

(Introductory essay written for The Parivar Raj and After, to be published by the Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai, early in August 2005.)

A Dangerous Illusion

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The Path of the Parivar (Three Essays Collective, New Delhi) appeared at the beginning of January 2004. It contained articles and letters about what I saw as the Sangh Parivar's distortion and fabrication of history, its lies about the present, its concerted campaign to impose on India a mediaeval uniformity, and, worst of all, its characterisation of religious minorities as "foreigners" and "enemies" who were to be suppressed, expelled or exterminated. I have continued to write on the same themes, and there is excellent reason for this. Not only is justice still denied to the victims of the horrors of Gujarat 2002, even more injustice is being heaped upon them. This is despite the fact that the BJP and its allies have been replaced at the Centre by a coalition which makes loud noises about secularism. It is my conviction that these noises are hollow; and I have sought to adduce evidence and formulate arguments to explain my position.

I have been asked why I "continue to waste time and energy" on the Hindu Right even after it suffered a resounding defeat in the general election. I hold that only the blind among us can fail to see that the Hindu Right is down but not out. Over the last several years, it has systematically planted its people in positions from which they can exercise control over, or can influence, the daily affairs of the country. It has set up institutions which appropriate public resources and use them to further its divisive and essentially mediaeval agenda. Nor should we forget that the several states which the BJP still rules can be likened to the typically small sites of origin of carcinomas which spread rapidly and unstoppably.

More important by far, the Vedic Taliban has filled with poison the minds of millions. We breathe a foul mixture of suspicion, fear and hatred. We no longer see that what our country needs are such things as food, industrial development, health care and education. Instead, we pour out on the roads when some ranting demagogue howls that the arrest of a man on suspicion of murder is an attack on Hinduism. In both the Babari Masjid matter and the Kanchi Sankaracharya one, the law, which is the underpinning of all civilised societies, has been used as a stick with which to beat others, it has been bent and twisted into a shield behind which to hide, it has been kicked about like a ball in a game which has no rules.

My priorities, though, have been changing since the general election of 2004. I now think it essential to see what the Congress, leader of the UPA government, does and does not do. Changing the chairpersons and the governing bodies of institutions is certainly a beginning, but it must remain a mere cosmetic exercise unless the numerous infiltrated termites are dislodged not just from the walls but from the very foundations of those institutions—and unless measures are taken to prevent a re-infestation.

A beginning has been made. The *Hindu* of 8 April 2005 reported on what two of the Human Resource Development Ministry's review committees had found. The Indian Institute of Advanced Study at Shimla selected 92 fellows in the period 1999 to 2004. Not one was a Muslim. In the same six years, the Indian Council of Historical Research awarded 456 Junior Research Fellowships. Uttar Pradesh got 121 (26.5 per cent) of these and Delhi, 15 per cent. West Bengal was privileged to get 0.8 per cent, while the north-eastern states got none. One thing was common to the IAS and the ICHR, but the paper's report did not expand on it. In the award of fellowships, scholarships and "foreign grants" (presumably funds to go abroad), a preference had been shown for work to do with ancient India. It can safely be assumed that this work will have been the creation and propagation of myths in the name of history. The "historians" of the Sangh Parivar have consistently shunned all known methods of historical enquiry, maintaining their purity by producing pots full of fairy tales and superstition about a Golden Age which only they say existed.

In the twenty-seven years from 1966 to 1992, the IAS had selected 239 fellows, which works

out to 8.85 a year, 9.2 per cent of these being Muslims (this is a straight average which does not take into account any variation that may have occurred over time). In the later period of six years, 92 were selected: that is, 15.33 a year. Did this burgeoning of scholarship involve a larger outlay of money and resources or did the scholars, presumably true nationalists like those who had appointed them, agree to work for just over half of the wages that their predecessors had been paid? I should think that while no sacrifice is too great if the aim is to attain the ideal of the Hindu Rashtra, being able to plunge one's hands deep into the coffers of the State cannot have been a hardship.

I have no knowledge or experience of archaeology or of graveyard management, but it seems reasonable to suppose that the deeper we dig, the more such skeletons we will find. For example, many "research" institutions were set up or funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research during the NDA Raj. One, the Centre for Policy Studies of Chennai, achieved momentary fame on account of the publicity given to the work done in it, supposedly on demography, by three people who were not demographers. But why quibble? Had not the Deputy Prime Minister, Lal Kishenchand Advani, written the foreword to the book and did he not speak at its release? Did not V.P. Sathe of the Congress also speak of the book in glowing terms? Finally, did not the Leader himself, K.S. Sudarshan, grace the release function? A collective release of wind, it was called, so obviously anti-Muslim and anti-Christian was the creation of the linguistically and logically extraordinary category "Indian religionists", so absurd were its calculations, based on the premise that India, Pakistan and Bangladesh still constituted one country ("Akhand Bharat", in the language of the Hindu Right), and so supremely sophisticated was its use of compound interest formulae in estimating growth rates that professional demographers were left gasping for breath.

The ICHR, ICSSR and IAS are bodies concerned with higher education. They have undoubted utility in the creation of propaganda and in the distortion of history and of present reality: but higher education is a small field. The National Council of Educational Research and Training, on the other hand, is concerned with, among other things, education at the school level. School children outnumber, by orders of magnitude, people with master's and doctoral degrees; and the mass corruption of their minds is a terrifying prospect. It should not surprise us that Murli Manohar Joshi, who was given charge of all mind corruption in the name of education, was particularly active in the mauling of books for children. Undoing the damage here will be slow and difficult, if only because the job is so much larger.

The NCERT deals with some part of organised school education; but there is also that vast area of children's education which is little organised, or entirely unorganised, by the State. This is where the Hindu Right has, over decades, lodged itself. This is where it fills the minds of the young with poison, beginning when they are barely able to talk. Its network of *shishu mandirs* and *ekal vidyalayas* leaves few parts of the country uncontaminated.

The growth and continued existence of this network is simply explained: there is no secular alternative. Parents in small villages or tribal hamlets have no other way to get a rudimentary education for their children. Along with reading, writing and arithmetic come the toxins. People who have studied the process have explained it, so I shall only point to two closely related strategies which strike me as being central. One is the unceasing use of religious symbols and imagery, even in play. The other is the systematic and comprehensive distortion of both history and the present, even in play. Invasions, forced conversions and the defiling of women are staples.

In India, Islam too has similar networks of institutions for what can only be called indoctrination in hatred. Where their ultimate effect is concerned, there is no difference between cyanide and strychnine; but while one is produced on an industrial scale, either with the knowledge or with the support of the State, the other is made in secret and in laboratory quantities.

Openness and secrecy. Those who do their dirty work in secret, in twos and threes, at dead of night—they are bad. But they are not bad who move about in broad daylight, in bands of hundreds, raping and killing. It is openness to the public gaze, everywhere, which has made the reprehensible "education" imparted by the Sangh Parivar socially accepted, "normal", a way of life—while exactly the same activities are recognised correctly as criminal when undertaken by its Muslim counterparts.

I did not speak of the role of the State without good reason. Our Constitution assigns to the State the duty of maintaining the secular fabric of the nation by enforcing the laws passed to do that. Has the State done its duty? Has it not looked away when the majority religion has broken those laws? Worse, has it not assisted and joined the majority religion in breaking those and other laws? That the RSS “family” rode rough-shod over the nation in a particularly obscene manner when the BJP was in power must not blind us to the fact that things were little different earlier, when others of the majority religion controlled the State.

Then there is the matter of promises made but kept only on paper. A law, POTA, which is no longer on the statute books, continues to be used in Gujarat against the minorities. The UPA is silent on the question of compensating those who may have suffered on account of this law and on the related question of punishing those who may have misused it. This is the same law which it called Draconian and amenable to misuse in justifying its repeal.

Before the election, when it was persuading people to vote it to power, the Congress said that POTA would be repealed with retrospective effect. POTA was repealed all right, very soon before it would have become history anyway, but its repeal was not retrospective. Here we have a law which was said to be amenable to being misused, a law which was said to have been applied to the wrong people or in the wrong way or to an excessive degree. In short, a bad law. Because it was bad, it was thrown out. So far, so good.

Can the Congress not see what POTA has left behind of itself? It has left behind not a mere shadow but something far more tangible. Let me put it in the only terms in which I can understand it, the simplest terms. POTA will continue to apply to those who were arrested under its provisions. People who have suffered on account of a bad law will be tried under the provisions of that very bad law—although that bad law has been thrown out precisely because it was a bad law. It is difficult to conceive of a more putrid example of brahminical double-speak.

It is also difficult to conceive of anything more irrational and illegal than what happened in Gujarat at the end of November 2004. Lawyers who were defending people arrested under POTA were themselves arrested under that same law—a law, we should remember, which no longer existed. POTA was passed by the Central Government and it was repealed by the Central Government. The Minister for Home Affairs at the Centre appears to deny not only any knowledge of its misuse while it existed but also any knowledge of its continued misuse after it has ceased to be on the statute books. Is Gujarat a part of India or one of Antarctica?

Ever since the rout of the NDA, many of us have been saying that the Congress, while it is not in the same league as the RSS and its front organisations, is after all a body whose record where communal matters are concerned is hardly reassuring. It has always harboured people who were, at the very least, saffron sympathisers—an excellent example was G.B. Pant of U.P., whom Nehru made Union Minister for Home Affairs—and there is no reason to think that it will cease to harbour them. It makes rousing statements about secularism when doing that suits it, but its practice has never come anywhere near those statements. People say that it lacks the will, that it keeps pussy-footing. I prefer to say that it is as much a victim—an unthinking one, perhaps, but one which acts and is therefore dangerous—of prejudice and superstition as anyone else. Moreover, it cannot rise above its deeply entrenched venality unless force of some kind is used, unless it is physically hauled out of the morass.

Who will pull it out? Who will push it so that it does what it should do and what it claims to do? You will and I will. If many people like us keep a constant vigil and raise our voices every time it does something wrong—or, and this is probably more relevant, every time it does not do something which it should have done—it may be frightened into acting. What I am saying is that the only thing which has any chance of moving it is fear. This fear must be instilled in it despite its inevitable use of the many forms of dishonesty of which it has had much practice. The very idea of democracy rests on responsibility towards the people and on the knowledge that the people have the power to remove those of their rulers (although “servants” is the deceptive term always used) who have shown themselves to be irresponsible or worse. The fear of this power of the people must be made real and constant.

The NDA got away with all manner of hogwash because no one challenged it; and it was the rosy glow induced by that absence of criticism which sent it scurrying into hiding when it got its comeuppance in the general election. The UPA must now be told clearly that precisely the same

will happen to it if it does the wrong things or fails to keep its promises: and the best way to do this is to keep it constantly aware that it is being watched. Given half a chance, it will only sit back comfortably and fatten itself as its dominant partner did so successfully for so long.

Thus there is before us a double task. The first concerns those whom Prof. I.K. Shukla calls the Saffronazis. They must be kept from hijacking and dominating the political life of the country, as they are succeeding in doing even when they are no longer in power. The ceaseless antics of these trained circus performers must not be permitted to bring the country to a standstill. At the very least, Parliament must function effectively, since that alone will allow us to claim that we are a democracy. Equally, we cannot afford to ignore what they do all the time and everywhere—spreading their communal poison and planting their own people wherever they can—even when they do this almost invisibly.

Second, the self-proclaimed secularists of the Congress have to be made to understand that they cannot get away just with claiming to be secular. The contradictions between their professed ideology and their actions cannot be permitted to persist and show themselves constantly. It was this very mockery which enabled the Hindu Right to come to rule the country and, among other things, to look on benignly while its hatchet men in Gujarat wreaked havoc, all backed by the same Constitution which they left in tatters. It was chiefly the Congress which made the space for these feral fascists to take over the country by using their endless lies to fool people of the majority religion into believing that they were its representatives—and, worse, that it needed representatives in a secular, democratic republic.

Just where does the leading party in the present ruling coalition stand? I asked my computer to search through Manmohan Singh's Independence Day speech for the words "Gujarat" and "secular". The machine could not find a single occurrence of either. Has that party decided to leave all the dirty work to the judiciary in the shape of the Supreme Court? Is it so desperate to hang on to every fragment of the electorate that it cannot act on the principles for which it so loudly claims to stand? Had India's Prime Minister forgotten events which had shaken the country to its roots just two and one half years before?

It is true that Arjun Singh has taken on the RSS and shows no signs of backing out; but I do not know what this will achieve. That conspiratorial "cultural" body must know that if all the truth were to come into the open it would find itself conducting *shakhas* for earth-worms. It can easily slither out of difficult situations, given its history of greasiness and of carefully placing members or sympathisers in critical places. But its backing out will be at best a theatrical performance: for it will go on spreading poison from its burrow, and the Congress will do nothing to prevent that.

I began to become aware of the fraud behind the "secular" stance of the Congress in 1961, when the first major post-Independence Hindu-Muslim riots began in Jabalpur. I lived then in Sagar, a little over a hundred miles away, and the violence reached that town within hours. It travelled with equal rapidity to Narsinghpur, the home of my paternal family in the same region.

This speed makes one think. The telephone instruments of the time had no dials. You picked up the hand-set and, when the operator came on the line, you spoke out the number you wanted. If you wished to reach a number in another town or city, you booked a trunk call. Then you waited, almost always for several hours, before you were connected. Not even the operator could say for how long you might have to wait or whether you would be connected at all.

It is improbable that news of the inter-religious violence travelled over the wires of this slow network in the ordinary way. People with power, however, could get through to any place with the speed of the electricity on which the telephones worked. Also under the control of people with power, there were agencies which communicated by wireless.

Which political party ruled Madhya Pradesh at that time? I give you one guess.

An inquiry was ordered into the Jabalpur riots, as inquiries are ordered into all riots. A report was the outcome—as reports have been the outcome of such inquiries before and since. People who have studied these reports have found several things that were common to all. I shall briefly enumerate these commonalities, but first I shall point to the most important one.

No report led, except at best in a token way, to punitive action being taken against those who had been determined to have been responsible, or against politicians whose involvement had been established, or against government officials who had been held guilty either of dereliction of duty

or of abetment. Narendra Modi's ministers have repeatedly described the commission of inquiry which their own government appointed as "a paper tiger". Similar commissions and committees which have been appointed in the past must be described in just those terms.

A common feature in the reports is that it was always Muslims, "the minority community", who suffered the most: more were killed by the other side, more fell to police bullets, and more were arrested and were incarcerated for longer periods. Another common feature is that the Hindu Right, that is, the RSS and its offshoots, was each and every time found to have provoked or begun, led, and probably planned, the "rioting". The last is significant: riots are by definition spontaneous, while planning and preparation entirely rule out spontaneity. The "riots" were not riots at all.

A further common feature, seen in propaganda, in press reporting and sometimes in official reports as well, is one which has always been blown up to a size which bears no relation to reality. This is that Muslims who had been involved in violence had had weapons. What weapons? They had stocked stones and bricks in their houses, they had steel rods, many had knives, and a few even had spears or swords. The arsenals of the majority community had always been far larger and more deadly; and it cannot be a coincidence that no comparison seems ever to have been made. Merely to say, "The Muslims were armed" was enough to squarely place the guilt on them, never mind that substantially more of them lost their lives every single time. Shrug it off: pathetic fighters who can't even counter a rifle with a sling-shot.

Such has been the record of our leading "secular" party. Numerous inter-religious "riots" took place during its rule. Its governments appointed individuals or bodies to look into them. When it received the reports, it shelved them. That is, it refrained from taking action against those who were found to have been guilty through commission or omission.

Symbols are important in all spheres of social life, specially when large numbers of people are involved. Religion and politics are easily the most obvious of these, and the convenient custom is for them to be combined into a more heady cocktail, a more potent poison.

It is on record that on 24 August 1954, Babu Rajendra Prasad, then the President of the Republic of India, went to Sringeri to seek the blessings of whosoever was the local His Holiness at the time. That this was not a private visit is clear from the fact that thousands of people were present to witness it. India, let us remember, had not too long before adopted a constitution which, among other things, declared it a secular republic.

Indira Gandhi, the widow of a Parsi in a culture in which a woman, on being married, retains little connection with her natal family, was cremated with what were described as full Vedic rites. The bodies of her sons, half Parsi "by blood", were disposed of in the same manner. Hinduism is routinely (and falsely, of course) described as open, ever willing to take anyone into its fold. I suppose that is what it did in the matter of these three cremations.

In the process, though, it forgot two things which lie at its very core: caste, which defines purity and impurity, those invisible but all-powerful phenomena which every Hindu—but no one else—knows all about; and the dominant system of kinship. In a marriage between Hindus of different castes, the caste status of the woman becomes indeterminate. She is, essentially, neither here nor there. Although patriliney is almost universal in all varieties of Hinduism, the children of such a marriage do not inherit their father's caste. They too are neither here nor there. Yet the nation witnessed full Vedic rites for three people who could not have been of the correct religion because they lacked the defining feature of caste.

One of these three cremations was of a prime minister and another was of a former prime minister. The corpses of such people are not carried in hearses or ambulances to crematoria and unceremoniously shoved into the furnaces there. They need gun carriages and the national flag, soldiers marching with arms reversed, radio and television commentators describing the grand events to the citizenry. Leaders from other countries attend the ceremonies and have to be protected. The most important people of the country may need or demand even greater protection. The least important people, those who merely elevated with their votes the defunct owners of the bodies which are to be set alight, have to be kept where they belong—well away. Barricades need to be put up, toilets and drinking water have to be provided, doctors have to be kept standing by. Vehicular traffic across the city has to be regulated, as does air traffic to the city. Sharpshooters must be stationed strategically and police personnel in plain clothes must mingle

with the crowds. The list is endless.

Such arrangements are of the order of a large military operation. Not even India's wealthiest capitalists can make them on their own. None but the State has the resources to cope: and cope it did. Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, neither of whom could have been accepted as a Hindu by Hindu orthodoxy, were cremated as Hindus by a State which called itself secular. The people who ruled India then, rule India now. They were and are "secular" people—almost all Hindus—presiding over a State which of course they call secular. Mother and son too called themselves not Hindus but secular. In sum, theirs were pyres which burnt to the gallery: the gallery being the overwhelming bulk of the electorate.

The display of symbols goes on. Rahul Gandhi, now Congress Member of Parliament for Amethi, but twenty-seven years ago a small boy with whom I tossed a ball a few times, on 18 May 2005 set in motion the construction of link roads in his constituency. The proceedings included talking to reporters—and the performing of the obligatory *puja*, photographs of which appeared, or were made to appear, in the press. A *havan* of bitumen, one assumes.

The *bhajans* which punctuated the daily routine at M.K. Gandhi's establishments—often the mansions on whose marble floors the super-rich permitted him to sleep in his adopted poverty—clearly marked him out as a Hindu. A Muslim-loving Hindu, many called him, and that was what led to his assassination: but without doubt a Hindu. The consequences of this, which found expression in the debates in the Constituent Assembly, became increasingly visible over the years. I speak of the extraordinary meaning that is given in India to the idea of secularism: no more than the peaceful co-existence of many religions. The secular really means that which is distinct from the religious and which is not bound by it, chiefly the State, morals and ethics: but as a nation we have never acted according to this distinction and, I suspect, have not even understood it.

The Indian definition of "secular" is a strange and corrupted one. For us, the secular has not meant that which is non-religious, other than religious. What Indian secularism, so-called, has been made to mean is the equality of all religions and the freedom of individuals to practise the faiths they choose. In reality, of course, this definition has been ignored in the actions of the State. Religions with fewer adherents have been neither equal nor free. The State, which has called itself secular, has not respected the difference between the secular and the religious. It has not kept itself above religious considerations. Laws and loud talk notwithstanding, ours has been without question a Hindu State. The most visible expression of this has been the manner in which its law enforcing wing, the police, has dealt with people of different religions. Every official report on a "communal riot" has spoken of this.

I do not mean to question the secular—howsoever that notion may be defined—credentials of Gandhi and Nehru. This country went in the wrong direction for another reason. From all accounts, the two men held the finest of ideas *as individuals*, but they failed miserably when it came to spreading those ideas among the people whom they had set out to mould into a nation. Most of India did not accept or even understand the Gandhi–Nehru ideal: it was merely turned into a sort of gospel to be mouthed ritually, without comprehension. This was why it did not serve to guide people's actions, this was why it did not rid people of fears and animosities—and this was why it did not make of India a "secular" nation. We never have had a State which has treated people of all religions in the same way.

Long before the Hindu Right came to power in Delhi, it had become the practice to begin State-sponsored functions with rituals associated with Hinduism—and only with Hinduism. Muslims or Christians do not light lamps at the commencement of a book release; and having a line of colourfully dressed girls sing the *sarasvati vandana* before prizes are awarded to weight-lifters or to advertising copy-writers is not, to my knowledge, a custom either among the Sikhs or among the Kond tribals of Orissa or among the Khasis of Meghalaya.

The Hindu Right, it has been argued, turned every public function into a religious performance with a distinct flavour of what it imagined royal courts in "ancient India" to have been. It has also been argued, though, that it only added tons of gilt and gallons of saffron paint to what existed already. Evidence of this is that little has changed since it was driven out of power in Delhi. On 23 September 2004, for example, a function of the Mahila Congress at Bhopal began with the lighting of a lamp in front of a garlanded portrait of Indira Gandhi. This cannot have been because Bhopal is the capital city of a state now ruled by the BJP. It was, quite simply, an

“auspicious” beginning as that is defined in what have come to be accepted as Hindu terms. That is why people wonder just how secular the Congress is, outside its manifestos and slogans.

Since the Congress controls the State, it follows that the secular credentials of that too are suspect. Early in April 2005, Renuka Chowdhury, Union Minister for Tourism, launched a joint scheme of Uttaranchal’s tourism department and the Centre’s postal department to make *prasad* from Badrinath available to the devout across the world. If the Indian understanding of secularism is put into effect, to premium services like Speed Post will be added ReligMail, with separate wings to handle mutually polluting substances such as *prasad* from Hindu places of pilgrimage, *tabarruk* from Ajmer Sharif, *kada prasad* from the Golden Temple—and, quite literally, heaven alone knows what else. The expense on refrigerated containers will of course be borne by the State. But this is a pipe dream: it is a near certainty that only places like Tirupati and Vaishno Devi and Sabarimala and Puri will be in the network. The State is only nominally secular, after all, and “soft Hindutva” is not really so soft.

The *Hindu* of 10 May 2005 reported that Rajasthan proposes to develop three major temples in the south of the state, bordering Gujarat, into a major centre of pilgrimage. On the Srinath temple of Nathdwara alone, State funds in excess of a hundred crore rupees are to be spent. The Chief Minister, Vasundhara Raje, announced, in words whose meaning eludes me, that the purpose was to “promote godliness [and] give a multi-dimensional boost to religious tourism in Rajasthan”. Her blood brother from across the border, Narendra Modi, was of course present; but the holiness of the occasion kept him from saying things of the kind which have introduced “bloody brother” into the language. I wonder if Ms. Raje is to spend any money on providing safe drinking water to her subjects and to the billions of many-dimensioned religious tourists who will no doubt pour into her principality.

On 18 April 2005, the same newspaper had reported that Tamil Nadu would spend, in 2005–06, twenty-five crore rupees on the renovation of the thousands of temples which dot its territory. This relative niggardliness is explained by the fact that the state is not ruled by the party of Hindutva as is Rajasthan. However, some looking around on its official web site, www.tn.gov.in, which is decorated with pretty pictures of many temples, is instructive. The state has a department which looks after “Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments”. Linked to this are “Tamil Development and Culture”. Non-Hindus—of whom there are a good many in the state—do not seem, though, to have even any linguistic or cultural affinity with the land in which they live. For all we know, the Muslims of Tamil Nadu speak Esperanto while its Christians have derived their culture from the islands of Polynesia. Here again, there is the matter of money for mundane purposes. Will Ms. Jayalalithaa spend a few hundred rupees on tackling female foeticide in her fiefdom?

India’s diverse religious minorities—Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, tribal groups—have been tolerated only when they have been quiet and subservient, and so long as they have been available for use as pawns in maintaining the pretence of parliamentary democracy. Nehru was something of a world statesman whose intellectual and political integrity few doubted; although there was criticism of the many compromises he made. Indira Gandhi stood on nothing but her family background. She wished, all the same, to be thought of by the world as her father had been thought of, and for that reason was always specially sensitive to world opinion. “The world’s largest democracy” and whatever she meant by socialism in a framework of non-alignment—these were important labels for both foreign and domestic consumption.

To a considerable degree, the strategy worked: for few troubled to look under the labels and the fancy packaging. The reality became only too visible during the Emergency; but it was soon forgotten as people’s attention came to be focussed on the political slapstick which followed the end of that phase in 1977. Jayaprakash Narayan, who had found no satisfaction in the partial revolution which he learnt in the Union of Socialist America and which he had therefore replaced with the total variety—not to be confused with totalitarian, as his followers, all of whom constantly spoke of the Milovan Djilas version of the Quran-Bible-Gita, would tell you—gave to actors from the Bharatiya Jana Sangh stellar roles in the Punch and Judy *nautanki* he was cobbling together as he went along. As we know, the troublesome dual membership issue was resolved by adopting dual membership instead, and the BJP was born.

One thing we see here is that the Congress imposed on the nation the fundamentally

undemocratic regime of the Emergency. It is argued that this would not have happened had Indira Gandhi not come under the influence of her younger son. Even if this argument is correct, we are left with the fact that the party showed not spine but sycophancy and meekly went along a path which ran counter to its declared principles. That party is the one which now once again rules the country. There is another Mrs. Gandhi at its head and many of the old faces have disappeared: but many other faces are still to be seen, and sycophancy still courses through its veins. Is the continuing hullabaloo about Sonia Gandhi's great sacrifice in not becoming prime minister so different from the classically comic "Indira Is India"?

The second thing we see is that JP's giving the Jana Sangh legitimacy on the political stage—whether it was caused by a lack of foresight or by something worse—led eventually to the destruction of the Babari Masjid and to the Gujarat pogrom. I have named only the two most visible consequences although there have been many others, some of which are capable of doing a great deal more damage in the long term.

It is a dangerous illusion, one which may prove fatal, that all will be well now that the Hindu Right has been thrown out and the Congress, with its allies and supporting parties, is in power again. As I have sought to argue, the Congress too has been and remains a Hindu party, never mind that it claims to be secular and all the rest of it. What does it do when the Parivar threatens to launch a nation-wide agitation because the head of a religious institution is arrested for the murder of another human being? What does it do when the Parivar describes this routine action against a suspected criminal as an "insult to Hinduism" and demands a separate set of laws exclusively for religious leaders, howsoever these worthies may be defined?

Does it say that this throws into the waste bin words which appear at the beginning of our Constitution, in particular "democratic" and "equality"? No, it does not take the Parivar head on. It speaks of principles only in its manifestos. When it is faced with realities, it does not take a stand. Are we not entitled to wonder whether indeed there are any principles for which it is willing to fight, that it is not just playing the game which it learnt over decades, tossing about the resources of the country and skimming off a substantial portion of them for itself?

The Hindu Right is nothing if not organised. It has an array of appendages and cells to which all possible tasks under the sun and the moon have been assigned. In a far more evolved and complex way than the National Socialists of Germany, with their Hitler Jugend and so on, our Vedic Taliban has created organisations for the young of different age groups, for school-children, for college and university students, for so-called teachers and researchers, for "saints", for the disseminators of ideology (whether or not this is described as "culture"), for fund-raisers across the globe, for muscle-men, for tribal groups—you name it. All are divided carefully along gender lines, naturally. For a Hindu man to rape and then kill a Muslim woman is not just morally permissible, it is actually an expression of pride and glory; but for a Hindu girl to hold the hand of a Hindu boy is the gravest of sins. Did not the all-knowing, timeless Vedas say this thousands of years before the world had heard of Islam? That is to say, is this not what we are told?

But then the Hindu Right says what it pleases, when it pleases. Often its different limbs say different things in what I believe is a carefully orchestrated way. The Babari Masjid affair is an excellent instance. A structure was demolished by an act of planned mass vandalism—that is, by a crime—and the plot of land which was thus made vacant is now called the subject of a "dispute". No one seems to realise that had there been no crime, there would have been nothing to dispute. The various organs of the Sangh Parivar have said, at different times, that they will abide by the court's verdict—but they have also said, often in the same breath, that the location of their fictional hero's place of birth is a matter of faith, and that faith is not subject to mere laws and parliaments. In other words, the courts and Parliament itself have not the status even of out-houses to the temple which is to be built at Ayodhya—in accordance with the verdict of the court. To hell with reason and logic—this is a Matter Of Faith.

Prof. I.K. Shukla warns that the Congress and the BJP are well on the way to becoming "carbon copies of the two-party system fashionable ... in the imperial 'democracies': that is, one party with two names" (personal communication). The reference is, of course, to the Republicans and the Democrats in the US and to the Conservatives and Labour in Britain. Prof. Shukla bases this conclusion on "the behaviour of the Congress in general and its compromise with the BJP in particular."

I would rather speak of the mutually rewarding relations between the Congress and the Hindu Right as a whole. For example, the RSS is known to have rendered valuable assistance to the Congress during the anti-Sikh riots of 1984; although it is unlikely that the Home Minister has been sitting on the report of the Nanavati Commission solely to keep under wraps the details of that productive co-operation. From time to time we hear also of how the RSS has helped Congress candidates in elections. Take your pick: carbon copies or a single coin.

I am not alone in speaking of pervasive suspicion, fear and hatred. Ram Puniyani says, “You scratch a liberal-looking person, the anti-minority biases will be exposed” (published on the Internet, 12 November 2004). I can vouch for this. Many of my first cousins, with whom I had played when we were children and whose children later played in my lap and turned me into a horse and rode on my back, but whose grand-children are now encouraged to maintain a safe distance from me, called me “Mulla Dube” when they read my early articles about the genocide in Gujarat. These affluent and supposedly educated people had become such lumpenised sectarians that they had turned the appellation “Mulla” into a term of abuse, which it decidedly is not. That they meant to be witty shows only how far they had fallen. There are millions like them. The worst by far were those who went in their motor cars to bring back expensive white goods from Muslims’ shops being looted in urban Gujarat.

There are far too many who persist in staying within or siding with the BJP and the RSS, paying no attention to the mayhem let loose by soldiers of these organisations and of others linked to them by “family” ties. One of my cousins said to me, seeking to set my thinking straight, “Not all members of the RSS are bad.” While I agree that they may not be individually, personally bad, I am unable entirely to understand how they can countenance the presence in their midst of murderers and rapists.

There are family ties of another kind. By name, “blood”, whatever, I am a Hindu and a Brahmin. I was born in an almost entirely Muslim neighbourhood in Hyderabad, and the people who cared for me at home and in the houses around were Muslims. They were my family. Some years later, though still nearly half a century ago, my family shared a house with a Muslim family. I was smoothly added to its own children. That too was my family; and it remains that to this day, in my mind at least. The man who was our family factotum for nearly two decades was of the sweeper caste. He drove and maintained the car, he taught me to drive and many things besides, he did the routine shopping, he filled the fountain pens—he did everything. He even did part of the cooking, although for Brahmins to eat something he had cooked was impermissible and profoundly defiling. He too was family. During the eighteen months of my doctoral field work, I stayed with a family of landless Chamars in a village in western U.P. The lone Brahmin family in the village shunned me. It was of no consequence, because they were strangers and I lived with *my* family in *my* neighbourhood.

Over the years, I have been friends with people of all religions, many castes, most regions. All have been family. There are many like me. What will happen to us if those who rule this country snatch away from us our whole families—or family—leaving us only those to whom we are related by blood or marriage and with whom we may share not a single idea or ideal?

On reading a draft of this essay, Prof. I.K. Shukla said that what we call “family” has also to do with ideas and with culture, with a way of life. He was correct. My ordinary speech, for example, includes many Urdu words, for the reason that I have heard them since I began to understand words. This is hardly surprising, since Urdu is a language born in this sub-continent and spoken nowhere else. It is as much Indian as are Tulu and Bhojpuri, and its spread is far greater. For forty years I have been an admirer of Mirza Ghalib’s work, although I know that I have barely skimmed the surface. What of the brothers Haddu Khan and Hassu Khan, early stalwarts of the Gwalior Gharana of Hindustani music? What of Faiyaz Khan, universally acknowledged as the finest Hindustani musician of the 20th century? Are all of these not also of my larger family? How must I have felt on hearing that Faiyaz Khan’s tomb in Baroda was destroyed in 2002 by ruffians to whom art, culture and history meant nothing?

It was not just that people like me were killed and cut up, that our sisters and daughters were brutalised, that our homes were ruined. It was far worse than that: our entire world, all that we had grown up with and which we held close, was viciously shaken and snatched away from us. And it goes on. Can I sleep in peace today, when I know that my family continues to be harassed

and starved?

The planet is now dominated by a single super-power, a bully which thought nothing of using its military muscle against a sovereign State on grounds which have conclusively been shown to have been plain fiction. The bully paid no attention to countries which opposed its action, not even to the United Nations, a body in whose setting up it had played an important part. Its leaders paid no attention even to those of its own citizens who raised inconvenient moral and ethical questions and even more inconvenient questions concerning facts and lies.

The Iraqis do not want the bully there, and they make this clear every day: but the bully does not leave, choosing instead to concoct fairy tales for the families of its many soldiers who continue to be killed, choosing instead to go on with its shabby pretence of installing “democracy” by placing hand-picked people in positions of power from which they can, in fact, exercise no power at all because everybody knows that they are faceless puppets.

What concern me here, though, are the consequences of the bully’s actions for the world. Countries across the globe have been “advised”, as the expression goes, to join in the War Against Terrorism by passing laws which, although thousands of miles may separate the territories to which they are made to be applied, all share the stench associated with the large structure at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

In India, POTA was one such law; and the amended Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act is another. The Hindu Right, on account of its long-standing, rabid and groundless fear and hatred of Islam, was quite happy to enact POTA and to use it as a sledge-hammer against Gujarat’s Muslims in particular. The second Act I named was passed by a government led by the Congress party. Should this be called coincidence or continuity?

The focus of most people’s thinking and writing changed in February–March 2002. To take one example, of those of us who had earlier written about agricultural labour, many abruptly stopped doing that. The exploitation of labour goes on, of course, and something which involves billions of human beings can hardly be called unimportant. It is, however, both a very old phenomenon and a spatially dispersed one; and we tend not to pay much attention to what have become “facts of life”, howsoever inequitable they may be. Their very ubiquity helps to make them almost invisible. It is a slow grinding away of the human spirit, a wasting disease which causes changes barely perceptible in the short term.

What happened in Gujarat in 2002 was, by contrast, a titanic eruption which made the earth heave well beyond the boundaries of that province and outside India. It changed our world and blinded us to all else. The people who caused it also ruled the country at the time, and they showed a singular determination not to speak of matters crucial to the existence of the bulk of the populace. The wealthy were well served, the middle class was given an array of technologically advanced toys and the money with which to buy them—but the food which should have gone to the hungry was sold to other countries.

Those who would otherwise have raised their voices against all this were kept busy cleaning up the tons of tripe and gallons of bilge with which the then government and its “family” daily filled Parliament and the media. The Parivar set the agenda and the rest of us had perforce to keep to it (Nasreen Fazalbhoy, personal communication). This agenda was unsurpassed in its pettiness and infantility and, worse, in being utterly irrelevant in a country which is short of food, employment, health care, education, even clean drinking water.

It was not that so many of us forgot about concerns which were and remain central for our country and specially for the deprived among us. The question was one of priorities. Gujarat had shown us, in the most unambiguous and bloody manner, many of the horrors which would inevitably spread to the entire country if the rule of the Parivar were to continue. Our very survival demanded that we concentrate first on bringing it to an end. The Parivar is now out and we can turn once again to things that matter; but now at the top of the list is the need to make sure that the Parivar does not slither back in.