaster. To accept the mediation of religious heads with other religious heads is to ensure that there will be no space left for secular politics.

The very idea that Hindus constitute a homogeneous community is dangerous. It is tantamount to accepting the forcible inclusion of Dalitbahujans into the Hindu fold, ignoring the massive and varied ways in which dalits have fought against Brahmanical oppression since the late 19th Century. One should not forget that the RSS was set up as much to counter Dalit assertion as to fight the Muslims. In the core Hindi belt areas, et us also remember, the BJP still gets a fraction of the votes. For its showing in Bihar it has to depend on support given by the Kurmi caste based Samata Party of Nitish Kumar. In UP, it has been driven to the third position by Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party and Kanshi Ram and Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party. Regardless of the personal characters of the leaders, these parties profess ideologies of intermediate caste and low caste assertion respectively.

There is a lot being written about the "undisputed land" and the "disputed land". This requires a brief clarification, as the apparently technical issue has a political angle. The disputed land includes the site of the now destroyed mosque. This, and much more land, was acquired by the central government in 1993, and the acquisition was upheld in a challenge by the Supreme Court. At that time, the Court had ruled that until the case regarding the Babri Masjid was resolved, the acquisition was to be upheld, so that no construction could be begun in order to present the Court and the government with a fait accompli. What is the dispute about? Even if it were true (as in any case serious scholarship says it is not) that a general of Babar had destroyed a Ram temple under his orders, what space should be there in modern times as reaction to that? Kings committed many crimes. Kings of all religions exploited their subjects. Kings of all religions and no definite religions all used religion politically, destroyed as well as supported the building of religious buildings. A modern, secular state has to take a different stance. And certainly, one can no more hold Muslims of present day India responsible for the alleged destruction of a Ram temple by Babar, than one can hold Hindus responsible for the alleged destruction of the Bodhi tree (the tree under which Siddhartha became the Buddha) by King Sasanka of Gauda (modern Bengal). What is therefore the problem in the Ram Janmabhoomi dispute? Not whether Babar had ordered the destruction, not whether there had ever existed a temple (as, once again, responsible archaeologists assert there had not), but whether the VHP and the Bajrang Dal have the right to use force to destroy an existing mosque, and force to murder Muslims everywhere in India in a drive towards turning them into second class citizens. Since they palpably do not have that right, banning them and arresting all their leaders is the first step in the direction of restoration of secularism and normalcy.

If we even take a step back and start with the Supreme Court verdicts, we should remember paragraph 96, which had clearly laid down that the acquisition had been done in order to bring about a final settlement. So any "interim" settlement that goes against a secular final settlement has to be firmly rejected.

The plan of the temple to be built by the VHP and the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas includes a plan to have the garbha griha (the sanctum sanctorum) within the "disputed" area. How can there be a compromise which allows the foundation temple to be laid while this plan is not scrapped? The bourgeois media was

proclaiming from rooftops that the VHP “moderates” like Singhal will obey the verdict of the Court. If, after violating the law every which way, they make such promises, are we total fools to accept these at face value, or should we look on the promises as a trick to lull us into a false sense of security?

Since the “moderate, statesmanlike” Vajpayee is daily being held up as a model, as the man to be propped up, let us look closely at him once again. The RSS pracharak Govindacharya had justly called him a mask. He is a successful mask because an increasing section of the bourgeoisie is willing to put up with occasional violations of rights of Muslims and Christians (to say nothing of communists, trade unionists, atheists and other oddballs who stand in the way of the great and glorious globalisation) and therefore to project him as an upholder of secular traditions. What of the reality?

- ☆ The murder of Graham Stein
- ☆ The rape of nuns in Jhabua and the VHP statement that this was a reaction by patriotic Indians to conversions
- ☆ The spreading of communal propaganda in Gujarat over inter-community marriages, going to the extent of saying that madrassas provide training to Muslim youth in the art of seducing Hindu girls
- ☆ The application of Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance against **only** Muslim communalists, showing it is actually an anti-Muslim, not an anti-terrorist law

The Vajpayee tactics and how to fight it?

Half a millennium ago, an Italian statesman turned political theorist named Machiavelli explained clearly certain policies that rulers need to follow:

- They have to be both loved and feared
- A ruler must make himself the object of fear, but not of hatred

Drawing from his experiences of Cesare Borgia, Machiavelli cites the case of Borgia's occupation of Romagna. It was a new territory and it was necessary to make himself feared. So he sent it a tough governor, Rimirro di Orco. When repression became too much, di Orco was recalled and unceremoniously executed. Borgia got the advantage of the repressions but threw off the opprobrium by executing the hated governor. This is not to suggest that Vajpayee intends to execute or even imprison Singhal. But this is to stress that the division of labour – Singhal, Togadia, etc as bogeymen and Vajpayee, Jayendra Saraswati, etc as reasonable, gentle people, is an old, old ploy.

How, then, is resistance to be built? Sadly, it is not only the Vajpayees who follow Machiavelli. People like H.K.S. Surjeet, the CPI(M) General Secretary, are also more interested in the advise to princes than in the defence of Republicanism in the Discourses. The ready and easy way, as no doubt the upcoming CPI(M) Congress will discuss, is to detach a few allies from NDA, notably Chandrababu Naidu (whose party, the TDP, once had extremely good relations with the CPI(M) and even boasts of a leading body entitled Politburo). This solution is no solution. Certainly, in fighting pogromists, all allies are useful allies. Every MP outside the BJP and the Shiv Sena, the two avowedly communalist parties, should be pressurised. Pressure should be put to ensure that the government does not retreat from the existing commitments. But that is not all. Relying too much on courts can be dangerous. In the Shah Bano case and in the Sarla Mudgal case, the supreme Court too had delivered judgements that accepted soft Hindutva arguments. Secondly, to rely on only legal and parliamentary battles means to detach this struggle from the anti-liberalisation and anti-capitalist struggles. In 1992, the destruction of the Babri Masjid had been followed by the National Campaign Committee of trade unions abandoning the struggle against capitalist neo-liberalism and its pressures on the working class. If the focus, once more, were to be on parliamentary alliances to prop up a government of a broad anti-BJP bloc including all rightwing parties willing to oppose pogroms, this would mean a surrender before the current onslaughts of privatisation, destruction of the state sector, destruction of jobs, the simultaneous withdrawal of subsidies from the poor and the creation of massive subsidies for the rich, etc. By contrast, it is only when the class struggle will be strengthened that the class identity will be established more firmly than any communal identity. In a united front against riots, all should be welcome that actually stand up against rioters. To invite all of them to form a government with working class support is a different matter.