

# The tragedy of Babri Masjid demolition

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RASHIDUDDIN AHMAD

MR. Kuldip Nayar's "Politics of Babri Masjid" in *Daily Star* November 27 was an eye opener for me. It was more so because it was by somebody like Kuldip Nayar.

It was even more of a surprise for me that the commission was a one man affair and Justice Manmohan Singh Liberhan, the one person appointed, submitted his report after 17 long years in a country like India (not Bangladesh!). Mr. Nayar also pointed out that Justice Liberhan, in his 900-page report, did not explain the cause of this long delay.

The report, however, has been revealing. It was more or less known that people like Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi were at the helm of the job even at that time, i.e. December 1992, and it was in the air that it was going to happen. But the central government did not do anything to prevent it on the plea that the centre could not interfere in the affair of Uttar Pradesh unless the state governor asked for it. This is considered by Mr. Kuldip Nayar as merely an alibi. All these were only hearsay at that time. But it is now in the report of a justice commissioned by the state for an official inquiry.

Another surprise was the name of Atal Behari Vajpayee because he was considered to be a liberal in the BJP compared to the

others. Can you imagine Vajpayee, who later became the prime minister, said on December 5, one day before the demolition of the Masjid, that the ground would "be levelled" and a *yangya* (religious celebration) held at that place. And India, in its constitution, proclaims itself to be a secular state. Even Arundhati Roy mentions this state sponsored action against the Muslims in Gujrat in her famous speech "Come September" delivered in US in 2002.

The Liberhan Commission said that these three top leaders were among the 68 who were "culpable," and that the destruction of the *masjid* was "preventable." Mr. Nayar adds: "Not only that, the three leaders acted against the Supreme Court's order 'not to disturb the status quo' " In other words, they made a mockery of the country's judiciary and the constitution..."

It is even sadder to see that even after Justice Liberhan's report, the government should say that there wouldn't be punitive action against anybody. Nayar even says: "Some of the guilty are saying openly that they are not repentant over what they have done."

It is even more shocking if you remember that in the same country a person as powerful as Ms. Indira Gandhi, when she was the incumbent prime minister, was barred from taking part in the ensuing election by the famous Allahabad High

Court order because of as inoffensive an offence as using government transport when she went for an official tour but then made a political party speech during the same tour!

However, leaving aside Justice Liberhan's report, I would now like to comment about Babar's alleged destruction of a Rama-Mandir there to build a *masjid*. Did he actually destroy any temple there? We know that Babar was a great warrior, being a descendent of Timur Lang (or Tamerlane) on his father's side and of the great Chengiz Khan on his mother's side. But I wonder how many of us know about Babar's intimate personality, his innate character, his social aptitude, and his human qualities as a person.

He was a real gentleman even by modern standards. He was highly educated, a literary person, an author, poet, a great connoisseur of painting and music and an appreciator of beauty. He imbibed all these qualities from his both parent's families, who were also highly educated. His father Umar was a passionate reader of books and a skilled reciter. Babar wrote a poem of 2,000 lines, and in conversations he would express himself in a few poetical lines.

His great book *Babarnama* is his autobiography, and is mainly based on his methodical and meticulously written diary. In his diary, he always used to describe not only the terrain (geography) of the country he conquered but also the people, their behaviour, nature, and even the flora and fauna of that area. Therefore, *Babarnama* is in fact a history of the countries of a large part of Asia in all aspects, including societal and anthropological studies of those countries.

I want to mention here that although Babar's dynasty in India is known as "Moghul" in the sense of the Mongol race of Chengiz Khan, Babar himself never liked to be called a Moghal. He actually despised the Moghals and mentioned them in his

Babarnama with reproach and dislike, saying, "mischief and devastation must always be expected from Moghul hordes."

Now coming on to the real matter after the prelude. I want to quote from Prof. R. Nath's (a non-Muslim professor of history of Agra University) *India as seen by Babar*. Prof. Nath says: "But in spite of his thirty six years' ventures in war, he was essentially a man of peace: honest and graphic chronicler, poet, ardent lover of nature and maker of beautiful gardens; artist, aesthete, and above all, a humanist. He was well bred and a thoroughly civilised and disciplined man." But the actual crux of the point is as mentioned by R. Nath is that "there is absolutely no record to show that demolition of temples was ever a program of any of his military expeditions"

This book by Prof R. Nath was first published in 1996, i.e. four years after the destruction of the Babri Masjid. Therefore, Mr. Nayar very poignantly said: "The question is not only legal but also moral and political [...] Those who have no clean hands should not be allowed to defile the temple of Parliament. And if they do so, what should be the punishment when facts come to light?" But BJP came to power through election. Vajpayee became prime minister; Advani became home minister and Joshi the human resources development minister.

There is something more striking in the book. Babur wrote a will, which he addressed to his son and heir Humayun. This was preserved in the State Library, Bhopal, C.I. A photocopy was sent on December 11, 1921, by B. Ghosal, the curator of the library, to Sir (Syed) Ross Masood, the then director of public instruction in the then Nizam's government of Hyderabad.

Babar's will reads (translation by Prof. R Nath):

"O my son, the Empire of Hindustan consists of various religions. Domination and sovereignty whereof has been



Will the destroyers ever be punished?

bestowed on you by the grace of the Almighty. It is incumbent that religious bigotries should be wiped off the tablet of the heart, and justice meted out to each religion according to its own tenets. Specially, abstain from sacrifice of cows as this would tend to win the hearts of the people of Hindustan and the populace of the country would be loyal to the Royal favours. The temples and places of worship of whatever religion under the Royal authority may not be desecrated. Such justice may be adopted that the King may be pleased with *Rayyat* (subjects) and the *Rayyat* with the King. The advancement of Islam is better achieved with the weapon of obligation rather than the sword of tyranny. Overlook the dispute between Sunnis and Shias since such weakness still persists in Islam. Establish administration with the *Rayyat* of various communities in accordance with the four principal ele-

ments so that the body of the Empire may be free from different diseases. The model work done by his Late Majesty Timur (Tamerlane) Sahib-Qiran should always be kept before the mind so that you may become mature in the work of administration." (Written on Jamadi' al-Awal 1, 935 H -- January 11, 1529 AD -- when he was camping at Dholpur.)

Babar died the next year, 1530. This will is additional testimony of his sagacity, thought for his *Rayyats* and conquered people, his capacity of administration and, above all, his education, upbringing, and human nature.

What more proof is required for Vajpayee, Advani, Joshi and associates of Babar's innocence in any destruction of a temple?

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## Native Orientalists in Pakistan

Pakistanis had failed to seize sovereign control over their country at its birth. Within a few years of its creation, the brown Sahibs, standing in the shoes of the British rulers, had strapped Pakistan to the wheels of the neocolonial order.

M. SHAHID ALAM

A few days back, I received a "Dear friends" email from the ex-editor of *Daily Times*, Pakistan, announcing that he had resigned from the newspaper. He thanked his friends for their support and encouragement in making *Daily Times* a "new voice for a new Pakistan."

Contrary to this slogan, it was never DT's mission to be a "new voice for a new Pakistan." The DT had dredged its voice from the colonial past; it had only altered its pitch and delivery to serve the new US-Zionist overlords. Most of the writers for DT are heirs to the brown Sahibs, home-grown Orientalists, who see their own world through the lens created for them by their mentors, the Western Orientalists.

Pakistanis had failed to seize sovereign control over their country at its birth. Within a few years of its creation, the brown Sahibs, standing in the shoes of the British rulers, had strapped Pakistan to the wheels of the neocolonial order. Without effective and organised resistance, these neocolonial managers have been cannibalising their own people in the service of their foreign masters.

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Grievously, Pakistanis have failed to challenge the rule of brown Sahibs. In large part, this failure was embedded in the nature of the Pakistan movement, which made no serious commitment to social goals. More regrettably, Pakistan's emerging middle classes have been too busy aping the brown Sahibs, stepping over each other to join in the loot, to check the rapacity of Pakistan's elites.

In the euphoria of Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, left intellectuals have not noticed that the West's servant classes in the Periphery have been producing an indigenous Orientalism. I refer here to the coarser but more pernicious Orientalism of the brown Sahibs, who are free, behind their rhetoric of progress, to denigrate their own history and culture. A few of these native Orientalists are deracinated souls, but most are opportunists, lackeys, or wannabe lackeys, eager to become the drum majors of foreign powers in the Periphery.

In the closing years of the colonial era,

the nationalists had kept a watchful eye on the native informers. In recent decades, as the capitalist powers have regained control over much of the Periphery, the native Orientalists have moved to centre-stage. This development has mostly gone unnoticed by the cohorts of post-colonial critics. They are still training their firepower on the "far enemy," the Western protagonists of Orientalism.

Perhaps, they imagine that the native Orientalists, the "near enemy," will vanish once the "far enemy" has been discredited. In truth, the "near enemy" has grown enormously even as the "far enemy" treads more cautiously.

As a result, we cannot lay our hands on even a single monograph documenting the methods that DT, the new flagship of native Orientalism, has employed to advance its advocacy of US-Zionist agenda in Pakistan and the Islamicate. This article makes a modest beginning in this direction.

The DT was launched in April 2002 just a few months after the United States had invaded and occupied Afghanistan. Was this timing a mere coincidence? Or was the launching of an aggressively pro-American and pro-Zionist newspaper an imperative of the new geopolitics created by Pakistan's mercenary embrace of the US-Zionist global war against "terrorism?"

Coincidence or not, the DT has served its masters with verve. Its pages have carried

countless editorials justifying Pakistan's induction into the US led war against Afghanistan, under the cover of the attacks of September 11. The editors and columnists at DT have routinely excoriated Pakistani patriots who have opposed their government's surrender to US-Zionist demands as naïve sentimentalists unaware of the tough demands of realpolitik. Endlessly, they have argued that Pakistan can save itself only through eager prostration before the demands of foreign powers.

In advocating national surrender, these native Orientalists boldly and unashamedly declared that Pakistan's elites draw their power from Washington, London and Tel Aviv, not from the will of the people of Pakistan. It is an insult that has since been sinking, slowly but surely, into the national psyche of Pakistanis.

Taking advantage of what appeared to be -- after the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 -- an irreversible US assault against the sovereignty of Islamicate nations, Pakistan's ruling elites openly began broaching the need to recognise Israel.

Once again, the native Orientalists at DT were leading the charge, arguing that Pakistan could advance its strategic interests by recognising Israel. Only determined opposition from nationalists in Pakistan defeated this treacherous move.

When resistance against US occupation of Afghanistan gained momentum, once

again the DT articulated the US-Zionist position. Daily, they editorialised on the imperative to shut down the madrasas and attack the resistance groups in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Lustily, the DT cheers when the Pakistan military carries its war deeper into the towns and villages of Pakistan.

In 2007, when the lawyers in Pakistan took to the streets to demand the restoration of the illegally sacked chief justice, the DT did not support them. Instead, it defended the sacking, and repeatedly made the case for a "gradual transition" to civilian rule in Pakistan. The "wrong" civilian government, they were afraid, might not be as compliant to US pressures as Pakistan's military rulers.

Space allows us to list only a few egregious examples of the Orientalist mindset on display in the pages of the DT. One columnist at DT, for several years, surveyed the foibles and follies of Pakistan's Urdu media in a column mischievously titled "Nuggets from the Urdu Press." He berated Urdu writers for their naïveté, emotionalism, and foolish advocacy of national interests that collided with realpolitik (read US-Zionist interests).

Consider one more "exhibit" that captures DT's servile mentality. In a regular column, oddly titled "Purple Patch," the newspaper lades out wisdom to its readers. This wisdom is dispensed in the form of article-length passages lifted from

various "great" writers, who are always of Western provenance. Presumably, the editors at DT still believe, with their long-dead spiritual mentor, Lord Macaulay, that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia."

I doubt if the departure of DT's long-time editors will make a difference. The owners of DT will quickly find replacements; voices equally shrill in their advocacy of foreign powers. More than at any other time, growing numbers of Pakistanis have been grooming themselves for service to the Empire, as their predecessors once eagerly sought to serve the British Raj.

This groveling by Pakistan's elites will only change when Pakistanis take charge of their destiny. It will only end when a people's movement can put these servants of Empire in the dock, charge them for their crimes against Pakistan, and force them to disgorge their loot.

This will take hard work. The signs indicate that Pakistanis have already begun the hard work that will eventually end the treachery of the brown Sahibs. When this "near enemy" has been decapitated -- metaphorically speaking -- the "far enemy" too will recede into the mists of history.

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## Elected Workers' Association in EPZs

Though the system of WAs continues to undergo improvements, the entire country can learn much from the current model of social management practices in the EPZs. Moreover, the progress that EPZ enterprises are making should be emphasised more to buyers in our export markets.

NAZNEEN AHMED

THERE has been much recent press coverage on the possible impacts of forming workers' representation and welfare committees in various enterprises of Export Processing Zones (EPZs) of Bangladesh.

It seems that the significant progress made in monitoring and enforcing labour practices in the EPZs of the country is unknown to many. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the workers' associations in the EPZ enterprises are currently working no less efficiently than full-fledged trade unions in terms of collective bargaining power of workers. It would also be no exaggeration to say that labour conditions in the EPZs are often better, the compensation paid is higher, and the grievances often fewer than outside the EPZs.

The workers' representation and welfare committees cited in recent press

coverage are gradually being replaced by "workers' associations" (WA). The WAs go considerably beyond workers representation and welfare committees in protecting workers rights:

- Members of the workers associations are elected directly and can discuss on any number of issues, whereas in the workers welfare committees, though they were elected, they had very limited bargaining power and could only discuss a few selected issues;
- Elections in these WAs have been conducted under a neutral election commission in every EPZ;
- The election process in the WAs is a more organised process.

The bottom line is that the WAs that are replacing the workers' representation and welfare committees go a lot further in protecting workers rights.

The blueprint for replacing workers' welfare committees with WAs was laid out

in the now-expired EPZ Workers' Association and Industrial Relations Act, 2004. This Act has now been extended

through an amendment (the EPZ Workers' Association and Industrial Relations Act, 2009). The confusion may

come from the similar wording of the 2004 Act and the 2009 Act but, 5 years on, the transition from workers' representa-

tion and welfare committees to WAs is well advanced.

Furthermore, in order to ensure additional safeguards to the process of forming WAs, 60 "counselors" (i.e., labour inspectors) were appointed to Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority (BEPZA) in 2005 under a project funded by the Bangladesh Investment Climate Fund. They were deployed to the EPZs of the country to complement the limited number of officials in the Industrial Relation (IR) department of different EPZs, and ensure compliance of labour issues -- including granting maternity leave to employees, proper compensation, correct overtime pay, and issuing appointment letters, just to name a few. They have facilitated the process of forming WAs considerably.

Though the system of WAs continues to undergo improvements, the entire country can learn much from the current model of social management practices in the EPZs. Moreover, the progress that EPZ enterprises are making should be emphasised more to buyers in our export markets.



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