

Ayodhya, 6 December 1992



Cry The Beloved Country

**People's Union for Democratic Rights
Delhi
December 1992**

The Bitter Harvest

Number of places affected: 224

Number of people killed: 1117

Population under curfew: 976 lakh

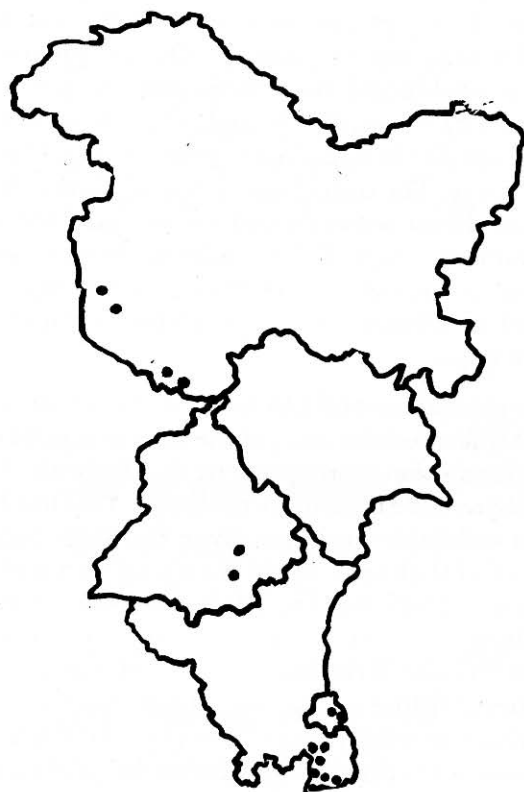
आई थीं बलाएँ किसके लिये
पाई थीं सज़ाएँ किसके लिये
मांगी थी दुआएँ किसके लिये
अशकों से जला के दिल के दिये
खुद अपने लहू के घूंट पिये
बैठे हैं दिवाने होंठ सिये
ज़ंजीर के टुकड़े साथ लिये
मंज़िल न हो ये बरबाद कहीं
आगाज़-ए-सफर जब याद नहीं

वहीदा नसोम

The Babri Masjid was demolished by *kar sewaks* on Sunday, 6 December. With it was shaken an image and an imagination that bound all of us together all these years. Memories of other times, of partition, revisited us and got mixed somewhat hazily with our future. The passage of time and process of change appeared as if they were transient illusions. But that was momentary. Our people and democracy have reestablished their resilience. As we write this report, normalcy is being restored. Curfew is being lifted, place after place, in the 213 places spread across 15 states and a union territory. The convulsions created by the demolition of the mosque, like a crater formation, will take a long time to settle in their final shape. It is perhaps too early to assess and reflect upon its impact. Hence this is not a report on the incident and its aftermath. It is a modest attempt to locate resources of hope.

The massacres and the massive movements of populations that informed the birth of the Indian republic, are not lived experiences for many present day Indians. For, sixty percent of them were born after partition. Yet that holocaust is part of a collective heritage. Over two lakh people were maimed or died that time. More than a million walked their way for almost 15-20 days in 24 foot convoys to reach this country. Many more moved in the opposite direction. Together, on both sides of the border, 170 lakh people moved out of their homes, "filling up the mirages of freedom with tears and irrigating the wilderness of the new republics with migration". Now, a fortnight after 6 December 1992, things are settling down. And they will. But let us not allow ourselves to forget that on a Sunday afternoon this winter, for a while, that past reappeared as a possible future.

The Indian republic was not founded on the basis of religion, unlike Pakistan. Nor was it ever ruled by the army. The constitution does not permit discrimination on the basis of religion except in matters of educational institutions, personal laws and religious property. (The last two were later to become instruments of communal contention as for instance in the Shah Bano case and Ayodhya.) But the grounding principle of our republic was a democratic system of

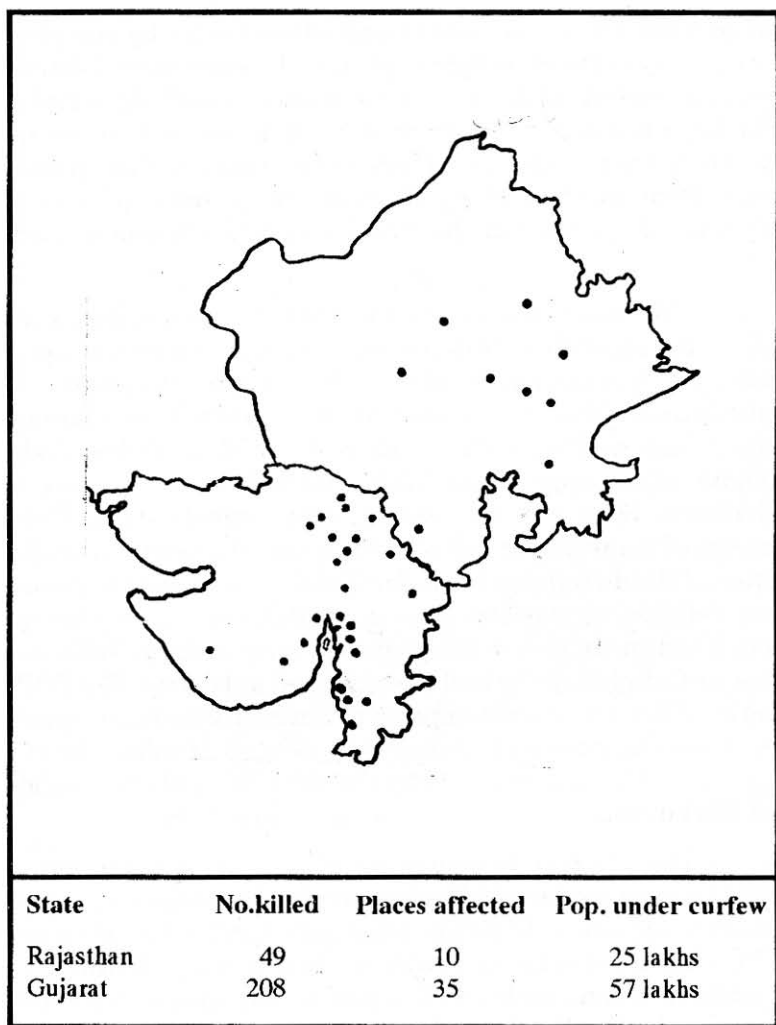


| State | No.killed | Places affected | Pop. under curfew |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Jammu & Kashmir | - | 4 | N.A. |
| Punjab | - | 1 | 0.4 lakhs |
| Haryana | 1 | 7 | 2.2 lakhs |
| Delhi | 15 | 15 (P.S. areas) | 11 lakhs |

governance. Democracy was thought to be the best guarantee for equality between religious groups. It remains so. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies are now seeking to make *Hindutva* the basis of our republic. If democracy comes in their way, they are prepared to demolish that too. The central issue of the incident at Ayodhya is not the demolition of a dilapidated mosque but the manner in which it was carried out.

This concerted attempt to shift the grounding principle of the republic from democracy to religion is part of communalism. Communalism always thrives when it appears as nationalism. Muslim communalism appeared as Islamic nationalism and led to the creation of Pakistan. Today, Sikh communalism appears as Sikh nationalism to demand a Khalistan. So is the case with Hindu communalism. This process of 'reinventing India' is organically linked to a redefinition of Hindu religion itself. Hinduism was never an organised religion. A variety of sects and faiths have always flourished in its rich mythology and long history. With no Pope or Caliph it never had a centralised authority. The BJP and its allies are now attempting to centralise it and arrogating presiding power to themselves. Not all Hindus like it. That is perhaps the reason why the demolition of the masjid has hurt devout Hindus as much as it did others.

The attempt to centralise Hinduism is being done with the most modern technology available. Audio and video cassettes appealing to Hindu sentiments proliferate even as a Toyota reincarnates as a rath for their *yatras*. Skillful use of modernisation coupled with appeal to 'national sentiments' have enabled the *Hindutva* forces to make significant inroads into the middle class; media, academia, lawyers and even civil and armed bureaucracy. What made this possible is not merely their campaign but the nature of our development. Its growth reached the limits even before large sections have benefitted from it. This gap is obscured by the discourse of modernisation. Rajiv Gandhi supported the opening of the locks of a sixteenth century mosque when he was promising to take us to the twenty first century. Forty years ago, while inaugurating Bhakra Nangal Project, Jawahar Lal Nehru

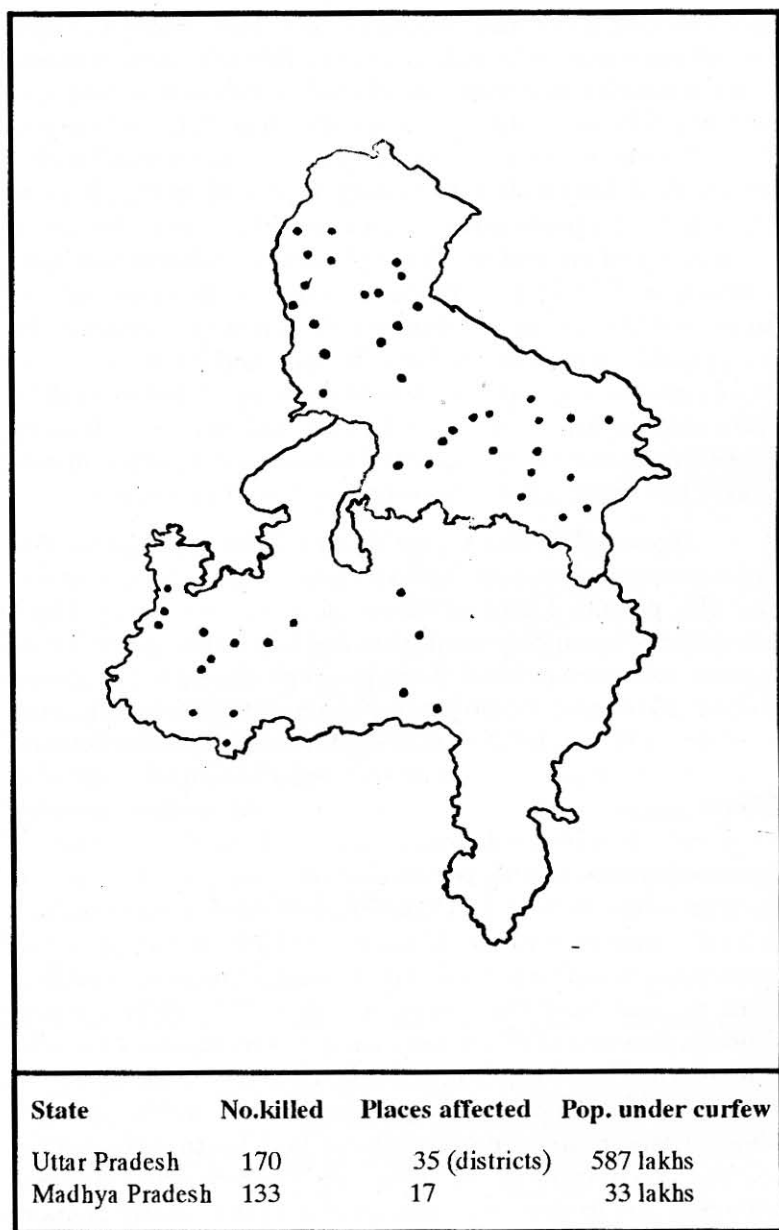


called development projects 'temples of modern India'. Today as his policies lie in ruins, and as government is voluntarily abdicating its leadership of development process, the state is undertaking construction of ancient temples and medieval mosques.

The economic causes and consequences of the demolition cannot be wished away in the din of competitive electoral politics. The Indian economy is in crisis and in transi-

tion. The long term implications of the current policy changes are not yet clear to the public. One striking feature in recent years is the rise to dominance of speculators over productive economy. The security scam is a reflection of this where just about 40 persons were able to loot public funds worth Rs 3900 crores. And they subverted every rule and norm. It is no accident that a party known as a party of petty traders came to the fore just around the time speculators came to dominate production. But in the ultimate analyses no economy can function if there is no respect for rule of law and contract. No investor will invest, no trader will trade and no labourer will labour unless assured of a promised payment and materials, and a mechanism to enforce it. In a country where the leading opposition party encourages and patronises defiance of rule of law, the economy will become functional anarchy.

Specifically the demolition and the consequent disturbances struck at a particularly cruel time for the economy and the people. Large sections of them are facing bleak prospects of unemployment. Current industrial growth rate is just above zero percent. Food grain production this season is down 25 percent. Some parts of the country are facing acute drought. In the midst of all this, curfew halted production and dislocated supplies. Economic and social life was disrupted in fifteen major metropolitan cities (over 34 million people). They include trade and production centres and port cities. 67 towns with over a lakh population were subjected to curfew from three to ten days. In Uttar Pradesh curfew was imposed in 34 districts as a whole. Majority of the 97 million affected by curfew are self employed or daily wage labourers. And they went without food. One instance will suffice. Palamau and Garwah districts of Bihar are facing unprecedented drought this season. Heart-rending tales of people trying to survive by eating *genthi* (wild fruit) appeared in the media. At least seventy persons are reported to have died due to starvation in the last two months in Dulsulma and neighbouring villages. Villagers left in droves in search of a living. Many of them reached the brick kilns of Varanasi. And that is where they are now facing starvation, in the curfew. The callousness of the forces which have pushed the mandir-masjid dispute onto the national agenda, needs no further comment.



For them the dispute is an instrument of power politics. They demolished the masjid and generated communal tensions all over with cool calculation. But then the issue

is not merely the demolition of a mosque. Mosques, temples, gurudwaras and churches were demolished or defiled many times in our turbulent past. Such incidents continued to take place even after independence. But there is a difference this time. For, it threatened a system of arrangements, a framework of relations within which we can settle disputes over our past and decide the direction of our future. On 28 November the then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Kalyan Singh gave an assurance that the court order will be respected. Letters of Swami Chinmayananda and Vijayraje Scindia were produced in the court to add strength to the assurance. Along with them almost all leaders of BJP, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS), Bajrang Dal and Marg Darshak Mandal, formally or informally, gave an impression that the mosque would not be touched. Yet it was demolished, demolished by their followers and demolished in their presence. Thus the central question becomes not the demolition, but what are the rules of the game. And when do we respect them and when do we chose not to.

Instead of facing and answering these questions, a host of other questions and counter questions are being posed now. Some say that Babar destroyed a temple, so what is wrong in destroying a mosque. If by their own account there is no difference between the two, then the choice is not over Mandir-Masjid but the medieval barbarism, then and now. Others claim that Muslim communal terrorists of Kashmir destroyed over 40 temples in Kashmir. If they did so, one should note, they did not give an undertaking to the highest court of the land that they would not destroy temples. The choice then is not between a temple and a mosque but between one set of vandals and another. Some others point out that temples are destroyed in Pakistan with the connivance of the government. But then Pakistan is a self-confessed theocratic state whose rulers rule their people including religious and ethnic minorities, with the help of the army. Then, the conflict is not between a mandir and a masjid but between army rule and democracy. Thus in the end the conflict over Rama Janmabhoomi- Babri Masjid is not a religious dispute but a political conflict.

Authoritarianism vs Commu

In October 1990 Lal Krishna Advani was arrested in the course of his *rath yatra*. The *yatra* led to disturbances in 116 places spread over a Union Territory and 13 states in which 564 people were killed. But Advani was never charged with any offence. Instead he was detained without trial under National Security Act (NSA). That time PUDR was one of the few voices of anti-communalism which took a position that this kind of undemocratic means to fight communalism is condemnable. This time too government undertook two such measures; ban on communal organisations and the dismissal of BJP government in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh. The arrest of leaders however was under the relevant laws of the land. But look how even that is turned into a farce.

Constable Hanuman Prashad and ASI Ganga Prasad lodged an FIR in the Ramjanmabhoomi police station at Ayodhya on the demolition. Among others the FIR names Ashok Singhal, Giri Rajkishore, Vishnu Hari Dalmiya of VHP, Vinay Katiyar of Bajrang Dal Lal Krishna Advani, Murali Manohar Joshi, Uma Bharti of BJP and Sadhvi Rithambara. on 8 December all except the last named were arrested. They were charged with 'promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion' (S.153-A); 'imputations, assertions prejudicial to national integration' (S 153-B) and statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred, or ill-will between different religious groups' (S 505 IPC). The actual description of the event as given in the FIR attracts other charges which the government has excluded. They include 'injuring or defiling place of worship with intent to insult the religion..' (S 295). 'deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings..by insulting religion or religious beliefs' (S 295-A); 'uttering words etc with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings' (S 298). In addition these leaders also attract provisions relating with rioting, causing riots or benefitting from them (S 146, 148, 153, 155, 156, 158; IPC). Thus if you go by the charges of the government these leaders have not hurt any religious feelings, nor caused any damage to a religious place nor are they responsible for any riot.

Instead the centre dismissed the three BJP governments on specious grounds. If law and order is the criterion then Maharashtra and Gujarat governments should be dismissed before any other. Membership of an organisation banned a few days earlier can also

Communalism: Is there a Choice ?

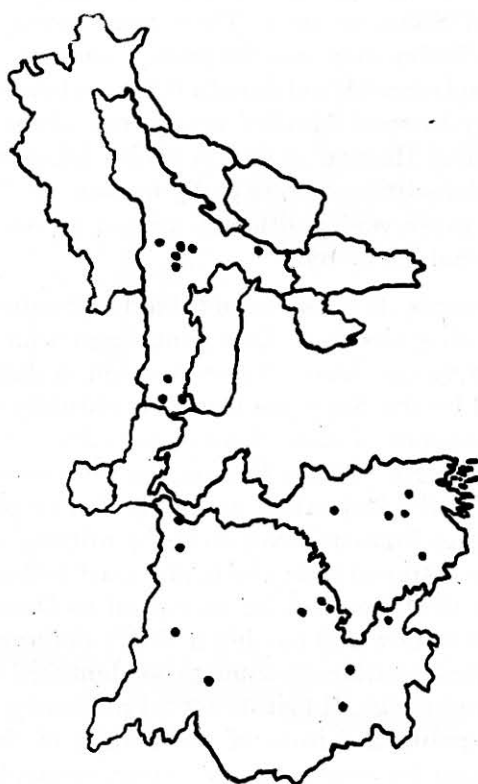
be a valid ground. Far worse charges are made against many Chief Ministers off the ruling party. In any case the ban is yet to be confirmed by the Tribunal.

The ban on Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, Islamic Sewak Sangh, VHP, RSS and Bajrang Dal (S.O. 898(E)- 902(E) respectively; No II/ 14034/2(v)/92-IS(DV); Ministry of Home Affairs) is also patently undemocratic. The ban was imposed under section 3 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (TUAA). As per the Act the government must set up a Tribunal headed by a High Court judge within a month. (S4&5, TUAA). Once the tribunal confirms the ban, it will be effective for two years. But quite ridiculously the government retains the right to revoke the ban even after the Tribunal confirms it (S 6) At present LTTE, ULFA, NSCN are banned under this Act. JKLF in Kashmir, CPI(ML) Peoples War in Andhra Pradesh, MKSS and MCC in Bihar are also under the ban, but under the relevant state legislations. In the past RSS, Anand Marg and various CPI (ML) groups have been banned during the emergency. It was revoked after the emergency was lifted. Ban on any political and social organisation goes against the ethos of our constitution. Both the ban order and the dismissal of the three BJP governments are part of the political machinations of the ruling party or factions within it. As such both these measures will only end up bestowing legitimacy to the communal forces. BJP which till yesterday was saying 'faith' is above all democratic institutions has today become a champion democracy. Even now its spokesmen have asserted that ban on anti national organisations like ULFA, JKLF LTTE etc is justified'. Many parties are endorsing these two undemocratic measures. This kind of hypocrisy where undemocratic acts become substitute for popular political opposition, has become part of our dominant political culture.

But what is disconcerting is that even some of the independent minded secular forces, perhaps reflecting a sense of helplessness, egg on the state to become authoritarian. And thus we find many supporting the use of NSA against Advani in 1990 and some of them endorsing the government measures this time. We condemn the ban on these five organisations and the dismissal of the three BJP governments. We believe that in their philosophical essence and practical effects there is no difference between authoritarianism and communalism.

The non-BJP political parties and their "secularism" is part of this political conflict. first we care to remember that initially our constitution did not even notify the republic as secular. For, democracy which permits religious, linguistic, ethnic and social plurality, is by definition secular. In those days communalism was confined to a few political parties with no popular appeal. Bharatiya Jan Sangh, the precursor of BJP, for instance polled just about 3.06% votes and won 3 seats in the Lok Sabha elections of 1952. It is only since the late sixties that religious sentiments have emerged as a major feature of electoral politics. Gradually Congress, under the leadership of Indira Gandhi began playing the communal card. It was when she became communal that she made the republic 'secular'. During the emergency the 44th amendment made India both a secular and socialist republic. Practically every leading political party, in the last two decades has pandered to communal sentiments for electoral expediency. They joined hands with minority communalists when it suited them. Rajiv Gandhi won the elections after the massacre of Sikhs in 1984 by appealing to Hindu sentiments. Within a year he pandered to Muslim communalism in the Shah Bano case. In the following year he supported the opening of the locks of the Babri Masjid and was back to pandering to Hindu communalism. Three years later his representatives Buta Singh and N.D. Tiwari entered into a pact with the VHP. And on 9 November 1989, *shilanyas* for the Ram Mandir was permitted. The difference between Congress and other parties as far as pandering to communal sentiments goes, is only a matter of degree. At points of time, upto an extent, communalism became permissible for all these parties. Thus in popular perception secularism came to be identified with a form of communalism.

The best illustration of the secular credentials of these parties is the way they conducted themselves in the parliament the day after the demolition. By any reckoning the republic was facing its gravest threat ever with communal disturbances spreading across the country cutting ethnic and caste boundaries. But our honourable parliamentarians were engaged in a frivolous exercise of oneupmanship. The country's premier democratic institution, the Lok Sabha, was

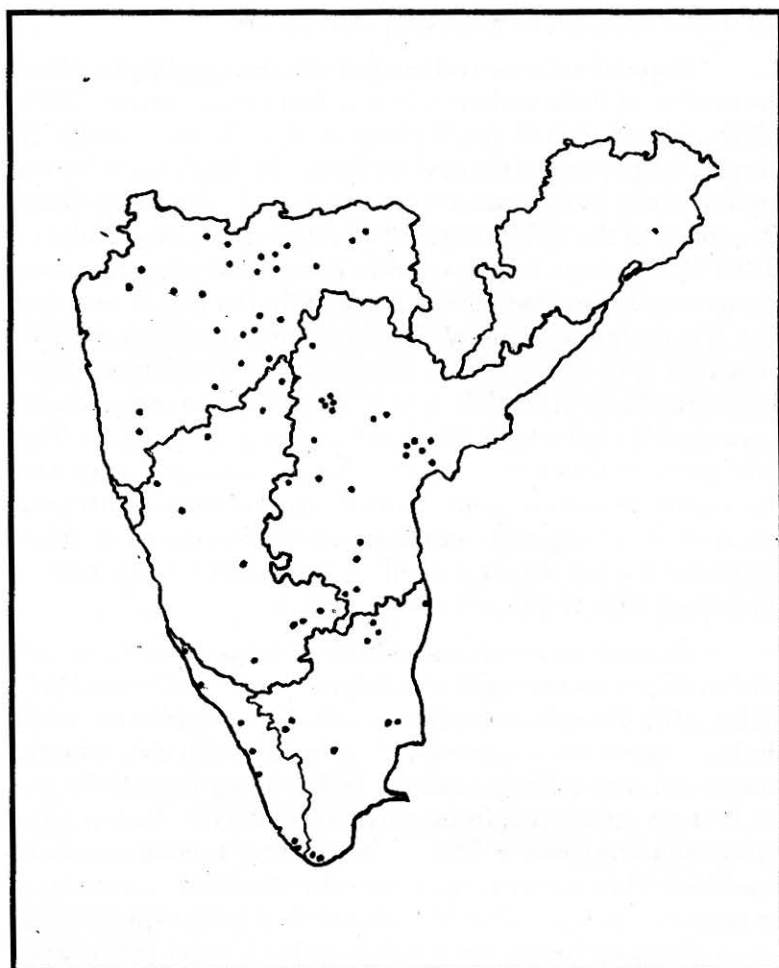


| State | No. killed | Places affected | Pop. under curfew |
|-----------|------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Bihar | 40 | 11 | 22 lakhs |
| W. Bengal | 27 | 6 | 55 lakhs |
| Assam | 98 | 12 | 7 lakhs |

paralysed, when its intervention was most needed. Later BJP joined them. We are further subjected to this spectacle in a different form. H.K.L. Bhagat and Sajjan Kumar were named as accused in the atleast four F.I.R.s registered over the massacre of Sikhs in 1984. They were never arrested or prosecuted. Today they lead the *sadbhavana yatras*. Salman Khurshid and some MPs of Janata Dal were involved with the agitation by lumpen Muslim communal elements against Prof. Mushirul Hassan in Jamia Millia Islamia. Two days before the demolition he was badly beaten up. Yet after the demolition these very politicians appeal for secular values and communal harmony.

Congress (I) spokesman talked of disqualifying BJP from contesting elections. One gentleman who was earlier disqualified by the Election Commission, a decision which was upheld by the Supreme Court, eventually rose to rule over the destinies of elected representatives of the people. And thus Governor Marri Chenna Reddy recommends the dissolution of the Rajasthan assembly. Jaffer Sharief is accused in a huge financial scandal in the railway ministry. He should have resigned after the High Court passed strictures against the deal. Instead he comes on to Doordarshan to uphold rule of law and condemn BJP's defiance of courts. Thus over time secularism came to be identified with crooks, criminals and thugs. It lost its moral authority. The visible moral and political failure of secularism of these parties created a space for communalism in our society. the strength and appeal of BJP lies not in its communal propoganda (which it has been indulging in for four decades any way) but in the wilderness of civil society bereft of any ideal, vision or developmental concerns, created by all leading political parties.

Yet a number of people today expect these very political parties, who reduced secularism to a form of communalism who destroyed its liberal human appeal, to combat communalism. As part of it a state which has neither moral authority nor political will is being permitted to selectively invoke authoritarian instruments to fight communalism (See BOX: Is there a Choice?) But the way ahead lies in independ-



| State | No. killed | Places affected | Pop. under curfew |
|----------------|------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Maharashtra | 259 | 32 | 70 lakhs |
| Orissa | 2 | 1 | 4 lakhs |
| Andhra Pradesh | 23 | 20 | 37 lakhs |
| Karnataka | 78 | 13 | 45 lakhs |
| Tamil Nadu | 3 | 11 | No curfew |
| Kerala | 11 | 7 | 20 lakhs |

ent democratic forces asserting themselves.

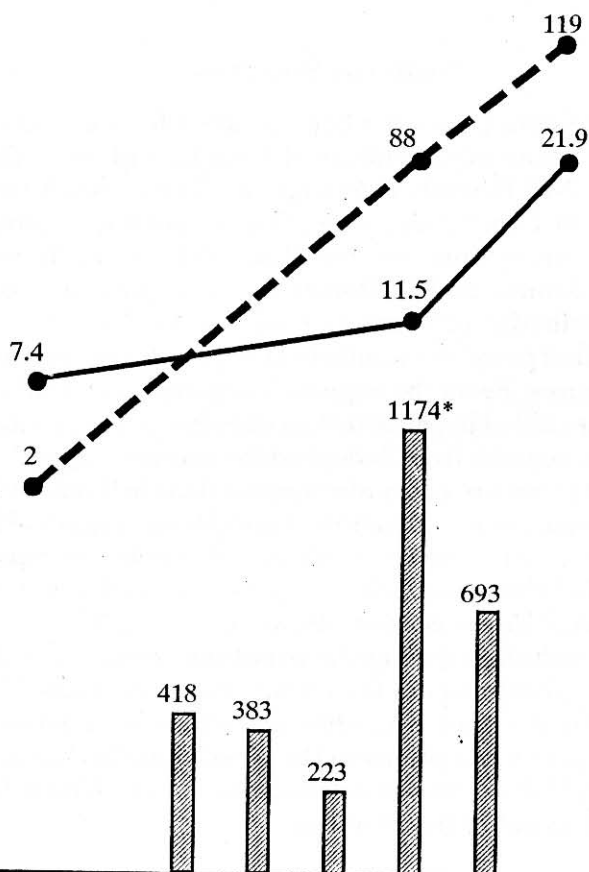
Popular notions and images of communal forces cloud the reality of their violence. In the last twelve years (1981-1992 October) 11538 people died in Khalistani violence in Punjab. 61 percent of them were Sikhs. In Kashmir, where a section of the insurgents are communal, Muslims constitute 78 percent of the 2272 unarmed civilians died in the violence (1988-92 October). In propaganda fanatics of every religious group target the other community. In reality it is democracy which is their main enemy. The Muslim communalists have indicated it in Jamia Millia Islamia. The Khalistanis have demonstrated it in Punjab. And now the Hindu communalists have openly challenged democratic norms in Ayodhya. The outrageous manner in which the Masjid was demolished and the media personnel were beaten up and the frightening implications of majority community being persuaded by these forces have indeed cast a spell of gloom over many people concerned with the future of our society.

In such momentous moods of despondency, we all tend to forget the strength of our democratic traditions. With all its infirmities, democratic system of governance has been the best guarantee we have had in a society ridden with caste, communal and ethnic tensions. It has been repeatedly assaulted or subverted from within. No doubt. But it also survived many a crises. The real resistance to communalism thus lies in the shared democratic values and beliefs that bind us together in this benighted land. Let us recapture that space which we have given away to power hungry politicians. Let us recreate for life the spontaneous joys that we have forfeited.

Note on Sources

The data presented here is culled from a scan of 42 dailies in 7 languages, published from 15 centres in the 14 days from 7-20 December. Among the 224 places affected, in 11 places in Tamil Nadu there was no curfew. population figures are approximations based on 1991 census. (Hence no figure for Jammu and Kashmir). In the major metropolitan centres estimates of population included refer only to the curfew bound parts. the number of people killed refers only to official figures. From the reports it appears to us that more people were killed in police firings than in clashes or attacks. Persistent reports from independent sources suggest that sections of police are guilty of communal bias in Bombay, East Delhi, Bhopal, Surat, Hyderabad and Mewat region of Haryana. In intensity the worst affected districts are Surat in Gujarat and Hojai subdivision of Nagaon district in Assam. Among the cities are Bombay, Surat, Bhopal and Kanpur. In the past, including during the partition, communal disturbances were confined to a few ethnic groups at a time. This is perhaps for the first time that geo-ethnic boundaries collapsed with few exceptions in the North East and Goa. The country wide disturbances affected one out of 7 Union Territories and 15 out of the 25 states.

सत्ता की राह पर



1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990 1991

--- No. of seats won by BJP in Lok Sabha

— Percentage of votes polled by BJP

▨ No. killed in communal riots

* includes 984 deaths in Bhagalpur

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चले चलो दिलों में घाव लेके भी चले चलो
 चलो लहुलुहान पांव लेके भी चले चलो
 चलो कि आज साथ साथ चलने की जरूरतें
 चलो कि खत्म हो न जाएं जिन्दगी की हसरतें
 ज़मीन, ख्वाब, जिन्दगी, यकीन सबको बांटकर
 वो चाहते हैं बेबसी में आदमी झुकाए सर
 वो चाहते हैं जिन्दगी हो रोशनी से बेखबर
 वो एक-एक करके अब जला रहे हैं हर शहर
 जले हुए घरों के ख्वाब लेके भी चले चलो
 वो चाहते हैं बांटना दिलों के सारे वलवले
 वो चाहते हैं बांटना ये जिन्दगी के काफिले
 वो चाहते हैं खत्म हों उम्मीद के ये सिलसिले
 वो चाहते हैं गिर सकें न लूट के ये सब किले
 सवाल सब बिना जवाब लेके भी चले चलो
 वो चाहते हैं जातियों की, बोलियों की फूट हो
 वो चाहते हैं धर्म को तबाहियों की छूट हो
 वो चाहते हैं जिन्दगी ये हो फरेब, झूठ हो
 वो चाहते हैं जिस तरह भी हो मगर ये लूट हो
 सिरों पे जो बची है छांव लेके भी चले चलो

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