

Beyond the Breaking of a Pledge

Mudrarakshas

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On 6 December 1992 the Babri Masjid was destroyed. the Government of Uttar Pradesh, then headed by Kalyan Singh, had made a solemn, written pledge to the Supreme Court, stating: “No such activity will be allowed at the disputed area. The mosque will be fully protected.”

Meanwhile, united forces allied with the Bharatiya Janata Party made statements directly opposed to that pledge. Not only the leaders of those forces but also the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party itself made public statements to the effect that it does not matter what pledge the Government of Kalyan Singh had made, karseva would still take place, and Lal Krishna Advani declared publicly that karseva was not just worship and recitation.

This was the first time that a party running the government made a false pledge to the Supreme Court. It was not a matter of merely not accepting a court decision; it was more serious than that, and it was the first time such an incident occurred.

It is a crime purposely to make a false pladge. So the question must be asked: Who should be punished for the activities of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the then Government of Uttar Pradesh? Realizing the seriousness of the situation, will the Court, the Centre or the Election Commission formally declare that the Bharatiya Janata Party used one of its own governments to make a false pledge before the Court? Furthermore, what guarantee do we have that the state governments currently in the hands of the Bharatiya Janata Party will in fact uphold the country's Constitution and laws, which they have sworn to do? And if a party

cannot be trusted to run governments that will uphold the country's Constitution and laws, then why should that party even be allowed to take part in elections?

Even more serious questions, however, must be asked of the Central Government of P.V. Narasimha Rao.

As soon as the government of Kalyan Singh announced the commencement of karseva in Ayodhya, all the opposition parties, except for Congress, made known their complete disapproval. When the Bharatiya Janata Party and its governments had the National Unity Assembly removed, all the opposition parties, except for Congress, repeated in no uncertain terms their demand for the dismissal of the Government of Uttar Pradesh. In the face of that demand the Central Government maintained a self-satisfied silence.

In order to solve the problem the Prime Minister had asked the Vishwa Hindu Parishad for four months, which he almost got. Meanwhile, the Babri Masjid Action Committee and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad each held meetings. Making evident their complete lack of faith in government, the leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad repeatedly proclaimed that they were bound by neither the courts nor the facts of history. Believing the situation to be a matter of faith, they continuously proclaimed that, no matter what, the mosque had to be destroyed and a temple built.

Even if he did not express his own opinion on this matter, should not the Prime Minister have at least made clear to the people his own point of view concerning the behaviour of the leaders of the VHP and the BJP, that they were ready to accept neither the authority of the Court nor the facts of history?

Congress notwithstanding, all the country's opposition parties raised their voices against the illogical, irresponsible and extremist claims of the Bharatiya Janata Party. Why did the Prime Minister not express his own view? Why did he always seem to believe that both sides were equally correct or equally wrong? He continued to pronounce the word "secularism", but he never openly stood alongside the secularists. Moreover, his words and actions on the issue were often reminiscent of the same kind of duplicity as that in the pledge made by Kalyan Singh's Government.

The behaviour of the Prime Minister after the events that followed that, however, is even more worrisome.

This time the Supreme Court declared that the karseva proposed for Ayodhya would not be allowed to include any kind of constructon ac-

tivity. Furthermore, the then Government was forced to make a solemn, written pledge to the Court that during the karseva in Ayodhya no construction would take place, the mosque would be protected, and the only activities that could be carried out as karseva would be the singing of devotional songs and the cleaning of the disputed platform.

As long as such a solemn, written pledge was not proven false, there was no reason to suspect any such pledge of having been given to the Court in bad faith. That is to say that in the present situation all the Court could do was declare the Uttar Pradesh Government guilty if and only if it broke its pledge. Before the pledge was in fact broken, was the Court solely responsible for the affair, especially when the possibility of such a crime would bring great danger to both the country and democracy?

Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that despite the pledge that had been given to the Court, the party in power during Kalyan Singh's Government not only spoke out against that pledge, they also made every effort to break it.

On both party and government levels large numbers of karsevaks began gathering. During the events of "Challenge Week" frightening and incendiary slogans began to be chanted. To make the situation even more explosive temples in Varanasi and Mathura were added to the dispute, and the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party began rathyatras from those two places to Ayodhya, during which they proclaimed that karseva would not be limited to singing devotional songs, karsevaks would complete their work with spades and shovels.

Exposing the intentions of the Uttar Pradesh Government of the day, all the opposition parties, except for Congress, demanded its immediate dismissal.

The Central Government ignored the claim of the non-BJP and non-Congress parties. Almost daily, from the second to the fifth of December, the opposition parties in Uttar Pradesh demonstrated for their demand, claiming that the intentions of the Uttar Pradesh BJP Government were deceitful. On the fifth of December, in large numbers, the summit's leaders courted arrest, but on the subject of the dismissal of the BJP Government, the P.V. Narasimha Rao Government maintained silence.

Finally, the most shameful incident in our nation's history occurred. On the sixth of December the Babri Masjid was destroyed.

Is the significance of this incident only that the Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies ambushed the country's democratic system?

No, there is something even more serious than that. The highest authority in the country is the Central Government, run under the leadership of P.V. Narasimha Rao. Are we to believe that the Government of India was helpless in the face of this looming threat to the country's unity and indivisibility because it was a state government that had itself caused this danger, or because the Government of India was naively innocent and completely unaware of what was about to happen in Ayodhya?

Both scenarios are frightening. If the Centre purposely allowed the Babri Masjid to be destroyed so that it could watch the State Government self-destruct, then the country is obviously not safe in the hands of Narasimha Rao's Government. And if the Centre was innocent and totally unaware of what was about to happen, that is even more dangerous! The gathering of 150,000 karsevaks a few days before, the public pronouncements from members of the BJP, VHP and RSS, and the doubt raised by the non-Congress opposition parties about the intentions of the BJP Government had made the truth of the matter clear even to the average man in the street. If the Central Government did not know what was going on, then in the sands of what desert did it have its head stuck?

Therefore, it is not unreasonable to raise this suspicion: The Government of P.V. Narasimha Rao had no less to do with the destruction of the Babri Masjid than did the BJP and its allies. Nor is this demand unreasonable: Just as the UP Government of the Bharatiya Janata Party has been dismissed, so, too, the Central Government of the Congress (I) Party no longer has the right to remain in power.