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THE TEMPLE MOSQUE CONTROVERSY

It is surprising but true that in the last decade of the twentieth century (a century that will be remembered most prominently for amazing advances in science) in India (a country that claims to be in the forefront among developing countries in science and technology) a main issue occupying national-level attention is whether a mosque or a temple will occupy a particular site. It has become difficult for an Indian to face any friend outside India with any self-respect. He or she is bound to be asked how are things in your country. And the Indian will have to reply that quite a large number of my people are fighting over the location of a temple/mosque - this has become a national crisis with the potential to make and unmake governments.

We Indians really have to do a lot of thinking at this critical juncture. Just one temple-mosque controversy the Ram Janambhoomi - Babri Masjid controversy is proving to be such a serious problem. But communal fanatics have already said that even if this dispute is solved soon there will be other disputes for constructing temples at places occupied by mosques in Mathura and Varanasi. The fanatics do not intend to stop even at this stage. It is said that they have on their list hundreds of even thousands of religious places where they intend to start this type of disputes.

If these communal fanatics are allowed to have their way, then we can visualize the dismal future. At a time when most other countries will be marching ahead on economic, scientific, and cultural fronts, we Indians will be busy fighting hundreds of battles among ourselves on temple-mosque issues. Our friends abroad who have always respected Indian civilization will become extremely sad. For others we will become a laughing stock. We will lose our status as a powerful and respected voice among the developing countries, we will become increasingly isolated from the countries where Islam is an important force. Our loss will be the gain of Pakistan.

Of course the argument given above is not the main argument against the temple-mosque dispute. The main argument is that of basic human values. But for those who are not listening to this main argument it is important to stress the other argument also - that as a nation we will be moving towards suicide if we allow ourselves to be involved in several temple-mosque disputes.

The present-day controversies are being traced to medieval history of India as it is alleged that some Muslim invaders and kings destroyed temples and sometimes constructed mosques at these sites. While it may be true that some temples were actually destroyed by Muslim invaders and kings, the communal fanatics who stress this aspect of history are guilty of distorting history on at least three important points:-

- (1) They greatly exaggerate the number of such incidents and they also exaggerate the acts of cruelty associated with such incidents with a view to whip up the emotions of people.
- (2) They do not place these incidents in a proper historical perspective; instead stressing those aspects which will incite people.
- (3) They fail to notice mounds of historical evidence which is available to show that several Muslim rulers gave grants for maintenance of temples and took other steps for their well-being.

The loot and destruction of some temples was quite often motivated not by religious fanaticism but by the economic motive of gaining the enormous treasures that were to be found in several temples. The importance of the economic motive is evident from the fact that a Hindu King of Kashmir named Harsha also damaged temples and the Mauryan Kings also melted idols of temples to obtain economic benefits. Surely these Hindu Kings cannot be called fanatics opposed to Hinduism and yet they did not hesitate to damage temples if this gave them badly needed gold, silver or other treasures.

Secondly, several well-known temples were also symbols of political power of the kings in whose kingdom there were located. So when an invader or another king defeated this king, to assert his superiority he damaged the various symbols of the power of the defeated king. In the process, some temples were also damaged. On the reverse side Aurangzeb (of all the persons) once ordered the destruction of a mosque.

A related issue is that there is enough historical evidence which shows that in ancient India several Hindu kings also damaged Buddhist and Jain places of worship. But our Buddhist and Jain brothers have forgiven and forgotten this and live with Hindus with the feeling of brotherhood. Why can't Hindus show the same large-heartedness towards their Muslim brothers?

The most important argument against the communal fanatics is that a lot of historical evidence is available to show that a large number of temples had received land grants, financial and other support from Muslims rulers, some of whom took a keen interest in their maintenance.

For example let us look at the policy of Mughal rulers towards the temples of Vrindavan-Mathura region. This Hindu pilgrimage was nearest to Delhi and Agra, the two main centers of Mughal rule and so it is of significance to know the relationship which the Mughal rulers had with the temples of Mathura and Vrindavan and with their priests and devotees. Dozens of documents of these days are available to reveal the policy of Akbar, Jehangir and Shah-jehan towards these temples. These documents have been available in Vrindavan Research Institute and in some of the temples. These have been studied by Tarapada Mukerjee and Irfan Habib in the papers presented at the 48th and the 49th sessions of Indian History Congress.

According to the study of Mukerjee and Habib, based on documents of Mughal days, Akbar enlarged and consolidated all grants to temples and temple-servants in the Mathura region by his farmans (dated 27th Aug. 1598 and 11th Sept. 1598) which provided for a total grant of 1000 bighas of land to 35 temples in Vrindavan, Mathura and their environs. Jahangir not only continued these grants; he substantially added to these. Jahangir added at least two temples to the list of the thirty five already supported by Akbar's grant of 1598. In addition he provided 121 bighas of land for 5 families of temple sevaks. Jehangir also visited Vrindavan temples in 1620.

The documents mentioned also reveal that whenever temple priests had any serious problem - they approached Mughal rulers or their senior official and generally the rulers/officials took action to solve this problem. On one occasion the water supply to Radha Kund was stopped, in another case a tax was imposed on the cattle kept by temples, on another case some trees around a temple were cut, in yet another case gardeners of temples were subjected to forced labour. In all these cases complaints were made by priests or others connected with temples to the Mughal rulers or their senior officials. And in all the above mentioned cases, prompt official action was taken to solve the problems. The fact that the priests appealed to the rulers / officials even for problems which were not very important indicates that they expected to get favourable verdicts from them.

In fact there are documents to show that even when there were disputes among two priests or other religious persons connected with temples, the intervention of Mughal rulers or their officials was sought to settle the dispute, and the example of at least one such dispute between Damodardas Radhaballabh and Kishan Chaitan is given in one of the documents.

In an extremely interesting document we learn that a time-gong was being used to indicate worship time and other such matters in the temple of Madan Mohan in Vrindavan. Some local officials prohibited the use of this time-gong (gharial) in Madan Mohan temple. So an appeal was made to Shahjahan to allow the use again of this time-gong. Shah Jahan's response was to issue a farman (dated 29th November 1634) which says

"Therefore the world - subduing, sun-illuminating, sky reaching order has been issued to the effect that none should obstruct the sounding of the time-gong in the said temple. Officials, present and future, should strive for the continuance and fulfillment of this order, ensure that the time-gong is in use in the said temple and not obstruct it for any reason. They are not to practise delay in carrying out what has been ordered."

The practice of giving grants for the maintenance of temples continued during the reign of Aurangzeb, despite some other narrow minded and unwise acts for which this Mughal ruler was no doubt responsible. Documents which show the assistance given by Aurangzeb to the temples located in Allahabad, Varanasi, Ujjain, Chitrakut and elsewhere are also available and have been quoted at length in a study by Shri B.N. Pandey. Regarding a famous temple in Varanasi it has been said that Aurangzeb ordered its demolition but more recent evidence has revealed that; due to the advent of some undesirable person in the holy place, the wife of a Hindu noble friendly to Aurangzeb was molested here and it was only after this insult that Aurangzeb ordered this demolition.

Tipu Sultan was an important Muslim ruler who is known to have made grants to several temples. According to the journal Young India (edited by Mahatma Gandhi), "Tipu made lavish gifts of lands and other things to Hindu temples, and temples dedicated to Shri Venkataramma, Shrinivas and Shiranganath and located in the vicinity of Tipu's palaces still bear testimony to his broadminded toleration."

The nawabs of Oudh gave several grants to the temples of Ayodhya and provided them protection in other ways. The diwan of Nawab Safdarjung built several temples in Ayodhya and arranged for the repair of other temples. Nawab Safdarjung gave land for the construction of a temple at Hanumangarhi to Nirwan Akhara, Asafadaullah's diwan gave further help for the construction of this temple. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah sided with the Hindus in a Hindu-Muslim dispute over this temple because it appeared to him that justice was on the side of the Hindus at that time.

Hindu communal fanatics are forgetting all this, and they are bent on looking only at the dark pages of history - and then exaggerating and manipulating these to whip up Hindu emotions against the Muslims. In the case of temple- mosque controversies which have already been debated and decided once, they want to reopen the case and again whip up frenzy on these issues.

It is important for all those interested in the welfare of the Indian nation and Indians to stand up to oppose all such efforts to divide the nation and drag it into unnecessary violence and hatred on the basis of temple-mosque controversies and other such issues.

WHERE WILL THE TEMPLE- MOSQUE CONTROVERSIES TAKE US ?

Some persons who do not agree with the stand of the Bharatiya Janta Party (B.J.P) / the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (V.H.P.) The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) on the Ram Janambhoomi issue, have now become so tired of the continuing tension that they feel that if peace can be obtained by agreeing to their demand, then let this demand be accepted. But the crucial question is- will these forces (who are in the forefront of the demand for removing a mosque and building a temple at the same site) be satisfied once and for all if this demand is met, or will this only provide added vigour to a whole range of other similar demands.

Early this year a Vishal Sant Sammalan (big meeting of saints) was called in Allahabad at the initiative of VHP and a sister organisation. At this meeting one leading person of this gathering Swami Chinmayananda said (Quoted in the Week, February 18, 1990).

"The dream of making India a Hindu nation will soon be realised. The new Ram Janambhoomi temple will of course be built, but that is just the beginning. We shall go on to liberate the Kashi Vishwanath temple in Varanasi and the Krishna Janmasthan in Mathura. And why stop there? We will install a Jamuna Bai Mandir at the spot where the Jama Masjid today stands. We will build a temple in place of the Taj Mahal."

S.C. Dixit, Vice-President of Vishwa Hindu Parishad has said, "we took up the Ayodhya issue first only because there was a long-standing dispute already pending there. But that does not mean we are any less keen on the other two shrines (at Mathura and Varanasi) as well" (Quoted in the Week, June 24, 1990).

VHP president Vishnu Hari Dalmia said (quoted in India

Today May 15, 1990) "Our plan is clear. First we want Ayodhya, Mathura and Varanasi and then we will launch a national campaign against cow slaughter."

In the course of the Dharam Jagran Yatra from Ayodhya to Mathura in April 1990, organised by VHP and its allied organisations the following slogans were heard (The Week, June 24, 1990).

'Yeh to Pahli Jhaki hai/Kashi Mathura Baki hai (This is only the first step, Varanasi and Mathura remain.

'Ram, Krishna Vishwanath/Teeno lenge ek saath' (Ram Janambhoomi, Krishna Janmasthan and Vishwanath temple, we'll capture all three together).

"Ayodhya hui hamari hai/Ab kashi Mathura ki bari hai (Ayodhya is already ours, now it is Varanasi and Mathura's turn" (The Week June 24, 1990).

India Week reported (May 4-10), "On April 21, six days before Id, some anti-social elements, led by VHP and Bajrang Dal activists and armed with batons, tridents and other weapons, attacked five mosques in Mathura, set fire to a furniture shop and forced shopkeepers to down their shutters.

India Today reported (May 15, 1990) "with saffron robed sadhus and Bajrang Dal activists brandishing swords, trishuls, knives and handguns and shouting inflammatory slogans, a communal clash was the next step."

It was reported in Frontline (October 28-November 10, 1989) "Vishwa Hindu Parishad activists have begun to refer to Ahmedabad as 'Karnavati' In Aurangabad, the Shiv Sena under its new mantle of the 'protector' of Hinduism, has been trying hard to rename Marathwada town as Shambajinagar. And it would like to rename Osmanabad as Dharashiv and Parbhani as Prabhavatinagar."

A recent Home Ministry Document said "No Single issue has so adversely affected communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims as the Ram Janambhoomi Babri Masjid controversy"

If one temple-mosque dispute has created so much havoc, then the impact of many such controversies can be easily imagined, and it is equally clear that the leaders of VHP and related organisations have openly expressed their commitment to taking up other such controversies.

Moreover the aggressiveness is not directed only at the religious places of Muslims. A report in the Week (June 3, 1990) on Hindu Christian conflicts in Chhota Nagpur region says that at least one report of the attack on a Christian religious place was confirmed and there were instances of temples being built just near Churches which could lead to future controversies.

It is even more important to draw attention to the fact that even those controversies of this nature which have been settled in recent years by the representatives of two communities are now sought to be reopened. For example in Mathura the controversy had been settled by representatives of the two communities in 1968. But now the local leader of the Bajrang Dal having close relations with VHP has clearly said that this agreement is not acceptable to him. If this is so, then where is the guarantee that any agreement signed today or any concession made today will be honoured by even more intolerant organisations/leaders tomorrow?

Saptahik Hindustan a Hindi publication of the Hindustan Times group, has published an interview with 'the all-important Bajrang Dal leader' of Mathura, Mr. Gopeshwar Chaturvedi who is also a representative of VHP. He says in this interview, In 1984 when we held a religious meeting in Delhi then the liberation of Krishna Janmabhoomi was included along with the liberation of Ram Janmabhoomi in the long-term programme of VHP". When asked why he was raking up the issue when representatives of both communities had agreed to a court settlement in 1978, Mr. Chaturvedi asserted,

"The Hindus did not reach any such agreement as will prevent them from liberating the birthplace of their God Krishna. But as the Muslims claim that the munshi (official) of Krishna Janmabhoomi Trust has signed an agreement, then go and ask them who is Devdhar Sharma to compromise with the emotions of Hindus. Did the Hindus elect him as their representative? VHP is the (only) declared undisputed representative of the Hindus".

It follows from this that if one religious organisation can challenge the agreement reached by another Hindu organisation in order to assert its superiority, then this trend can continue in future also.

Those who think that for the sake of removing tensions and

establishing peace a major concession should be made to the BJP/RSS/VHP viewpoint on this issue should carefully consider the statements and indications given above and then decide whether such a concession, apart from not being based on historical facts, will be able to bring peace in the country.

They should also consider the statements that have been made in pamphlets widely distributed by VHP members and supporters. In fact VHP supporters have been asked by these pamphlet writers to reproduce and distribute crores of copies of these pamphlets.

Some main points emphasised in these documents again and again are:-

Muslims and Christians have been criticised in very strong words.

It has been written, "Christians and Muslims are creating Lebanon like conditions in India by converting the maximum number of Hindus." About Christian priests and missionaries it has been said, "Everywhere they are spreading hatred against Hindu religion." Further it is said, "Two thousand Christians who come to India have become 3 crore."

Further appeasement of minority communities has been held responsible for crimes like smuggling, drug peddling and riots.

However, the documents are critical not only of minorities but also of certain Hindus. The 'traitors' among them are warned that they will be held accountable for their actions so that no traitors are born in India in future. In particular certain Hindu intellectuals are criticised severely.

These documents say that after India's independence the Hindus have still not attained independence. It appears, the documents say, as if Christianity or Islam is the State religion of India today. Hindus have been asked to form separate vote banks. A slogan has been given in these documents - Hindu Rajya is our birthright.

However, the most disturbing aspect of these pamphlets is that the name of Mahatma Gandhi has been invoked time and again in these pamphlets and it has been asserted that these pamphlets were written after consultations with Gandhian thinkers.

It needs to be pointed out therefore that it was a person of RSS ideology who had killed Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. Soon after the Mahatma's assassination by this fanatic, Sardar Patel wrote a letter to RSS leader Shri Golwalker in which he held the communal propaganda of RSS men responsible for the Mahatma's death. Further he wrote, "RSS men expressed joy and distributed sweets after Gandhiji's death."

In that phase the spread of communal poison snatched away the nation's father. We shudder to think of the price we may have to pay in the present phase.

MUGHAL DYNASTY - HISTORY DOES NOT SUPPORT COMMUNAL DIVIDE THEORY

Shivaji, a courageous and able statesman of medieval India, is one of the most fascinating personalities of Indian history. His manifold achievements have made him a folk hero. It is extremely tragic, however, that the name of this remarkable king has been used in recent times to spread hostility against a community. A person who is a symbol of national integration has been used in exactly the opposite way to spread discord.

It is important therefore to stress the historical fact that Shivaji had the highest respect for Islam religion, and enjoyed the affection and respect of a large number of Muslims in his own time. He assigned important responsibilities to Muslims who occupied important positions in his army. He built a mosque in front of his palace. He paid his respects to several Muslim saints and saw to it that the Muslim population of his kingdom lived without any sense of discrimination or discontent.

V.B. Kulkarni writes in his book, Shivaji - The Portrait of a Patriot (Orient Longman), "Shivaji's veneration for other faiths was as profound as for his own. He showed the highest respect for the holy men of Islam and of Christianity. He looked upon Baba Yakut of Kelsi as his honoured friend and benefactor, while a number of Muslim shrines received liberal endowments from his government. He showed similar respect and consideration for Father Ambrose when he met him at Surat. Like the temple and the Gita, the mosque and the Holy Koran won his highest respect. During his military operations, he made it his invariable practice to give the Koran to a Muslim divine when the sacred book fell into his hands".

It was due to his large heartedness with respect to other religions that Shivaji was able to gather around him a strong and loyal force.

Kulkarni writes 'Men of all classes and creeds enthusiastically took part in the great enterprise of building a new order in the country. The Pathans from the wilds of the North-West Frontier fought shoulder to shoulder with his Hindu comrade-in-arms in sustaining and strengthening the new creation. The sea-faring Muslim from the Konkan was received with open arms in the Maratha navy and given positions of trust and responsibility without the slightest suspicion or fear that the ties of religion would triumph over his sense of loyalty and obligation. Indeed, the Muslim in the Maratha service had little to fear. He was assured of regular pay and promotion - a rare blessing, taking into account the bad record of the chronically impeccunious Muslim governments, good and impartial treatment and a complete liberty of conscience."

Similar views have been expressed by another historian G.S. Sardesai in his book 'New History of the Marathas' Vol I, "He (Shivaji) never undertook a serious task without first consulting his gurus. Shivaji made no distinction in this respect between a Hindu and a Muslim saint. He honoured all with equal respect. At his capital Raigad he erected a special mosque for Muslim devotees in front of his palace in the same way that he built there the temple of Jagadishwer for his own daily worship."

Further, Sardesai writes, "One thing is quite clear that in defending the Hindu religion, Shivaji was in no way actuated by any hatred towards the Muslims as a sect or towards their religion. Full religious liberty for all was his ideal and the practice in his State. He revered Muslim saints like Baba Yakut of Kelsi to whose shrine he made a grant which is still being enjoyed. He had many devoted Muslim servants and followers who whole-heartedly co-operated with him. His chief naval commanders were Muslims Daulat Khan and Siddi Misri. Madari Mehtar, a farrash (Chamberlain) was a servant near his person, who helped him in his flight from Agra. Shivaji's confidential foreign secretary (Munshi) was one Mulla Haidar. A considerable portion of the population under Shivaji's rule was Muslim, but it all lived as contented and free as his Hindu subjects."

Shivaji was keen not only to secure the help of worthy persons of other religions in his life's tasks, he was equally keen to secure the help of the so-called lower castes. For example, when he went to find a suitable location for Sindhudurg fort, looking at the difficult terrain he was quick to realise the enormous help that local fishermen could provide in this task. He immediately recruited them and assigned responsibilities to them.

This then is a basic lesson to be drawn from the successes and achievements of Shivaji against tremendous odds - his wisdom and large-heartedness to secure the cooperation and loyalty of all castes and religions, and in turn to give them due respect and equal status, Shivaji was thus a tremendous symbol of national integration. But in recent times the name of the same Shivaji has been used by communal fanatics for propaganda against a minority community, namely the Muslims. Shivaji would have been shocked at such efforts of misusing his name and personality. Several widely circulated books are available which picture Shivaji's role mainly as a fighter against Muslims. This role is also stressed day after day at several gatherings of communal minded persons who try to instil such communal interpretation of history into the minds of children and youths.

A similar effort has been made by vested interests to misuse to name of Rana Pratap, another great king and warrior of medieval India, for sectarian ends. Like Shivaji, Rana Pratap too in his relentless struggle had sought and secured the loyalty of persons from other religions and the so-called lower castes. In the famous battle of Haldighati, the warrior who led perhaps the fiercest assault on the Mughal army was Hakim Khan Sur followed by his equally loyal Afghan troops. And later, when Pratap had to spend several years in the wilderness, his struggle could remain alive largely because of the help and hospitality of the Bhil adivasis. Rana Pratap had recognised their strength and valour at an early stage of his life, in sharp contrast to several other Rajput Kings also considered it beneath their dignity to befriend the lower castes.

The Bhils remained loyal till the last, helping the Rana to turn what had once seemed to be a decisive defeat into a partial victory towards the last years of his life. Incidentally we may mention that despite the long-sustained battle against Mughals, Muslims

painters continued to get patronage of Pratap and subsequently his son, Amar Singh. The Jagir of Sindhi Muslims was also maintained.

But in the case of Rana Pratap also this integrating aspect of his character is not stressed. Instead, in several widely circulated books as well as in daily meetings of persons oriented to communalism, he is depicted mainly as a fighter against Muslims.

Another important question of history that needs to be raised at this stage is - in order to recognise Rana Pratap as a hero, do we necessarily have to denigrate Emperor Akbar or vice-versa, in order to recognise the large-heartedness and tolerance of Emperor Akbar, do we necessarily have to question the greatness of Rana Pratap.

Unfortunately, this is the position that has been taken in several widely circulated books. In particular, those who have pictured Rana Pratap as a hero, albeit in a narrow sense, have found it necessary to question the greatness of Emperor Akbar. Unfortunately for those writers, however, history is not a C grade Hindi film to be seen and related only in terms of heroes and villains, heroines and vamps. History is much more complex and true-to-life than this unrealistic formula-film type image.

The truth is that both Akbar and Pratap were great in their own ways, both had many remarkable qualities, but their perceptions differed somewhat. Akbar felt that in his nation building process several sovereign rulers could not exist side by side and some sort of subservience to central rule was a must, even though he was willing to allow them a great deal of autonomy in their own kingdoms. Pratap, a proud king, differed on terms of this subservience.

It must be stressed at the same time that before the battles started there had been several efforts for peaceful negotiations - Akbar sent several senior persons as ambassadors and Pratap too sent his son to the Emperor's court.

In any case, after both Pratap and Akbar had left for heavenly abode, their sons decided to stop the fighting. Jehangir and Amar Singh reached a most honourable agreement which appears to have satisfied both sides. At this stage the communal minded historians get caught in their own trap. Because in the earlier phase they've shown nothing but hatred for Mughal rulers, they are now forced to make at least mild criticism of Amar, while on a fair appraisal he comes out as a valiant warrior and a fine statesman, not afraid of struggle yet not held back by sheer pride when the interests of his people demand this.

By manipulation of words and facts and by arbitrary value judgements, an impression has also been created as though somehow the Hindu Kings were patriots defending homeland while the Muslim Kings were invaders. However, this falsehood reaches a strange culmination in the 1857 uprising against British rule when the Mughal king Bahadur Shah Zafar, despite his old age and weakness, becomes a symbol of 'freedom' for Hindu and Muslim freedom fighters alike, while some Hindu Kings side with the British.

To go back to medieval India, however, most of the famous battles fought during the years of the Mughal rule have become embedded in public mind as battles between Hindus and Muslims. We've already seen, however, that Shivaji's army had a significant number of Muslims. We should add now that all through Aurangzeb's prolonged fight with Shivaji several Maratha nobles continued to occupy an important place in Mughal court and army. The names of these Maratha nobles in Aurangzeb's court and the soldiers commanded by them are available in historical documents and in fact historians have compiled a list of such names. It is surprising but true that the number of Maratha nobles in Aurangzeb's court was higher than in the court of any other Mughal ruler before him.

It has also been pointed out earlier that at Haldi ghati Hakim Sur and his Afghan soldiers had fought valiantly on the side of Rana Pratap. We may only add here that on the Mughal side there were a large number of Rajput soldiers led by Raja Man Singh. Earlier at the battle of Khanwa, Mahmood Lodi and Hasan Khan Mewati had fought on the side of Rana Sanga against the army of Babar.

From these examples it should be clearly known that the famous battles of the days of Mughal rule were not battles between Hindus and Muslims - instead the armies which fought each other were of a mixed composition. In fact there are even instances when Muslim fundamentalists had ganged up against Muslims rulers, and the Mughal ruler then sent an army under the leadership of Hindu Rajas to quell such rebellions.

Describing this rebellion Prof. Satish Chandra writes "The rebellion kept the empire distracted for almost two years (1580-81) and Akbar was faced with a very difficult and delicate situation. Due to the mishandling of the situation by local officials, Bengal and almost the whole of Bihar passed into the hands of the rebels who proclaimed Mirza Hakim as their ruler. They even got a religious divine to issue a Fatwa, calling on the faithful to take the field against Akbar. Akbar did not lose his nerve. He despatched a force under Todar Mal against Bihar and Bengal, and another under Raja Man Singh to check the expected attack by Mirza Hakim."

It is well known that Shivaji's father had at one time agreed to fight on the side of the Mughals, although this agreement was soon breached - as the Mughals did not give him the promised jagir around Pune. It is equally well-known that Marathas had joined in large numbers the armies of Malik Ambar and other Muslim rulers of the Deccan region. Not so well known is the fact that Jai Singh, an able general of Aurangzeb, had almost secured an agreement of Shivaji whereby Shivaji was to be an ally of the Mughals in the campaign against the other rulers of the Deccan. It is another matter that this agreement was breached due to the unstatesman like behavior of Aurangzeb when Shivaji went to meet him. And even in the middle of his battles against the Mughals, Shivaji did not hesitate to attack Hindu rulers when he felt the need for this.

It is clear from the above examples that the history of Mughal India is not a history of fights between Hindus and Muslims. Kings fought each other time and again, but generally there were mixed armies on both sides. Further heroes and villains did not exist in any one religion. On some occasions the persons who showed great valour and large-heartedness happened to be Hindus, on some other occasions they happened to be Muslims. In fact in the opinion of this writer, the biggest heroes of this age were those who rose above all sectarian considerations to spread the message of universal love and brotherhood-men Sant Kabir and Guru Nanak.

HINDU MUSLIMS RELATIONS - INTEGRATING PROCESS AND COLONIAL INTERVENTION

The tragic events at the time of partition, the subsequent distrust among the Hindus and Muslims and the more recent outburst of communal feelings over the mosque-temple controversy may lead some observers to conclude that the differences and mistrust between the two communities cannot be resolved, but the historical facts tell a different story. It is a story of mutual respect, no doubt hindered at times by mistrust and contempt on the part of some, but finally paving the way for a real urge to integrate, assimilate and live harmoniously with each other. Unfortunately this emerging feeling, which manifested itself clearly till as late as the 1857 uprising against the British rule, was cruelly shattered by organised efforts on the part of the colonial rulers to divide the two communities, and the weakness of the Indian elites themselves in succumbing to these efforts to divide them.

Referring to the colonial role in spreading communalism, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in his book, *The Discovery of India*, "It is our fault of course and we must suffer for our failings. But I cannot excuse or forgive the British administration for the deliberate part they have played in creating disruption in India. All other injuries will pass but this will continue to plague us for a much longer period."

The first Muslim scholars came to India before any Muslim rulers did, and they came with the spirit of learning and not conquering. They carried back from India several works of wisdom and these were then translated into Arabic. Acknowledging this intellectual gift, Arab author Yaquibi wrote in the year 895, "The Hindus are superior to all other nations in intelligence and thoughtfulness. They are more exact in astronomy and astrology than any other people. The Brahma Sidhanta is a good proof of their intellectual powers; by this book the Greeks and the Persians have also profited."

Another Arab historian Qazi Said wrote "The Hindus have always been considered by all other people as the custodians of learning and wisdom."

Thus the very first contacts were favourable, and these were strengthened subsequently at the upper level by certain liberal policies initiated by Akbar and retained by several (though not all) Mughal rulers who followed him, as well as by several Muslim rulers of the smaller kingdoms such as Bijapur, Mysore and Oudh. More important, at the grassroots level, these ties were strengthened by the Bhakti and Sufi movements which stressed the unity of God and religions and attracted millions of followers.

Akbar started many good traditions. He respected and listened to the views of learned men from several religions including not only Hindus and Muslims but also Sikhs, Christians and others. He gave liberal grants for the maintenance of Hindu temples. He started a translations department to get the Ramayana, the Mahabharat and the Bible translated into Persian language.

In the Deccan kingdoms, a sixteenth century king, Adil Shah followed a similar path. He established a very good library to look after which he appointed a Sanskrit scholar Vaman Pandit. His descendant Ibrahim Adil Shah was called the 'friend of the poor' and 'world's teacher' due to his policies of benevolence and goodwill. In his songs he often pays respects to Saraswati, the Hindu Goddess of learning. He played an important role in the development of some Hindu religious places.

In Kashmir the 15th century king Zain-ul-Abdin sent messengers to call Hindus who had fled due to the intolerant policies of a predecessor. He was a scholar of Sanskrit as well as Persian, and played an important role in translating parts of the Upanishdas into Persian. He publicly participated in Hindu festivals and constructed temples.

In Bengal Pathan Kings like Sultan Nazir Shah and Sultan Hussain Shah followed similar policies and arranged for the translation of Mahabharat and Bhagwat Puran into Bengali.

But more important was the impact of the Bhakti and Sufi movements at the grass roots level. These poets and teachers spoke against the artificial and ritualistic divisions among religions and in favour of the essential unity of all religions. They stressed basically the purity and depth of the relationship between the God and the devotees. The strength of this relationship would render the various rituals and artificial impositions as insignificant. They wrote devotional songs and poems in the common man's language, thereby eliminating the necessity of intermediaries in worship.

A scholar Dr. Savitri Charan Shobha who has specialised in the bhakti movement writes in her book, "Social Life and concepts in Medieval Hindi Bhakti Poetry;

"The biography of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi by Hasan Sijzi and the Malfazat of many sufi saints suggest that there was continuous contact between the sufi saints and the Yogis, specially Nathpanthi Yogis and Jain saints (Yatis). The use of Hindi devotional poetry in the sama or musical gatherings of the Chishti saint is well known. This had reached such a point by the 15th century that a writer, Abdul Wahid Bilgrami, had to justify it by providing sufi allegorical meaning to such terms as 'Uduo' 'Murl', 'Gopis, 'Ras-Lila' etc. - It is interesting to know that Hindi poems written by sufi saints were read from the pulpit of the mosques also."

Kabir, perhaps the most important poet of Bhakti movement, wrote "Only the One I recognise. Those who call Him two will go to hell. For they know not the reality. All human beings are sustained by the same air and water, and are illuminated by the same light. All have been formed out by the same dust and their creator is the same."

Interpreting the writings of Kabir, S.C. Shobha writes, "Kabir was very critical of the externalia - the rituals and practices of the two faiths, Hinduism and Islam..... Not only were these practices irrational, they also obscured the reality that God is one. These superficialities were for Kabir the cause of Hindu-Muslims conflict- especially because these ideas were propagated and upheld by the religious leaders of the two communities - the brahimins, pandits, mullahas, shaikhs, qazis etc."

But these were other saint poets - such as Dadu Dayal - Who perhaps went even further than Kabir in raising their voice against sectarian trends. In the words of Dr. Shobha, 'Kabir's denunciation of religious narrowness and his appeal to Hindus and Muslims for sinking their differences is well-known. It was, however, Dadu who most clearly advocated the path of non-sectarianism or nipakh. He called upon Hindus and Muslims not to be guided by bigoted men such as mullahs and pandits, who set the followers of the two religions against each other. He also asked people not to take their stand on a rigid interpretation of the revealed books, but to rely on their faith in the "True God."

'Dadu Dayal wrote 'I am neither Hindu nor Muslim, I am not attached to any philosophical school but only to God'. Further he says 'In cutting Brahma up into bits the sects have divided him.' He advocates a nipakh (non-sectarian) path.

Comparing Brahma to a flowing river, he says the water of the river contained in different pots is the same.

B.N. Pandey, another prominent scholar of medieval history and culture, writes about origin and impact of Bhakti movement, 'Islam and Hinduism, which appeared at the start, so antithetical, at last intermingled, each one stirred the profoundest depth of the other and from their synthesis, grew the religion of Bhakti and Tasawwaf, the religion of love and devotion, which swept the hearts of millions following different religions and sects of India. The current of Islamic sufism and Hindu Bhakti combined into a mighty stream which fertilized old desolate tracts and changed the face of the country. It was this spirit of India which achieved apparently an impossible task of reconciling the puritanical severity and awe-inspiring transcendence of Islam into the luxuriant fullness and abundance of form and the intuitive perception of their immanent unity with Hinduism, and created those monuments of art, literature and painting, music and poetry, and love-inspired religion which are the heritage of Indian History, during the middle ages."

Thus despite, several adverse factors and problems, a certain integration and assimilation of Hindu and Muslim population was certainly taking place before the advent of the British rule.

Despite early British efforts to divide and rule, the impact of this integration could be seen in the 1857 uprising against British rule in which Hindus united with Muslims in an effort to oust the foreign rulers. While Hindu rebels accepted King Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal ruler as their king, the Muslim rebels, as a mark of respect to Hindus, banned cow slaughter in the areas which they liberated for some time.

This alarmed the British rulers who stepped up their already existing efforts to divide and rule. Towards this end they made special efforts to introduce communal feelings into the education system so that these could take root among the newly emerging western educated sections more likely to play a leadership role in the coming years.

The Secretary of State Wood in a letter to Lord Elgin said, "We have maintained our power in India by playing off one part against the other and we must continue to do so. Do all you can, therefore, to prevent all having a common feeling.

George Francis Hamilton, Secretary of State for India, wrote to Curzon, "We should so plan the education text books that the differences between community and community are further strengthened."

Cross wrote to the Governor General Duferin, "The division of religious feeling is greatly to our advantage and I look for some good as a result of your committee of inquiry on Indian education and on teaching material."

A British official writing under the pen name 'Carnaticus' wrote in 'Asiatic Review' that divide or rule should be the policy in political, civil and military matters. Lt. Col. Coke of Moradabad said that the principle of the government should be to divide and rule.

The British rulers followed this policy in many subtle and non-so-subtle ways. The freedom movement drew the participation of all communities, but the impact of the divide and rule policy was also felt.

The communal and sectarian interpretation of history which was encouraged by British rulers still continues to have an important hold in India and it is responsible to a large extent for continuing suspicions and tensions. Efforts have been made to stress all those aspects, real or imaginary, which could divide Hindus and Muslims while the aspects of History which bring the two communities together have not been given the necessary attention.

This continuing colonial impact on our history and culture should be fought and defeated.

AVENGING PAST WRONGS - THE MISUSE OF HISTORY

In the course of India's history, some kings clashed with some other kings. As was the practice in most parts of ancient and medieval world, occasionally unjust and cruel acts, sometimes highly cruel acts, were enacted in the course of these clashes. Sometimes those who suffered belonged to one community, sometimes those who suffered belonged to another community. The crucial question is - now in the last decade of the twentieth century should these old incidents (for some of which complete authentic details are not even

available) be allowed to be used for spreading hatred and bad feelings against a community by the other community.

If this is allowed to happen all over the world, then it is quite likely that the entire world will be engulfed in entirely avoidable violence and tension. The same is likely to happen in India if such feelings are allowed to spread. In fact due to temple-mosque controversies going back to medieval India, this is already happening in a big way.

When historical incidents (or mythical incidents covered up as historical incidents) are used for spreading hatred, then at least two important questions need to be raised.

The first question is whether these unjust or cruel acts had come in the way of re-establishing friendships with a 'forget and forgive' approach in the past. If this is so, and if our ancestors had themselves forgiven these wrongs, then what justification can be provided after so many generations have passed to re-assert these enmities on the basis of these old incidents.

For example let's look at the long-drawn out war between Akbar and Rana Pratap which continued till long after the important but indecisive battle of Haldighati. Whatever bitterness may have accumulated in the course of this war during which the Rana's family suffered in the wilderness for several years, the fact remains that in the next generation the Rana's son, Amar Singh, established a friendship on honourable terms with Akbar's son Jehangir. Jehangir made absolutely no efforts to humiliate him in any way, and infact showed him the utmost respect. Subsequently the scions of the Rana's family fought on the side of Mughal kings and princes on several occasions. Prince Karan, the son of Rana Amar Singh, was accorded the rank of 5000, which had been earlier accorded to the rulers of Jodhpur, Bikaner and Amber. He was to serve the Mughal emperor with a contingent of 1500. All the territories of Mewar were restored.

Raja Chatrasal of Bundelkhand also fought against the Mughals, but soon enough friendship was reached with Emperor Bahadur Shah. I. Similarly the Jat King Raja Churaman ended his hostilities by establishing friendship with Bahadur Shah I and assisted him in some campaigns. It must also be stressed that Sant Prannath, the guru of Raja Chatrasaal, was one of the leading saints who stressed the essential unity of Hinduism and Islam.

None suffered as much at the hands of Mughal rulers and their chieftains at the Sikh Gurus and yet they revealed their greatness by adopting the attitude of forgiveness and establishing friendship.

Jehangir received information that his rebel prince had been helped by Guru Arjun. The subsequent imprisonment and death of Guru Arjun by Jehangir spoiled the good relations that had existed earlier between the Mughal rulers and Sikhs. Guru Arjun's successor Guru Har Govind was also imprisoned for some time, but he was soon set free. Subsequently good relationship prevailed between him and Jehangir. Infact he accompanied Jehangir as a visit to Kashmir. The force of Guru Har Govind had a Muslim section led by Painda Khan.

The unjust acts against Sikhs were even worse during the reign of Aurangzeb. Guru Tegh Bahadur was executed in Delhi.

Aurangzeb's faujdar in Sirhind Wazir Khan worsened the matters by executing two sons of Guru Govind Singh. But there seems to be no evidence that this was done at the instance of Aurangzeb. Infact another Muslim chieftain who ruled Malerkotla protested against this execution. When Aurangzeb received Guru Govind Singh's letter informing him of this extremely tragic event, he invited the Guru to meet him. The Guru was on his way to meet him in the Deccan when Aurangzeb died.

However, it is important to note that a few years later Guru Govind Singh did reach a friendly agreement with Aurangzeb's successor Bahadurshah I. If the Guru was so great as to forget and forgive even at that time, when the wounds were still raw, how can there be any justification to reopen them hundreds of years later and to spread hatred on that basis?

The second question is - can only one community be blamed for the acts of injustice? It is true that several wrong and unjust acts were committed during the reign of Aurangzeb against, for instance, Rajput, Maratha and Sikh communities. However, it is important to stress that throughout his reign a large number of Hindu feudal lords and kings continued to remain his mansabdars. They, along with Muslim Mansabdars, provided the strength of the empire and its army. As evidence of Aurangzeb's wrong deeds grew, their number did not decrease, instead it increased. The number of high-ranking Hindu Mansabdars in Mughal Dynasty was at its peak towards the last two decades of Aurangzeb's rule. So shouldn't the blame for these wrong deeds also be shared by the Hindu lords and kings.

Aurangzeb was generally known to be intolerant while his brother Dara Shikoh was generally known to be a tolerant person. So at the time of war of succession between the two a clear choice was available to the Hindu kings and nobles between tolerant and intolerant rulers. But several leading Hindu mansabdaars opted to support Aurangzeb against Dara. The list of these nobles is available. Rama Raj Singh, Champat Bundela, Jadu Rao, Damaji Deccani, Raja Inder-Man Dhandera, Raja Rajroop Kohistani, Dadaji, Manaji Bhonsle, Rustam Rao, Babaji Bhonsle (Habaji), Biyas Rao, Man Singh of Gular, Amar Singh Zamindar of Narwar, Karan-Kachhi Zamindar of Malwa, Saun Singh, Raja Sarang Dhar of Jammun, Bhagwant Singh Hara, Subh Karan Bundela.

It is well-known that the patrons of Hindu communal organisations today include several members of former royal families. If we carefully follow the genealogy of several royal nobles of Aurangzeb then we are likely to get surprising evidence about the family records of present day supporters and patrons of Hindu communal organisations. A list of nearly 150 loyal high ranking Hindu nobles of Aurangzeb is available in history texts.

Therefore, those who preach avenging past injustices on the basis of historical records may well find the finger of revenge being directed against themselves. This is the price they have to pay for their wrong sense of history.

But let us hasten to add that history provides no justification for such revenges. Instead it records how some of the greatest sons of India, such as Guru Govind Singh, were willing to adopt the attitude of forgiveness even after suffering grave injustice.

Bharat Dogra

COMMUNAL HARMONY AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE THE NEED OF THE HOUR



"Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal? Wherein is the cause for quarreling?"

Why should we blaspheme God by fighting one another, because we see Him through different media - the Quran, the Bible, the Talmud, the Avesta or the Gita?

I do not expect the India of my dream to develop one religion, i.e., to be wholly Hindu, or wholly Christian, or wholly Mussalman: but I want it to be wholly tolerant, with its religions working side by side with one another.

One must entertain the same respect for the religious faiths of others as one accords to one's own. Where such tolerance becomes a law of life, conflict between different faiths becomes impossible. We must respect other religions even as we respect our own. Mere tolerance thereof is not enough.

— Mahatma Gandhi