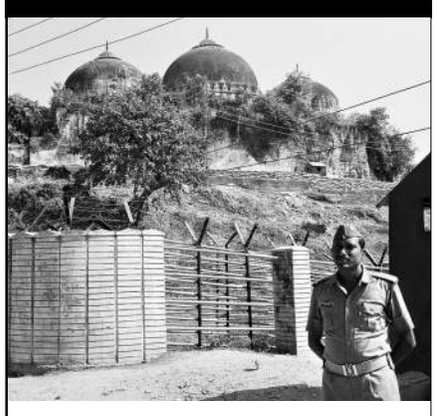
THE AYODHYA TIMELINE

A timeline explaining the centuries-long Ram Mandir-Babri Masjid land dispute in Ayodhya and events leading up to the historic judgment



1885: One Mahant Raghubar Das files a suit seeking permission to construct a Ram Temple at the disputed site. A trial court rejects the petition fearing such a permission would lead to riots. Appeals are also rejected

1934: A mob damages parts of the disputed structure. The British repair it. Muslims continue to offer prayers at the mosque and Hindus worship at Ram-Chabutra and Kaushalya Rasoi

1949-1959: Lord Ram's idols are planted inside the central dome of Babri masjid. Both sides file court cases; the site is locked. Ten years after that, Nirmohi Akhara files a suit seeking possession of the site and claims to be the custodian of the disputed land

December 18, 1961: The Sunni Central Board of Waqf files a suit claiming ownership of the site

1984: Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) launches a campaign for the construction of a Ram temple at what it claims to be the birthplace (Janmabhoomi) of Lord Ram. Two years after, the Faizabad district court orders that gates of the mosque be opened and Hindus be allowed to worship there. Muslims protest the move and form the Babri Mosque Action Committee

November 9, 1989: VHP lays the foundation of a Ram temple on the land next to the Babri Masjid after receiving permission to do so from the Rajiv Gandhi government of the day

September 25, 1990: Then BJP President L K Advani launches a Rath Yatra from Somnath in Gujarat to Ayodhya, demanding the construction of a Ram temple. However, he is arrested in Bihar's Samastipur in November

December 6, 1992: The Babri Mosque is razed to the ground by hundreds of kar sevaks

April 2002: A three-judge Bench of the Allahabad High Court begins hearing to determine the ownership of the disputed land in Ayodhya. The HC orders the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to excavate the site and determine if it was a temple earlier

2003: ASI finds evidence of the presence of a temple under the mosque. Muslim organisations dispute these findings

September 30, 2010: The HC rules that the disputed land should be divided into three parts — a third should go to Ram Lalla Virajman, represented by the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha; one-third to the Sunni Waqf Board; and the remaining to the Nirmohi Akhara. In December, the parties move the Supreme Court

May 2011: The Supreme Court stays the Allahabad HC order

March 2017: The Supreme Court says charges against Advani and other leaders in the Babri Masjid demolition case cannot be dropped. The apex court adds that the matter is sensitive and must be settled out of court

May 30, 2017: Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Uma Bharati and Vinay Katiyar are charged with criminal conspiracy in the Babri Masjid demolition case

December 5, 2017: The SC says it will hear the civil appeals filed by various parties challenging the 2010 Allahabad High Court verdict on February 8

September 2018: The Supreme Court rejects the plea for a review of the 1994 Farooqui judgment but then clarifies that this would have no bearing on pending title suits

October 2018: The Supreme Court decides that the land dispute case will only be listed before an "appropriate Bench" in January 2019. A Bench consisting of Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi and Justices S K Kaul and K M Joseph says: "The appropriate Bench will fix the schedule with regard to the hearing of appeals in the case"

January 8, 2019: The Supreme Court sets up a five-judge Constitution Bench to hear the land dispute case

January 10, 2019: A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court hears the Ayodhya land title dispute case, sets January 29 as the next date for hearing in the case

March 8, 2019: The SC refers the Ayodhya land dispute case for mediation, asks the panel to complete proceedings within 8 weeks

August 1, 2019: The mediation panel submits its report to the apex court. The SC says the mediation panel failed to find a solution

August 6, 2019: The top court begins day-to-day hearing in the case

October 16, 2019: After a marathon 40-day daily hearing, the SC concludes hearing in the case. It says that a verdict will be delivered by CJI Gogoi before his retirement on November 17, 2019

November 8, 2019: The Supreme Court lists Ayodhya title suit judgment for November 9

November 9, 2019: In a unanimous verdict, the Supreme Court Bench led by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi orders that the disputed land in Ayodhya should be given to Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas for construction of a temple, and the Muslim side should be compensated with five acres of land at a prominent place in Ayodhya for a mosque. The court also orders the central government to formulate a scheme within three months to implement the order

THE VERDICT

'Balance of probabilities'

The facts, evidence and oral arguments of the present case have traversed the realms of history, archaeology, religion and the law. The law must stand apart from political contestations over history, ideology and religion. For a case replete with references to archaeological foundations, we must remember that it is the law which provides the edifice upon which our multicultural society rests.

In the present case, this Court is tasked with an adjudicatory task of unique dimension. The dispute is over immovable property. The court does not decide title on the basis of faith or belief but on the basis of evidence. The law provides us with parameters as clear but as profound as ownership and possession. In deciding title to the disputed property, the court applies settled principles of evidence to adjudicate upon which party has established a claim to the immovable property.

On the balance of probabilities, there is clear evidence to indicate that the worship by the Hindus in the outer courtyard continued unimpeded in spite of the setting up of a grill-brick wall in 1857. Their possession of the outer courtyard stands established together with the incidents attaching to their control over it.

As regards the inner courtyard, there is evidence on a preponderance of probabilities to establish worship by the Hindus prior to the annexation of Oudh by the British in 1857. The Muslims have offered no evidence to indicate that they were in exclusive possession of the inner structure prior to 1857 since the date of the construction in the sixteenth century. After the setting up of the grill-brick wall, the structure of the mosque continued to exist and there is evidence to indicate that *namaz* was offered within its precincts. The report of the Waqf inspector of December 1949 indicates that Muslims were being obstructed in free and unimpeded access to mosque for the purposes of offering *namaz*. However, there is evidence to show that *namaz* was offered in the structure of the mosque and the last Friday *namaz* was on December 16, 1949. The exclusion of the Muslims from worship and possession took place on the intervening night between 22/23 December, 1949 when the mosque was desecrated by the installation of Hindu idols. The ouster of the Muslims on that occasion was not through any lawful authority but through an act, which was calculated to deprive them of their place of worship. During the pendency of the suits, the entire structure of the mosque was brought down in a calculated act of destroying a place of public worship. The Muslims have been wrongly deprived of a mosque, which had been constructed well over 450 years ago.

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We have already concluded that the three-way bifurcation by the High Court was legally unsustainable.

Suit 5 (which was brought before civil judge, Faizabad by the deity (Bhagwan Shri Ram Virajman) and the birth-place (Asthan Shri Ram Janam Bhumi, Ayodhya), by the next friend for a declaration of title to the disputed premises and to restrain the defendants from interfering with or raising any objection to the construction of a temple) — has been held to be maintainable at the behest of the first plaintiff (the deity of Lord Ram) who is a juristic person. The third plaintiff (next friend) has been held to be entitled to represent the first plaintiff.

We are of the view that on the one hand, a decree must ensue in Suit 5, Suit 4 (which was instituted on 18 December 1961 by the Sunni Central Waqf Board and nine Muslim residents of Ayodhya. It has been averred that the suit has been instituted on behalf of the entire Muslim community together with an application under Order) must also be partly decreed by directing the allotment of alternate land to the Muslims for the construction of a mosque and associated activities. The allotment of land to the Muslims is necessary because though on a balance of probabilities, the evidence in respect of the possessory claim of the Hindus to the composite whole of the disputed property stands on a better footing than the evidence adduced by the Muslims, the Muslims were dispossessed upon the desecration of the mosque on 22/23 December 1949, which was ultimately destroyed on 6 December 1992. There was no abandonment of the mosque by the Muslims.

This Court in the exercise of its powers under Article 142 of the Constitution must ensure that a wrong committed must be remedied. Justice would not prevail if the Court were to overlook the entitlement of the Muslims . The area of the composite site admeasures about 1,500 square yards. While determining the area of land to be allotted, it is necessary to provide restitution to the Muslim community for the unlawful destruction of their place of worship.

This exercise, and the consequent handing over of the land to the Sunni Central Waqf Board, shall be conducted simultaneously with the handing over of the disputed site comprising of the inner and outer courtyards as a consequence of the decree in Suit 5. Suit 4 shall stand decreed in the above terms. Section 6 of the Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Act 1993 empowers the Central Government to direct that the right, title and interest in relation to the area or any part thereof, instead of continuing to vest in the Central Government shall vest in the authority or body or trustees of any trust which is willing to comply with the terms and conditions as government may impose.

Excerpts from the Supreme Court judgment on the Ayodhya land dispute delivered on November 9

Mandir done, miles to go

Modi's stature could be dented if India's economy doesn't break out of its chronic stall. He needs grand ideas to end the slide or risk more emotional populism

Even the most incorrigible critics of Prime Minister Narendra Modi would struggle to find fault with his short and sweet address to the nation after the Ayodhya judgment.

It had three strands. One, that the Supreme Court had settled a festering, divisive issue and now there was time to move on, forgetting the "fear, bitterness and negativity" of the past.

Second, that the date, 9 November, was particularly significant, as it was the anniversary (30th, actually) of the fall of the Berlin Wall that divided the world during the Cold War. He invoked this Berlin Wall comparison not necessarily for Ayodhya but the opening of the Kartarpur Sahib corridor, where he acknowledged that both India and Pakistan had worked together, forgetting their differences.

And third, he said, the Supreme Court had already ordered that the Ram Temple could be built. It was therefore an obligation on the part of all citizens to dedicate themselves to the larger task of nation-building. He invoked 'unity in diversity' repeatedly (*vividhta mein ekta*), and concluded with greetings for Eid-ul Milad.

So far so good. Then we move to the political meaning of what he said. His third point, 'Temple done, now is the time for nation-building', is what indicates the next steps in his government and party's politics. Also, some important questions.

SHEKHAR GUPTA

You can take an optimistic view and presume that Modi and his party will now focus on the economy. But then, there is the Jharkhand election next month, Delhi soon thereafter and so on. And this isn't a political leadership that takes even a panchayat election lightly

He swept the 2019 election with a combination of welfarism turbo-charged by Hindu nationalism. With Article 370 and the Ram mandir done, and some moves towards a Universal Civil Code (banning triple talaq) made, what is left of that agenda? Within less than six months of beginning its second term, the Modi government and BJP have done almost everything they have been promising on their Hindu and nationalist agenda for decades. Where do they go next?

Modi won 2014 on the promise of "achche din", minimum government-maximum governance, growth and jobs. Most of that hasn't happened. If anything, the economic and employment situation has greatly deteriorated for the past three years. In 2019, Hindu nationalism plus direct benefit transfers to crores of poor enabled him to persuade enough voters to look beyond the economic distress to win a second mandate. What does he do next?

In a more perfect world, his government would need to normalise and relax restrictions in Kashmir, at some point de-escalate with Pakistan and there isn't another foreign adversary to get people angry with. Some bit of economic nationalism, possibly directed at Chinese imports, could be useful. But it can't have anywhere near the same oomph as demolishing a mosque, building a temple, bombing Balakot, surgical strikes and so on.

Modi has employed his foreign visits and interactions brilliantly to enhance his political stature and convince his voters that he's seen by global leaders in a league several notches above any other Indian leader they can remember. He is too smart not to know that this would be unsustainable unless India's economy breaks out of a stall that's looking chronic now.

Therefore, 9 November, 2019, is also significant for our domestic politics. Because this is when voters would expect Modi to focus back on their economic well-being, redeem his old pledge of "achche din".

Of course, if you do not have grand new ideas or imagination to break out of the slide, you could explore more options to fire emotional populism: The other religious sites, NRC, and Pakistan is always next door. But, as the disappointments of Maharashtra and even Haryana show, voters are a bit bored with the same Hindu-nationalist potion now. BJP performed way below expectations in both states although the vote took place within 11 weeks of the action on Article 370.

You can take an optimistic view and presume that Modi and his party will now focus on the economy. But then, there is the Jharkhand election next month, Delhi soon thereafter and so on. And this isn't a political leadership that takes even a panchayat election lightly.

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How the BJP used the idea of Ram

The party has used folklore to create a bond between the legend of Ram and a host of backward classes in order to whip up support for the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, even as it retains upper-caste loyalty, says **Badri Narayan**

Twenty seven years after the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6 December, 1992, the Supreme Court announced its verdict in the title suit over the disputed land earlier on Saturday. In a unanimous judgment, a five-judge Constitution bench of the Supreme Court allotted the disputed Ayodhya land to the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust. The verdict also ordered the government to allot five acres of prominent land in Ayodhya to the Sunni Waqf Board for the construction of a mosque. This brings the curtain down on a long and turbulent campaign spearheaded by the BJP-RSS for the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya.

The Ram Janmabhoomi movement that started in the 1990s brought about a major shift in the country's politics. It is common knowledge that the movement was the brainchild of seers belonging to various Hindu sects, and was constantly supported and planned by Hindutva forces such as the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) Bajrang Dal and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), especially during the 1980-1992 period.

While Ram Janmabhoomi as an issue was alive till this morning and subject of political debate, it ceased being the mass movement of the 1990s long ago. However, the overall appeal it produced in the mindset of the Hindutva brigade back then remains a constituent of saffron politics and indeed in Indian society at large. The BJP supported and led the movement politically, with the 'Rath Yatra' by Lal Krishna Advani, who was the party's president in those days, creating and expanding the popular base for the outfit's politics.

One might recall that prior to Ram Janmabhoomi, the BJP got just two seats in the 1984 parliamentary elections. But once the movement captured the nation's imagination, the party was able to get 85 seats in the 1989 Lok Sabha polls. In the 1991 elections the party got 120 seats and in 1996, the count improved further to 161 seats. Before Ram Janmabhoomi, the BJP was typically the party of the forward castes and its reach was largely limited to India's urban pockets.

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But once the movement began gathering steam, BJP used the opportunity to expand its base from the upper castes to the middle and lower castes of Hindu society and also entered the rural areas, especially in northern and central India. The BJP and the Sangh Parivar used the symbol of Ram to good effect in their bid to unite all Hindu castes and forge a Hindutva identity. The symbol of Ram is popular with practically every village household. It cuts across caste lines as the persona is regarded as God and is remembered, narrated and worshipped by people in the form of Ram Katha, Ram Leela and a host of rituals centred around Ram Puja in various parts of the country. In fact, *Ramcharitmanas* is read, recited and worshipped in most households in rural India, regardless of caste. It was this cultural mindset that the BJP exploited quite well, using the presence of Ram in Hindu consciousness in oral, aural, visual and ritualistic form to fuel the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and expand its base among Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and Dalits, even as it continued to enjoy upper caste support.

The BJP and RSS used the mythical narratives of Ram to associate MBC, OBC and Dalit castes with the Janmabhoomi movement, bringing even the most backward castes such as the Nishads, Mallahs, Binds and Lodhis closer to the party. BJP cadres and leaders who were active in the 1990s during Ram Janmabhoomi movement involved these river basin-centric communities by delivering this sentiment to them: "You are a descendent of Nishad Raj Guhya who helped Ram to cross Ganga River at Shringverpur, when he was going for 'van gaman'. So you should support Ram Janmabhoomi movement." It was due to this cultivated mythical relationship that these communities helped the Karsewaks to cross river Sarayu and assemble in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992 when a curfew had been imposed in the holy city. The BJP and its affiliates also created a link with Dalit castes like the Musahars and several tribal groups that associate themselves with the characters of Ramayana, such as Sabari. Marginalised Dalit castes like the Musahar, Bansphor (bamboo cutters) and many tribal communities call themselves descendent of Sabari.

The BJP also used the Ram Janmabhoomi movement to convince castes like the Kushwaha, Maurya, Kanjar and others in the Hindi speaking states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, that they are the descendents of Ram's son — Kush. The party whipped up this sentiment to mobilise these castes to fuel the cause of the Ram temple, and get them to work for the BJP to build the monument in Ayodhya.

Another symbolic character that the RSS and BJP used in their campaign to expand their base among tribals was that of Hanuman. Apart from magnifying the popular mythical hero's persona, the two outfits also took to narrating stories of some of his compatriots like Sugreev and Jambvant to the forest dwellers. The plan worked well and several tribal communities such as Kol, Bheel, Oraon, Gond came closer to the BJP. This association of various characters of the Ramayana with the identities of various OBC, MBC and Dalit castes provided space for the BJP to create a base among these non-upper caste social groups of Indian society.

During and after Ram Janmabhoomi movement, several BJP leaders from OBC and Dalit castes began assuming prominence within the party. These included the likes of Vinay Katiyar, Swami Chinmayanand, Uma Bharti, Keshav Prasad Maurya, Vijay Sonkar, and Sakshi Maharaj, who have a strong hold on the OBC and MBC voter base.

The sum and substance is that the BJP has used the Ram Janmabhoomi movement very effectively to build and sustain a political base that cuts across castes and communities, constantly evolving it to ensure it continues to yield electoral dividends.

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Views expressed are personal

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No growth at all costs

Start-ups must have a clear path to profitability

Start-ups are a growth engine for the slowdown-hit Indian economy, at least two industry reports have reiterated recently. Consider the "Indian Tech Start-up Ecosystem", the latest report from the National Association of Software and Services Companies (Nasscom). It is heartening to know that India has the potential to create more than 100 unicorns (a start-up parlance to describe companies with a valuation of $1 billion and above) in the next five years. According to the report, the country will have 95-105 unicorns, enjoying a cumulative valuation of $350-390 billion. At present, India has around 24 unicorns. While seven were added this year itself till September, another two to three could be added by the end of 2019. India is third in the unicorn pecking order, after the US and China.

The other report by KPMG also celebrates the Indian start-up story. The report, "Fintech and Startups Fuelling India's $5-trillion Economy", highlights the role of start-ups in giving a growth impetus to the broader economy. It noted that despite the overall slowdown, there was no dearth of funding in the start-up economy. Government, the private sector, and academia — forming the golden triangle — are important players for boosting the start-up eco-system further, the report suggested.

It also brought out the difference in funding between traditional businesses and start-ups. Traditional businesses relied on banks for funding their capex, and that the growth plans are stuck with liquidity drying up. In contrast, capital (mainly by venture capital and highly valued tech firms) has continued to flow into the start-up world. Industry estimates peg fund infusion in Indian technology start-ups at $4.4 billion till September this year, up from $4.2 billion in the corresponding period last year. Early-stage funding also rose significantly — as much as 70 per cent year on year, according to Nasscom.

All this is encouraging news, but that's just one side of the story. The harsh reality is that profitability remains rare among the internet-led businesses, more than a decade after the country's biggest e-commerce company, Flipkart, was born. Growth without profitability may not be a sustainable model in the long run, as the start-up universe has witnessed time and again. There is no doubt that the narrative on the distance and the path to profitability has to become a bigger part of the story versus growth at all costs.

International investors backing start-ups typically target high valuations of the businesses they fund, so that they can exit profitably. Towards that end, investors often push start-ups to play the volumes game in sales while maximising the user base. That, in turn, is made possible by offering deep discounts, whether on a shopping site or a food-delivery platform. This explains high growth among start-ups with little focus on profitability. The fact is that if an investor wants to stay in business for a longer period, return on investment is the key. Also, without a road map for profitability, Indian start-ups run the risk of killing the spirit of entrepreneurship, while giving in to the valuation game of investors. Many Indian start-ups have fallen by the wayside, and a large number of founders have had to step down because of a business model targeting notional numbers rather than profitability.

While start-ups have indeed emerged as a success story for the country in the midst a slowdown, the funding structure in this ecosystem may be more fragile than popularly believed. It's a vibrant industry with around 9,000 tech start-ups in the country, and counting. But as a recent report pointed out, Gurugram-based tech-enabled logistics firm Rivigo was set to become one of the first Indian unicorns to turn profitable, planning to achieve cash break-even in the current financial year. It is important for the survival of the ecosystem that more and more start-ups become profitable. This will also help attract more investment and make the start-up ecosystem a real driver of economic growth.

The brave new world of ample oil

The shift from scarcity to abundance has been brought about in an astonishingly short time by America's "fracking" revolution, leading to massive benefits for consuming countries

Unconventional oil: A wellhead on a fracking site leased by Oasis Petroleum in the Permian Basin oil production area near Wink, Texas PHOTO: REUTERS

TILAK K DOSHI

In the oil universe, the September 14 attack on Saudi Aramco's oil facilities is comparable to the 9/11 attacks on the twin towers in New York City. Yet, the taking out of half of the Kingdom's oil output led not to an oil shock but a whimper. Barely two weeks after the brazen attack, oil headlines were once again dominated by fears of over-supply and falling prices amid a slowing global economy. Following an initial 20 per cent intra-day price surge after the attack, the benchmark Brent Crude oil price quickly retraced its steps back down to pre-attack levels.

US output surge benefits Asia

The shift from a perceived world of oil scarcity to abundance has been brought about in an astonishingly short period of time by the advent of the "fracking" revolution in the US. This combines horizontal drilling and hydraulically-fracturing shale rock with high-pressure liquids to extract "unconventional" oil and gas. In the past decade, US crude oil production more than doubled. By mid-2019, US production was rated at over 12 million barrels per day (b/d), surpassing Russian and Saudi Arabian output as the world's largest.

Academic studies suggest that global oil prices would have been higher by $10-50 per barrel if there had not been a fracking boom in the US. Given the scale involved, even with conservative estimates on the price impact, the US upsurge in unconventional oil production has probably led to the biggest transfer of wealth in history. Largely at the cost of reduced oil revenues to OPEC and Russia, benefits have primarily flowed to the world's largest oil markets in the US, China, India, Japan and South Korea, as well as America's unconventional oil producers.

From what was previously expected to be an inevitable growing dependence on West Asian supplies, Asian oil refiners are now spoilt for choice. With Europe's long-declining oil demand trends, crude oil exports from the Russian Far East, West Africa and Latin America to Asian markets compete with the traditional large exporters of West Asia. While the majority of Asian crude imports are still sourced in West Asia, prices are set at the margin by competing crudes from other regions including the US.

West Asia's reform imperatives

While the US fracking revolution has benefited Asia's crude oil importers, it has burdened West Asian oil producers. The Gulf countries had built up extensive welfare states utilising massive oil revenues to support social security, health, education and government employment programmes. The social upheavals since the Arab Spring in 2010 led the Gulf states to further expand social support programmes to maintain their implicit social contracts with their citizens.

By emerging as the "swing" oil producer, America has weakened the ability of OPEC and Russia to support crude oil prices by curtailing production

In 2015, the fiscal break-even oil price for Saudi Arabia — that is, the oil price at which the government budget is balanced — was estimated by the International Monetary Fund to be $94.25/barrel while the reference "OPEC basket price" had plummeted to $49.50/barrel. The situation since has generally been one of increased government spending, low economic growth and recurring budget deficits.

The Gulf Arab states are reaching the limits of their tolerance to declining oil export revenues. Low oil prices make the imperative of economic reforms and industrial diversification a central concern for the Gulf "rentier" oil states. The risks of a collapse in the social contract between the ruling regimes and their peoples in the Gulf region may be remote for now. The spectre of growing populations, unemployed youth and persistent budget deficits, however, will increasingly concentrate the minds of its planners and palace advisors.

Oil geopolitics upended

Ever since the historic meeting of Saudi Arabia's King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud with US President Franklin D Roosevelt on a warship cruiser in the Suez Canal in 1945, the *quid pro quo* of the strategic relations between the two nations has been clear: While the Saudis assured the Western world access to its oil exports, the US served as the security umbrella for the Kingdom. With its new-found unconventional oil and gas resources, the US is no more the energy supplicant in this relationship. Saudi Arabia and other West Asian oil producers still constitute the world's major source of low-cost conventional oil reserves. However, their overwhelming dominance is no longer a defining feature of global oil markets.

In the age of US-led oil abundance, conventional notions of geopolitical risk and perceptions of energy security have been upended. By effectively making the US the "swing" producer in global oil markets, the fracking revolution has weakened the ability of OPEC and Russia to support crude oil prices by restraining output. It may be argued that US strategic interests in West Asia might wane along with the decline in its energy imports from that region. But it would be a mistake to make too much of America's reduced dependence on West Asian oil. Containing Islamic terrorism, mitigating the threat of nuclear proliferation and supporting Israel's defence needs in a volatile region remain strategic foreign policy imperatives.

It is also important to avoid a superficial understanding of "dependence" on oil imports from West Asia. Oil is sold in fungible global markets, and its price for the large oil importers in Asia is linked to its price everywhere else. Ultimately, it does not matter how much of the oil consumed in Asia comes from West Asia. The price of oil depends on global demand and supply, and the disruption of oil trade flows anywhere affects consumers everywhere. The precepts of "energy security", founded on defunct Malthusian notions of scarcity, have been debunked. Asia's oil importers and West Asia's oil producers now face the brave new world of ample competing oil supplies, shifting geopolitics and an American energy renaissance.

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The case for fixed exchange rates

SITHARAM GURUMURTHI

In an earlier article (*Business Standard*, March 24, 2019), the need for dispensing with the outdated relic called special drawing rights (SDRs) was discussed. This article deals with the implications of abolishing SDRs and contemplates a return to the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates, where the value of a currency is determined by the US dollar and gold.

SDRs, an international reserve asset created by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1969 to support the Bretton Woods' fixed exchange rate system, should have been abandoned immediately after US President Richard Nixon's announcement in August 1971 that the US would no longer exchange dollars for gold at the fixed exchange rate of $35 per ounce. On the contrary, the SDR, redefined as a basket of 16 currencies from 1974 to 1980, was replaced in 1981 by a basket of five currencies — the US dollar, Deutsche mark, French franc, pound sterling, and the Japanese yen.

After the introduction of the euro in January 1999, the SDR basket included only four currencies: The dollar, the euro, the pound and the yen. It was expanded in 2016 to accommodate the Chinese yuan as the fifth currency. Of these five currencies, both the euro and the pound sterling are in trouble and continuance of the SDR as an international reserve asset in its present form is no longer viable. The other two, the yen and the yuan, are well known for currency manipulation in the past to boost exports.

Once the US dollar replaces the SDR as the world's single reserve currency, the dollar could qualify to be a common currency for a select number of countries

In 1985, the Japanese yen at 220 to a dollar had almost killed the US auto industry, until President Ronald Reagan imposed import quotas on Japanese cars, and the yen rose to 120 to a dollar. Strangely, the IMF had failed to remove the yen from the SDR basket in its 1986 review. Had this been done, the Chinese yuan, which President Donald Trump refers to as the "grand champion of currency manipulation", would not have found its way into the SDR basket in 2016. This leaves out only the US dollar. In other words, this would signal a return to the fixed exchange rate regime.

The price of gold has remained remarkably stable during long periods of time. Isaac Newton, in his capacity as the Master of the UK Mint, fixed the price of gold roughly equivalent to $20 per troy ounce of gold in 1717 and it remained at this level until 1914. The official US gold price changed only four times between 1792 and the present. Starting at $19.75 per troy ounce, it rose to $20.67 in 1834 and $35 in 1934. In 1972, the price was raised to $38 and then to $42.22 in 1973. A two-tier pricing system was created in 1968, and the market price of gold has been free to fluctuate since then.

A careful appreciation of gold prices from 1833 to 1971 on the one hand and the behaviour of gold prices in the post-1971 era constitute the basis of my plea for abolition of the SDR and a return to fixed exchange rates. Gold prices have risen beyond one's imagination in the post-1971 era (from less than $41 per ounce to over $1,500 in 2011), when the Bretton Woods system was abandoned and exchange rates were subject to the values of various currencies in the SDR basket. A comparison of gold prices before and after 1971 is striking, and provides enough justification for a return to fixed exchange rates.

The US holds the largest amount of gold — 8,133.5 tonnes, which accounts for 75 per cent of its reserves. In fact, its gold holdings account for 36 per cent of the total of 22,657 tonnes of gold held by the next ten countries.

Once the US dollar replaces the SDR as the single reserve currency, the dollar could qualify to be a common currency for a select number of countries. Even after the introduction of the euro in 1999, the dollar accounts for nearly 64 per cent of global currency reserves, compared to 27 per cent held in euros, with 40-60 per cent of international financial transactions being denominated in dollars. If both the UK and the European Union were to adopt the US dollar as their currency, it could lead to substantial savings in terms of conversion and transaction costs for payments to the Gulf countries for oil, which is priced in dollars. But if a country such as France were to join the dollar zone, it will be necessary to return all the gold France exchanged for the dollar prior to August 1971.

As in the case of the Maastricht Treaty for the euro, the US Federal Reserve in close coordination with the IMF should evolve specific criteria for admission of countries into the dollar zone. Apart from the eleven countries who joined the euro zone in 1999 and Britain, the dollar zone could cover counties such as Canada, Australia and Singapore, provided they satisfy the criteria to be prescribed for the purpose. The replacement of SDRs by the US dollar could mark the culmination of President Trump's "America First" initiative.

The writer was formerly with the IMF

OTHER VIEWS

Proposed fund could help revive stressed realty sector

Identifying genuine projects in need of support will be critical to success

From first looks, the long-awaited package to support the real estate sector, cleared by the Cabinet on Wednesday, appears well-designed. The ₹25,000 crore Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has expanded in both size and scope from the earlier one announced in September. And the variables are clear, such as the unit sizes that will be supported. The AIF will provide funds to bail out stalled real estate projects with unit size of less than ₹2 crore a unit in metros and ₹1 crore in other places. According to Ms Sitharaman, over 1,600 projects involving some 4.58 lakh housing units are stalled for want of funds.

The real estate sector is not only one of the biggest providers of jobs but also has a huge multiplier effect in the economy. While the AIF is a good idea, it is important that it is implemented without glitches. Too many good ideas have suffered due to bad implementation. The critical part will be identifying genuine projects in need of support and ensuring that biases do not creep in. Also important will be attracting more investors into the AIF. The finance minister said that sovereign funds and other private investors have shown interest. These need to be followed upon quickly and money should be released from the AIF right away so that the trickle-down effect is felt before the end of this financial year. The real estate industry now has to do its part.

The Hindu, November 8

Law and disorder

An unfortunate face-off

New India can be a topsy-turvy turf. Its capital, for instance, had been temporarily besieged — ironically by the keepers and the practitioners of law. An altercation at a parking lot flared up into a full-fledged confrontation between the police and the lawyers, indicating the troubling relationship between law and disorder in the country. Lawyers have complained of police heavy-handedness at the Tis Hazari court complex. The charges against the lawyers are equally grave.

The consequences of such an unprecedented face-off between two crucial pillars upholding the edifice of law and order cannot be but unfortunate for citizens. Lawyers on strike locked the doors of important district courts in the city while hundreds stayed away from four other courts, inconveniencing litigants. The performance of the police has been equally shameful on several occasions. Three years ago, large segments of the force watched as lawyers beat up university students, teachers as well as journalists. There should be an immediate and impartial inquiry into the allegations and counter-charges to establish the truth of the matter in this instance. The guilty, on either side, should be penalised so as to discourage such lumpenism in the future. An immediate remedy is the only way to redeem the sorry image of the minders of the law.

The Telegraph, November 8

Laxity on stubble burning

Judicious long-term solutions needed

The Centre and the states have again been caught napping on the seasonal scourge of stubble burning, forcing the Supreme Court to raise the fire alarm. In a blistering attack on the government machinery, the court has stated that top-level officers "sit in their ivory towers and let people die". The dressing-down by the SC has, as expected, roused the powers that be into action, with PM Narendra Modi directing the agriculture ministry to give priority to farmers of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana in distributing equipment to prevent straw fires. Under the judicial scanner, the governments are going all out to show how serious they are on this burning issue.

The Central and state governments have miserably failed to dissuade farmers from setting stubble ablaze. The machinery for crop residue management is either in short supply or is not reaching the intended beneficiaries. A judicious mix of solutions, incentives and regulation, executed in a planned manner, rather than a quick-fix aimed at pacifying the court is the way forward. The nation owes its food security to the farmers. Branding them as criminals or offenders without giving them adequate support to stop eco-unfriendly practices reeks of ingratitude and indifference.

The Tribune, November 8

Opinion

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2019

EUGENE LINDEN

Climate change misinterpreted

Scientists tend to underestimate the severity of threats. Few thought it would arrive so quickly. Now we're facing consequences

FOR DECADES, MOST scientists saw climate change as a distant prospect. We now know that thinking was wrong. This summer, for instance, a heat wave in Europe penetrated the Arctic, pushing temperatures into the 80s across much of the Far North and, according to the Belgian climate scientist Xavier Fettweis, melting some 40 billion tons of Greenland's ice sheet. Had a scientist in the early 1990s suggested that within 25 years a single heat wave would measurably raise sea levels, at an estimated two one-hundredths of an inch, bake the Arctic and produce Sahara-like temperatures in Paris and Berlin, the prediction would have been dismissed as alarmist. But many worst-case scenarios from that time are now realities.

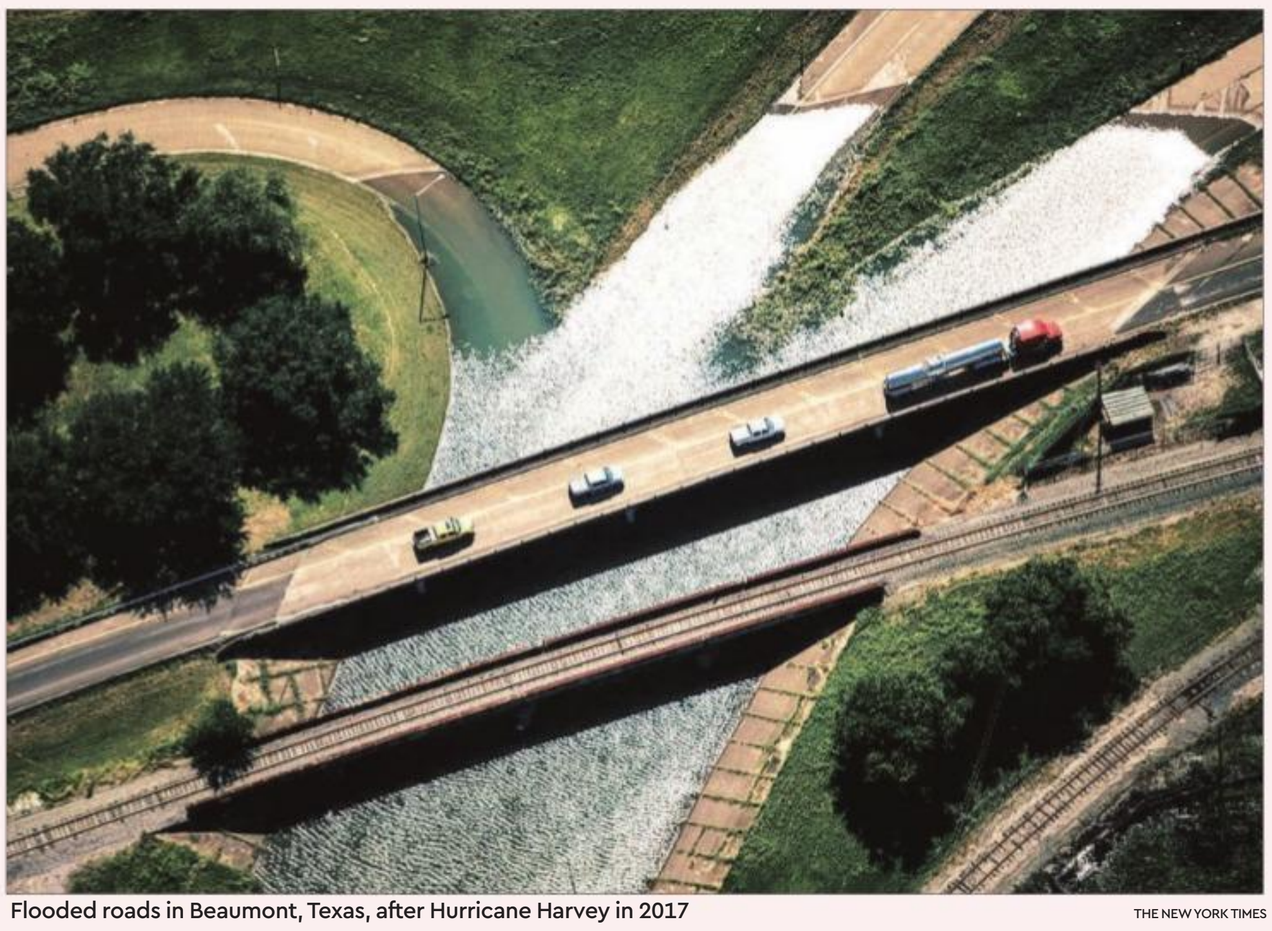
Science is a process of discovery. It can move slowly as the pieces of a puzzle fall together and scientists refine their investigative tools. But in the case of climate, this deliberation has been accompanied by inertia born of bureaucratic caution and politics. A recent essay in *Scientific American* argued that scientists "tend to underestimate the severity of threats and the rapidity with which they might unfold" and said one of the reasons was "the perceived need for consensus." This has had severe consequences, diluting what should have been a sense of urgency and vastly understating the looming costs of adaptation and dislocation as the planet continues to warm.

In 1990, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the United Nations group of thousands of scientists representing 195 countries, said in its first report that climate change would arrive at a stately pace, that the methane-laden Arctic permafrost was not in danger of thawing, and that the Antarctic ice sheets were stable. Relying on the climate change panel's assessment, economists estimated that the economic hit would be small, providing further ammunition against an aggressive approach to reducing emissions and to building resilience to climate change. As we now know, all of those predictions turned out to be completely wrong. Which makes you wonder whether the projected risks of further warming, dire as they are, might still be understated. How bad will things get?

So far, the costs of underestimation have been enormous. New York City's subway system did not flood in its first 108 years, but Hurricane Sandy's 2012 storm surge caused nearly $5 billion in water damage, much of which is still not repaired. In 2017, Hurricane Harvey gave Houston and the surrounding region a $125 billion lesson about the costs of misjudging the potential for floods.

The climate change panel seems finally to have caught up with the gravity of the climate crisis. Last year, the organisation detailed the extraordinary difficulty of limiting warming to 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit (1.5 degrees Celsius), over the next 80 years, and the grim consequences that will result even if that goal is met.

More likely, a separate United Nations report concluded, we are headed for warming of at least 5.4 degrees Fahrenheit. That will come with almost unimaginable damage to economies and ecosystems. Unfortunately, this dose of reality arrives more than 30 years after human-caused climate change became a mainstream issue. The word "upended" does not do justice to the revolution in climate science wrought by the discovery of sudden climate change.



Flooded roads in Beaumont, Texas, after Hurricane Harvey in 2017 THE NEW YORK TIMES

The realisation that the global climate can swing between warm and cold periods in a matter of decades or even less came as a profound shock to scientists who thought those shifts took hundreds if not thousands of years. Scientists knew major volcanic eruptions or asteroid strikes could affect climate rapidly, but such occurrences were uncommon and unpredictable.

Were the ice sheets of Greenland and Antarctica to melt, sea levels would rise by an estimated 225 feet worldwide. Few expect that to happen anytime soon. But those ice sheets now look a lot more fragile than they did to the climate change panel in 1995, when it said that little change was expected over the next hundred years.

In the years since, data has shown that both Greenland and Antarctica have been shedding ice far more rapidly than anticipated. By 2014, a number of scientists had concluded that an irreversible collapse of the West Antarctic ice sheet had already begun, and computer modelling in 2016 indicated that its disintegration in concert with other melting could raise sea levels up to six feet by 2100, about twice the increase described as a possible worst-case scenario just three years earlier. Then this year, a review of 40 years of satellite images suggested that the East Antarctic ice sheet, which was thought to be relatively stable, may also be shedding vast amounts of ice.

As the seas rise, they are also warming at a pace unanticipated as recently as five years ago. For one thing, a warmer ocean means more powerful storms, and die-offs of marine life, but it also suggests that the planet is more sensitive to increased carbon dioxide emissions than previously thought. The melting of permafrost has also defied expectations. This is ground that has remained frozen for at least two consecutive years and covers around a quarter of the exposed land mass of the Northern Hemisphere. As recently as 1995, it was thought to be stable. But by 2005, the National Center for Atmospheric Research estimated that up to 90% of the Northern Hemisphere's topmost layer of permafrost could thaw by 2100, releasing vast amounts of carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere.

For all of the missed predictions, changes in the weather are confirming earlier expectations that a warming globe would be accompanied by an increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather. And there are new findings unforeseen by early studies, such as the extremely rapid intensification of storms, as on Sept. 1, when Hurricane Dorian's sustained winds intensified from 150 to 185 miles per hour in just nine hours, and last year when Hurricane Michael grew from tropical depression to major hurricane in just two days. If the Trump administration has its way, even the revised worst-case scenarios may turn out to be too rosy. In August, the administration announced a plan to roll back regulations intended to limit methane emissions resulting from oil and gas exploration, despite opposition from some of the largest companies subject to those regulations. Also its actions approached the surreal as the justice department opened an antitrust investigation into those auto companies that have agreed in principle to abide by higher gas mileage standards required by California. The administration also formally revoked a waiver allowing California to set stricter limits on tailpipe emissions than the federal government.

Even if scientists end up having lowballed their latest assessments of the consequences of the greenhouse gases we continue to emit into the atmosphere, their predictions are dire enough. But the Trump administration has made its posture toward climate change abundantly clear: Bring it on! It's already here. And it is going to get worse.

—NYT

INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

JNU escape artistes

The fact that Nobel prize winner Abhijit Banerjee was imprisoned in 1983 in Tihar for 12 days for participating in a *dharna* against the then JNU vice-chancellor has evoked interest. Sunil Gupta, the former legal adviser for Tihar Jail, in his new book, *Black Warrant*, provides an interesting postscript to the tale. Some 250 JNU students were arrested for arson and rioting, but amazingly, 170 students, including 55 women, managed to escape right under the noses of the jailors. A large number of visitors met the students on their first day in jail. In those days Tihar visitors were identified simply by a stamp on their wrists. The students took advantage of the hot and sweaty weather in May to transfer the stamp image from one wrist to another. The bumbling jail authorities did not notice that three times the number of visitors left the jail as had entered. They also discovered belatedly that the arrested students had all given fake names and police never bothered to verify their identities. So the escapees could not be traced. Incidentally, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman was then a member of the Free Thinkers group, one of the two student bodies which organised the protest.

Crumbling house

The government's decision to convert the historic Parliament House, built in 1927, into a museum is not without reason. Signs of ageing of the iconic circular structure have been apparent for some time. In the 1990s, when Najma Heptulla was the deputy chairperson of the Rajya Sabha, a terrible stench sometimes pervaded the House. Eventually the drainpipes under the floor had to be dug up and diverted. During PV Narasimha Rao's tenure as prime minister, there was pandemonium in the Lok Sabha one day when a piece of cement fell off the roof. To keep away pigeons that regularly perched and cooed in the Lok Sabha's high ceiling, a large net was installed under the dome. Later, the windows of the dome were permanently shut to keep the birds out. Since a major gas fire in the kitchen, cooking in the heritage building has been forbidden. Food is now brought from outside and warmed on electric heaters. Thankfully the parliamentary staff seems to have successfully tackled the monkey menace. There was a time when simians roamed the circular verandahs.

Daunting task

The Jal Jeevan Mission under the Ministry of Jal Shakti is envisaged to achieve for Narendra Modi's second tenure what the Swachh Abhiyan campaign did for his first. The mission's budget is a whopping $51 billion and the goal is set very high. At present only 18 % of rural households have tap water connection and the aim is to provide the entire country safe drinking water. PM Modi hopes to replicate the success of WASMO (the Water and Sanitation Management Organisation), which he established in Gujarat in 2007 as chief minister. Today, 78% of rural households in Gujarat get water supply through taps. Modi has ensured that those recruited for the water ministry have domain knowledge. Secretary Parameswaran Iyer has focused on projects concerning water and sanitation through most of his career, including in the Swachh Bharat Mission. Additional Secretary Bharat Lal is usually associated with his tenure as resident commissioner, Gujarat, and as joint secretary in Rashtrapati Bhavan, but he has worked earlier both with water projects in the rural development ministry and with WASMO in Gujarat.

Not so meek

N C Saxena, who was a member of the National Advisory Council (NAC) during UPA time, in his recent book, *What Ails the IAS*, suggests that Manmohan Singh as prime minister did not follow Congress president Sonia Gandhi's writ unquestioningly, as has been alleged. He notes that Singh and his adviser, Montek Ahluwalia, often differed with Gandhi, who chaired the NAC. The PM was not in favour of safety net programmes such as NREGA, for example, writes Saxena. Significantly, the NAC was not reconstituted immediately after the Congress returned to power in 2009 and, according to the book, Singh reluctantly revived it in March 2010. The Food Security Bill was delayed for two years by the then PM and the Act finally passed with modifications because of pressure from Gandhi, it adds. Saxena also points out that Singh did not renew the membership of three NAC members, including the outspoken Harsh Mander, in 2012 even though Gandhi herself acknowledged their valuable contributions.

Faces to remember

Well-known artist and Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha MP Jogen Chowdhury, whose term expires next March, has put his years in Parliament to good use. He has sketched the faces of many colleagues in the House over the years, including Manmohan Singh, Smriti Irani, Sitaram Yechury, Amit Shah, Ghulam Nabi Azad and the late Arun Jaitley and Sushma Swaraj. The artist plans to compile his parliamentary sketches for a book. Chowdhury describes his experience as an MP as, "invaluable for an artist. It was like watching different characters on a stage".

Welcome to pink (SG)!

Ganguly has maintained that, albeit scepticism, day-night Test cricket is the way forward

RINGSIDE VIEW

Shamik Chakrabarty

KERRY PACKER'S WORLD Series Cricket came at a time when change had become the need of the hour. The late Australian media tycoon had the far-sight and intelligence to catch the winds of change. Christopher Martin-Jenkins, a doyen of cricket reporting and broadcasting, had described the game under lights, with a white ball and the players wearing coloured clothing as 'pyjama cricket'. The great John Arlott had called it a 'circus'. At the end, Packer was the winner. He revolutionised limited-overs cricket. White-ball cricket under lights gradually became the mainstream in the short-form.

Unlike golf, tennis or hockey, cricket usually is slow to accept a departure from tradition. Purists still take T20 cricket with a pinch of salt, its great success notwithstanding. And given that Test cricket still remains the ultimate—for the right reasons—to the players and connoisseurs alike, it's natural that pink-ball, day-night Tests are viewed with scepticism by many. Former India captain Bishan Singh Bedi, for example, is not against pink-ball Test cricket. But as his tweet suggests, he is probably against its proliferation.

"Much as we admire @SGanguly99's hurry n 10 months as BCCI chief-but am not v convinced if 'Pink' is the only road ahead-#Dada cn do well to resurrect Ranji/Duleep & put everything into 'marketing' Test Crkt!" Bedi had tweeted after Sourav Ganguly became the BCCI president and ensured that the upcoming second Test between India and Bangladesh at Eden Gardens from November 22 would be a day-night affair.

Last year, with the Indian cricket board being helmed by the Committee of Administrators (CoA), the Indian cricket team reportedly declined twice to play day-night Tests—first against the West Indies at Rajkot followed by the series opener against Australia at Adelaide. Ganguly settled the matter in just one meeting with Virat Kohli. According to the BCCI president, the India captain took just three seconds to agree.

Last year, the Indian cricket team reportedly declined twice to play day-night Tests, a matter which Sourav Ganguly settled in one meeting with Virat Kohli

"I don't know what's the reason they didn't want to play (Adelaide day-night Test). I met Virat, met him for an hour and the first question was that we need to have day-night Test cricket. The answer in three seconds was, 'yes let's go ahead and do it'. So I really don't know what's happened in the past. What's the reason and who was involved in the decision. But I found him absolutely acceptable to play day-night Test matches. He realises I think that empty stands in Test matches is not the right way forward," Ganguly told the audience during a promotional event in Kolkata last week.

Ganguly has always maintained that day-night Test cricket is the way forward, given the dwindling stadium attendance in the long-form—the spectator response for the three home Tests against South Africa had been dismal. In this day and age, it's difficult for the fans to throng the stadiums on working days and stay put for seven hours to watch a game of cricket. Yes, day-night Test is the way forward but like the Packer revolution, this, too, needs time to become the traditional, day version's replacement.

To start with, a lot of technical issues are involved. Pink-ball, day-night Test cricket tilts the balance significantly in favour of the fast bowlers. Cricket has always been a batsman's game. So once again, there's a departure from the norm. A substantial amount of grass is needed on the pitch to help the pink ball retain its colour. An extra coat of lacquer allows the pink ball to swing more than its red counterpart. And then, there's the 'twilight zone', when the ball moves even more because the air just above the pitch becomes more stable, and as dusk melts into evening and floodlights take over, players find it difficult to pick the ball. Also, and this is very important, the pink-ball hasn't yet passed the test with regards to its longevity – whether it can overcome the dew factor and stand for 80 overs, when the second new ball becomes available. For the first time, a day-night Test is going to be played in full winter and the degree of difficulty will be higher.

The pink Kookaburra, tried out in the Duleep Trophy, had received negative feedbacks from the players. The Eden Test will be played with the SG pink and although the ball manufacturer is very confident, we should keep our fingers crossed. The pink-ball manufacturing technology is still a work in progress and further improvement is required before any attempt to proliferate day-night Tests is made. Till then, it can stay as an exciting diversion—one pink-ball Test in every series. Yes, the cricketers will have to adapt, but for far too long the sport has ignored its biggest stakeholders – fans. Day-night Test cricket allows fans to turn up at the ground during their free time. That has to be the top priority.

Day-night Test cricket is certainly a way forward in terms of bringing the crowd back to the stands. The game's purest format also badly requires hard-selling, which at the moment is virtually non-existent. And as Kohli has proposed, India should have "five strong Test centres"; elite venues where a strong section of fans still covets the long-form. Rotation can happen for limited-overs internationals and the IPL matches.

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WORDLY WISE

BE GRACIOUS, MASTER, AND ALLOW THE WORLDS TO REST FROM TROUBLE NOW
— VALMIKI, RAMAYANA

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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

INDIA, A TEMPLE, AND A MOSQUE

All parties must respect, abide by SC verdict on Ayodhya. BJP, in power, has an added responsibility: Make it about future, not past

AS THE RAMJANMABHOOMI-BABRI Masjid title suit in Ayodhya dragged on for over seven decades, it became clear that, in the end, it would have to be settled in court, resolution would have to come within the ambit of law and the Constitution. Politics had, far from facilitating any meaningful give and take, only deepened the polarisation. And mediation efforts outside the court had invited charges of bad faith. Closure would have to come, it became evident, not by the brute calculations of majority and minority, nor by taking the legislative route, but by invoking a higher principle. A solution would have to be situated in justice and due process, and all parties would have to respect and abide by it.

The Supreme Court verdict on Saturday, November 9, which recognises the Hindu claim over the disputed land, while directing the building of a mosque on a suitable plot elsewhere in Ayodhya, meets that promise, by and large. The unanimity of the five-judge Constitution bench led by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi is not an incidental artefact of the ruling — it is part of its essence. In the aftermath, it instantly lowers temperatures. And going ahead, it creates crucial room for all political players to speak to their constituencies.

But of course, even a unanimous verdict sparks questions. In a democracy, on a dispute as tangled and resonant with claims, complexities and ambiguities as Ayodhya, a tidy closure will always elude.

Admittedly, the nature of the task before the court was almost impossibly fraught and, to its great credit, it has tried to find a balance between pronouncing on a matter that involves faith, belief, contested history and bringing into play settled principles of evidence sustainable in law. It has recognised the Hindu claim over the disputed site because of the existence not merely of faith and belief but of "actual worship down the centuries". Crucially, however, the court has also acknowledged that the damage to the mosque in communal conflict in 1934, its desecration in 1949 when idols were installed on the pulpit below the central dome, and its destruction in 1992, "constituted a serious violation of the rule of law". Under exercise of its powers under Article 142 of the Constitution to do "complete justice", the court has, therefore, directed that 5 acres be handed to the Sunni Waqf Board by the Central government out of the acquired land, or by the UP government within the city of Ayodhya, simultaneous to the handing over of the disputed site to a trust.

The court prefaces its verdict by saying it has been "tasked with the resolution of a dispute whose origins are as old as the idea of India itself." It unambiguously underlines that "title cannot be established on the basis of faith and belief." But after invoking the Constitution and constitutional values of justice, fraternity, human dignity and equality of religious belief, the final settlement it makes is of a bare title suit. This raises a question: Could the act of judgment have been more an act of imagination of a more equal justice? Could it be that the Allahabad HC order of a three-way ownership of the disputed land offered a cue?

These questions have no immediate answers. But one thing is clear. The Supreme Court verdict must now be taken forward and built upon by all stakeholders. In his address to the nation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken of a new resolve, a new dawn, of the need for India to leave behind past bitterness. The Opposition parties have signalled their acceptance of the verdict. There are signs of ferment among Muslim groups, with the IUML backing the ruling, but the Muslim Law Board expressing dissatisfaction. It is the right of the Muslim side of the dispute to ask for a review, but that decision must be taken calmly, wisely.

For the politics of secularism, the verdict brings the promise of freedom — from the burdens and dead-ends of a congealed dispute. It is now faced with the task of renewal — to find a new vocabulary, and to fill it with new issues and meanings. For the BJP, too, which used the Ramjanmabhoomi dispute and the demolition of the Babri masjid to propel itself to relevance and power, this is a moment of challenge: At a time when the judicial clearing of the path to the temple helps it to claim political vindication, as the ruling party at the Centre and a majority of states, in a country where almost half of the population was born after 1992, it needs to make the Ayodhya verdict more about the future, less about the past.

Ram's political triumph

The reconfiguration of Hinduism, where political rather than spiritual forces represent it, is now complete

PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

THE BIRTH OF the Ramayana, as we know it, is in an act of grief. A *nishada* hunter strikes down the male of a pair of *krauncha* birds. The unslain female bird utters a mournful cry. Unable to bear the separation, she too dies. This primal scene of crime, and the anguish it generates, prompts Valmiki to compose the Ramayana. But the deep sorrow of that crime haunts the story. Ram has his triumphal moments — vanquishing Ravana, establishing Ram Rajya. Ram always sides with duty, some exalted high ideal that makes his own desires irrelevant. That is his greatness. But there is also no escaping the fact that Ram himself never finds inner repose. His deepest moments of anguish arise precisely when he acts as a sovereign, overcoming his natural *karuna*, sidelining it for some kingly duty. It is almost as if his most political of acts, the banishment of Sita, is contrary to his own nature. It is when Ram acts as a political agent, that his torment is most pronounced. His political acts, sometimes, make him guilty of wrongdoing. He is saved, if at all, only by the forgiveness of Sita as Bhavabhuti perceptively noted. It is Ram in the end who is most in need of *karuna*. The fact that Ram politically triumphs is not always the moment that he is morally redeemed, or made whole.

So Ram has triumphed politically. The Supreme Court has declared that he, in his incarnate form, has sovereign rights to 2.77 acres of disputed land. Any other claimants to the land, especially the waqf board, cannot claim adverse possession to the land. The sovereignty of Ram's empire over the hearts and minds of Hindus has been resoundingly affirmed. He is an object of worship, a locus of faith whose importance cannot be denied. He has politically triumphed over all the deniers: Those who denied he existed, and those who denied that there was an attempt to erase his temples. He has triumphed because a way has been cleared for the central government to manage Ram's land, to create a grand structure to mark his divinity. His sovereignty, and our faith in him, can now be affirmed in legalese, and etched in stone.

The Supreme Court had a difficult job on its hands. It is a reflection on the state of India's politics that the idea that the pre-1991 status quo ante would be restored was ruled out right from the start. It is hard to imagine what Indian politics would be like if the Court had asked for the restoration of the Babri Masjid. So, the only two other options were a victory for the Hindu side, or some imaginative solution that did equal justice to all kinds of claims involved in this dispute. The Allahabad High Court judgment, flawed as it was, was very explicitly a balancing act: Divide the property, respect all faiths, and put the past behind us. In some ways, this judgment has gone for a corner solution. It does say, none of the claimants can prove adverse possession; it does recognise that the demolition of the Babri Masjid was an act of political vandalism. It provides compensatory relief for the waqf board. But in its operative part, this judgment is the opposite of the Allahabad High Court — no division of property; one faith nominally given priority over another, and an affirmation that long gone historical wrongs can continue to be the basis of new legal claims.

But will this moment of political triumph solve Ram's inner torment? Or will it only exacerbate it? We hope that the judgment, right or wrong, will depoliticise the issue. It has been settled. Let us move on. This would be the best option, a chance for Indian secularism to get a fresh start. But there are reasons to be nervous on three fronts: Psychological, institutional and political. For Hindu nationalists, this is a moment in a long historical struggle. They identify Hindus as subjugated. The demolition of the Babri Masjid was a cathartic moment, and the building of a temple will be the denouement for a long repressed civilisation.

C R Sasikumar

> A government trust will now determine how worship at the site will be materialised. Is it just possible that instead of a triumphal monument to Ram's political glory — for this is all that the temple will be under present circumstances — can we build something genuinely congruent with Ram's greatness?

Has that cathartic need now been satiated? Or will this simply embolden those who see politics as an apocalyptic conflict between Hindus and others, to assert their pride even more insistently? Second, in public form we all respect the unanimous view of the Supreme Court. But let us not pretend that, if not in this case, in a wider context, the Court's credibility is in serious doubt. Will marginalised groups read this as a loss of faith in the fairness of Indian institutions or not? Politically, does this judgment deepen the fusing of religion and politics? In some ways, the institutional fusion has been deepening for a while — the political, legal and religious movements have all intermingled. But with a central government trust, now in charge of effectively building a temple, the state is the medium through which Hindu sovereignty is now being exercised. The political reconfiguration of Hinduism, where political rather than spiritual forces now represent it, is now complete.

We all ardently wish that India moves on. The settlement should take the issue, and all allied psychological complexes of Hindu subjugation off the table. But here is an outlandish thought. A government trust will now determine how worship at the site will be materialised. Is it just possible that instead of a triumphal monument to Ram's political glory — for this is all that the temple will be under present circumstances — can we build something genuinely congruent with Ram's greatness? Something that marks a new kind of holiness not predicated on the revenge of history or the narcissism of group identities? Can we create a new liturgy that is genuinely inclusive of all religions, and looks to dawns of the future rather than glories of the past? What this might be can be left to more imaginative minds to devise. But such a gesture would be, in the face of this legal triumph, an even more poignant way to move on. It will save both secularism from identification with majoritarianism and Hinduism from identification with a prideful communal identity. The Court decision does not foreclose this option, and it would be entirely in keeping with Ram's *karuna*. No one disputed Ram. But making the fate of 2.77 acres of land a litmus test of respect for Ram, and for the fate of a civilisation, was an act of vandalism on Hinduism as well. Ram's political triumph should not leave him, like in Valmiki's Ramayana, with an inner torment, at war with his better more compassionate self.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

PEACE AND A TEMPLE

The Ram temple struggle is over, let's hope for harmony for all now

RAM MADHAV

THE RAM TEMPLE at Ayodhya will soon be a reality, now that the legal hurdles have been removed by the Supreme Court.

Symbols of vandalism and iconoclasm at the most sacred places of Hindus, like Ayodhya, have been very big sources of embarrassment as the sentiments associated with such places are quite deep-rooted. It is not just about a temple or a mosque. There are any number of thriving mosques in the country. There are more than a hundred mosques in the vicinity of Ayodhya, many of them unkept. It is about the renewed sense of assertion of a nation.

Historian Arnold Toynbee talks about it in the context of a church in Warsaw pulled down by the Poles. "In the course of the first Russian occupation of Warsaw (1914-1915) the Russians had built an Eastern Orthodox Christian cathedral on this central spot in the city that had been the capital of the once independent Roman Catholic Christian country Poland. The Russians had done this to give the Poles a continuous ocular demonstration that the Russians were their masters. After re-establishment of Poland's independence in 1918, the Poles pulled this cathedral down... I do not greatly blame the Polish government for having pulled down that Russian church. The purpose for which the Russians had built it had been not religious but political, and the purpose had also been intentionally offensive", Toynbee said.

"Perhaps the Poles were really kinder in destroying the Russians' self-discrediting monument in Warsaw," he added. The Muslims should look at Ayodhya probably from the same perspective. They are saved by the Supreme Court from the embarrassment of defending the indefensible in the name of religion. It might be instructive for them to remember that Islam came to India from West Asia not just riding over the shoulders of invaders like Mahmud of Ghazni and Babur, but also through Sufi saints of the 13th century like Hazrat Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, who came to spread the message of love and harmony. Ajmer Sharif is a standing testimony to the fact that India is an inclusive and pluralist civilisation where all religions thrive.

Hindus too would be making a mistake if they look at Ayodhya from a religious prism or from the prism of "avenging historical wrongs". Leaders of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement as well as the other Hindu organisations have also stressed upon it in their statements after the verdict. A similar historic event happened about 70 years ago: The Somnath temple, destroyed by Ghazni several centuries before the arrival of Mughal invaders, was rebuilt in 1950. The then president of India, Rajendra Prasad, had said, "By rising from its ashes again, this temple... will proclaim to the world that no man and no power in the world can destroy that for which people have boundless faith... Our only aim is to proclaim anew our attachment to the faith, convictions and values on which our religion has rested since immemorial ages."

Ram Janmabhoomi is about those values. Together, with a magnificent Ram temple at Ayodhya, shall rise a nation imbued with those values that Mahatma Gandhi, whose 150th birth anniversary we are celebrating, used to describe Ram Rajya. Ram epitomised values like respect, love and dignity. These values are not reserved for Ram's own people alone, but everyone including the enemies. When he encountered Ravan on the battlefield, he was said to have bowed to him in respect before aiming at him. For him, material wealth alone was not the ultimate goal in life. "Even if Lanka were to be a kingdom of gold, I shall consider my mother and motherland to be superior to it," he declared.

There were very few intellectuals appreciating the deeper message of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement in the 1990s, when it was at its peak, except for Girilal Jain, Arun Shourie, and a handful of others. The larger liberal intellectual establishment of the country was ferociously anti-temple, forcing Nobel laureate V S Naipaul to comment in an interview that, "It is not enough to abuse them or to use that fashionable word from Europe: Fascism. There is a big historical development going on in India. Wise men should understand it. Rather, they should use it for intellectual transformation of India."

It was a long struggle that has finally seen its culmination today. Swami Chinmayananda, eminent spiritual guru, used to say: "This whole fight for Ayodhya is for 'Ayuddha' - non-war". Let us hope that with the rise of the Ram temple, this country shall see lasting peace and harmony.

The writer is national general secretary, BJP, and director, India Foundation

FAITH WINS OVER LAW

The Ayodhya judgment is a setback to evidence law with differential burden of proof being demanded from different parties

FAIZAN MUSTAFA AND AYMEN MOHAMMED

THE SUPREME COURT has tried to please everyone in its much awaited judgment on the property dispute in Ayodhya. The worshippers of Lord Ram have been given land for the construction of a temple at the very site where the Babri Masjid stood between 1528 and December 6, 1992.

The Nirmohi Akhara has welcomed the judgment as it will be given some representation in the trust that would construct the temple. The Sunni Waqf Board too must have the satisfaction that the highest court has accepted their central argument that the Babri Masjid was a Sunni, and not Shia, waqf property, and the same was not constructed after demolishing the Ram temple. Thus, the court has rejected the Hindu right's narrative on the Babri mosque. This false narrative not only was responsible for galvanising the ordinary Hindus, but also gave some sort of legitimacy to divisive electoral politics. Similarly, Muslim grievances about the trespass in 1949 and the tragic demolition of the mosque in 1992 have been accepted by the court. In fact, the court has accepted that there was an injury caused to them — i.e. violation of their legal right. Accordingly, the court, invoking its extraordinary jurisdiction of doing complete justice, has given them almost double the land in Ayodhya.

The Ayodhya dispute did not begin in 1528 with Babur, the founder of Mughal empire, but in 1886 with litigation in the British courts over a *chabutra* (courtyard) that was constructed outside the Babri Masjid by one Mahant Raghubar Das in the late 1850s. When the British prevented the construction of a canopy over the *chabutra*, Das unsuccessfully litigated his cause in three judicial forums. Each time, the courts emphasised status quo — that is, the Muslims would pray inside the Babri Masjid while the Hindus had limited rights to pray at the *chabutra*. Surprisingly, the apex court has rejected title of Muslims for want of proof of title document. This may have repercussions for several temples and mosques. The court rejected the revenue record and gazetteers as sufficient proof. Even the British grant papers were said to be sufficient only for proving the upkeep of the mosque.

In law, the phrase "status quo" means the situation at the time of the judgment must not be changed. The Babri litigation is a story of changing "status quo". On the night of December 22-23, 1949, trespassers placed Lord Ram's idol under the central dome of the Babri Masjid. In a few days after the incident, a new status quo would be sanctified by the local courts: Muslims were not allowed to pray inside the mosque, the idol would not be removed, and that Hindus would have a "limited" right to pray and pujaris would ensure daily *bhog*. By one act of criminal trespass, a mosque was converted into a temple.

> Certainly in matters of freedom of religion, the court should not have any say, but deciding title suit on the basis of faith is a thorny proposition.

On February 1, 1986, District Judge K M Pandey would order the unlocking of gates that acted as a "barrier" between the idols inside the masjid and the devotees who had come for the darshan. This decision had the blessing of then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who in order to mollify the self-anointed regressive Muslim leadership would subsequently introduce the bill to reverse the Shah Bano judgment on February 25, 1986.

The demolition of the mosque on December 6, 1992 was also the destruction of the rule of law. The SC has rightly criticised it and accepted that it was in violation of the "status quo" order passed by it. Within a few hours of the mosque's demolition, a makeshift temple had come up at the structure's location. Within a month of the demolition, the Allahabad High Court allowed for darshan at the makeshift temple. In 1994, the Supreme Court, while dealing with the Acquisition of Certain Areas of Ayodhya Act, ordered the protection of the latest "status quo": No mosque but a makeshift temple and legally protected darshan at the site.

In 2010, the Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court ruled that the title suit must be decided as a question of joint-ownership of property. Muslims, the deity Ram Lalla and Nirmohi Akhara were to get one-third share of the disputed property. The Supreme Court has overruled this judgment and rightly held that it was not a partition suit.

The judgment will be remembered for the victory of faith over the rule of law as the Supreme Court considered religious beliefs even in deciding a property dispute, and despite conceding that faith cannot confer title, it still went ahead to give property to worshippers on the basis of faith. The court should not have any say in matters of freedom of religion, but deciding title suit on the basis of faith is a thorny proposition. In brief, it is the red letter day for the constitutional right to religion but a setback to property law and a setback to evidence law with differential burden of proof being demanded from different parties.

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inside TRACK
COOMI KAPOOR

JNU Escape Artistes

THE FACT that Nobel prize winner Abhijit Banerjee was imprisoned in 1983 in Tihar for 12 days for participating in a *dharna* against the then JNU vice-chancellor has evoked interest. Sunil Gupta, the former legal adviser for Tihar Jail, in his new book, *Black Warrant*, provides an interesting postscript to the tale. Some 250 JNU students were arrested for arson and rioting, but amazingly, 170 students, including 55 women, managed to escape right under the noses of the jailors. A large number of visitors met the students on their first day in jail. In those days Tihar visitors were identified simply by a stamp on their wrists. The students took advantage of the hot and sweaty weather in May to transfer the stamp image from one wrist to another. The bumbling jail authorities did not notice that three times the number of visitors left the jail as had entered. They also discovered belatedly that the arrested students had all given fake names and police never bothered to verify their identities. So the escapees could not be traced. Incidentally, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was then a member of the Free Thinkers group, one of the two student bodies which organised the protest.

Crumbling House

The government's decision to convert the historic Parliament House, built in 1927, into a museum is not without reason. Signs of ageing of the iconic circular structure have been apparent for some time. In the 1990s, when Najma Heptulla was the deputy chairperson of the Rajya Sabha, a terrible stench sometimes pervaded the House. Eventually the drainpipes under the floor had to be dug up and diverted. During P V Narasimha Rao's tenure as prime minister, there was pandemonium in the Lok Sabha one day when a piece of cement fell off the roof. To keep away pigeons that regularly perched and cooed in the Lok Sabha's high ceiling, a large net was installed under the dome. Later, the windows of the dome were permanently shut to keep the birds out. Since a major gas fire in the kitchen, cooking in the heritage building has been forbidden. Food is now brought from outside and warmed on electric heaters. Thankfully the parliamentary staff seems to have successfully tackled the monkey menace. There was a time when simians roamed the circular verandahs.

Daunting Task

The Jal Jeevan Mission under the Ministry of Jal Shakti is envisaged to achieve for Narendra Modi's second tenure what the Swachh Abhiyan campaign did for his first. The mission's budget is a whopping $51 billion and the goal is set very high. At present only 18 per cent of rural households have tap water connection and the aim is to provide the entire country safe drinking water. PM Modi hopes to replicate the success of WASMO (the Water and Sanitation Management Organisation), which he established in Gujarat in 2007 as chief minister. Today, 78 per cent of rural households in Gujarat get water supply through taps. Modi has ensured that those recruited for the water ministry have domain knowledge. Secretary Parameswaran Iyer has focused on projects concerning water and sanitation through most of his career, including in the Swachh Bharat Mission. Additional Secretary Bharat Lal is usually associated with his tenure as resident commissioner, Gujarat, and as joint secretary in Rashtrapati Bhavan, but he has worked earlier both with water projects in the Rural Development Ministry and with WASMO in Gujarat.

Ageing of the iconic Parliament building has been apparent for some time. *File*

Not So Meek

N C Saxena, who was a member of the National Advisory Council (NAC) during UPA time, in his recent book, *What Ails the IAS*, suggests that Manmohan Singh as prime minister did not follow Congress president Sonia Gandhi's writ unquestioningly, as has been alleged. He notes that Singh and his adviser, Montek Ahluwalia, often differed with Gandhi, who chaired the NAC. The PM was not in favour of safety net programmes such as NREGA, for example, writes Saxena. Significantly, the NAC was not reconstituted immediately after the Congress returned to power in 2009 and, according to the book, Singh reluctantly revived it in March 2010. The Food Security Bill was delayed for two years by the then PM and the Act finally passed with modifications because of pressure from Gandhi, it adds. Saxena also points out that Singh did not renew the membership of three NAC members, including the outspoken Harsh Mander, in 2012 even though Gandhi herself acknowledged their valuable contributions.

Faces to Remember

Well-known artist and Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha MP Jogen Chowdhury, whose term expires next March, has put his years in Parliament to good use. He has sketched the faces of many colleagues in the House over the years, including Manmohan Singh, Smriti Irani, Sitaram Yechury, Amit Shah, Ghulam Nabi Azad and the late Arun Jaitley and Sushma Swaraj. The artist plans to compile his parliamentary sketches for a book. Chowdhury describes his experience as an MP as, "invaluable for an artist. It was like watching different characters on a stage".

Fifth COLUMN
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An *adda* with the Finance Minister

WHILE WAITING for Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to appear at the Express Adda last week in the glittering ballroom of the St Regis Hotel, I got chatting with some important businessmen. I asked them what the mood was now in Mumbai's mighty corridors of commercial power. They said without hesitation, "The mood is gloomy. Nothing is happening at all on the investment front and the government is not paying its bills so there is no improvement on infrastructure... The NHAI cannot expect roads to be built if it doesn't pay its contractors." As soon as they finished talking, these worthy gentlemen looked nervously around and said that they would be grateful if I did not quote them. So they shall remain nameless. Suffice it to say that what they said is something I hear almost daily in this city, whether I am talking to big businessmen or small shopkeepers.

In the words of one big businessman who also requested anonymity, "We had hoped that Modi's first Budget after winning a second term would indicate signs of major reforms, but this did not happen. They say that the Budget was prepared by bureaucrats and handed to the Finance Minister to read out which is why there was nothing new in it. That is unfortunate. The situation in the private sector is so grim that solutions will only be found if Modi appoints an economic czar, like he has a political czar in Amit Shah." When I asked if Nirmala Sitharaman could become that czarina, he said she had done a good thing by lowering corporate taxes but not much else had happened.

I arrived early at the Adda to get a seat close enough to the stage. I wanted a chance to ask the Finance Minister a question I have been longing to ask her about, something she said while imposing her super-rich tax in the Budget. She had said it would affect less than 5,000 super-rich Indians so she had no problem imposing it. I wanted to ask Nirmala Sitharaman if she was ashamed that in a country of more than a billion people there were only 5,000 super-rich Indians. So as soon as the floor was open for questions, I asked my question. She said she would like 'millions of Indians' to come into the super-rich bracket. What was she doing to make this happen, I persisted, and she said, "I have lowered corporate taxes, haven't I?" She smiled as she said this so I was not sure if she was being ironic or serious. But, the truth is that she will have to do much, much more as Finance Minister if we are to see that miserable figure of 5,000 rise to even 50,000 by the end of Narendra Modi's second term as Prime Minister. At the moment super-rich Indians are fleeing in their thousands to countries in which it is easier to do business.

The Prime Minister routinely announces proudly that India has gone up many notches on the international charts that measure the ease of doing business. If only he could wander unnoticed in the city that we grandly call India's commercial capital, he would discover that he has little to be cheerful about. There is a peculiar menace in the air that has intensified in his second term because petty officials in positions of huge regulatory power appear to believe that it is open season on businessmen. It is as if they are conspiring to ensure that India remains stuck in a sort of undeclared licence raj, that now comes in the form of regulations instead of licences. It is no surprise at all that investment has not picked up.

Unless it does, there is little hope that those 12 million new jobs that need to be created every year will begin to happen. Wherever I go these days, I meet fashionably dressed young men who have about them a restless, angry quality. When I stop to talk to them, they tell me that they are all educated and so do not think that they should become farmers. In any case, they say, there are too many people in every family already employed on the farm. They want real jobs, they say, jobs that will enable them to better their lives and better the lives of their children. The dream of prosperity that Modi sold them remains a dream. It is these restless, angry young men who are meant to be India's greatest asset and they are losing hope. If there is one single factor that could cause a sudden, sharp drop in Modi's immense personal popularity, some day soon, it is his seeming inability to chase away the dark clouds that continue to hover darkly over the economy. Modi's ministers who blame this enduring downturn on the global situation fool only themselves. Nobody believes what they say.

When snooping brought down a CM and a PM

history HEADLINE
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AS ALLEGATIONS of illegal phone-tapping rock the Karnataka Assembly, with the CBI investigation revealing that police were snooping in on several public figures in the state, it's déjà vu all over again for politics in India. The recent WhatsApp row and the storm it has kicked up in political corridors — while the Opposition alleged that the government had a role in the snooping, the latter brought up the "bugging" of then finance minister Pranab Mukherjee's office during the UPA regime in 2011 — is only another version of this cloak-and-dagger drama that's old hat for Indian politicians.

Flash back to the heady days of the late 1980s, when Rajiv Gandhi, once hailed as 'Mr Clean' by the media, was on the decline. And Ramakrishna Hegde, the charismatic Janata Party chief minister of Karnataka, was in the ascendant, widely seen as a potential prime ministerial candidate from the non-Congress camp. His two consecutive victories in the 1983 and 1985 Assembly elections in Karnataka had alarmed all his rivals in the Janata Party, who also nursed prime ministerial ambitions.

In 1988, media reports surfaced to the effect that Veerappa Moily, then leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Assembly, was trying to lure some ruling Janata Party MLAs to the Congress. The reports were based on some tape-recordings. Moily, instead of being apologetic for what was clearly an act of political impropriety, came out all outraged that he had been subjected to snooping.

With Hegde's detractors, particularly Subramanian Swamy, moving forward to politically ambush him, the allegation followed that Hegde had ordered the tapping of telephones of 51 politicians in Karnataka. The Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, empowered the Home Secretary to permit the Deputy Inspector General of Police (Intelligence) of the state concerned to intercept telephonic conversations of certain categories of people. Hegde's response was one of complete denial. "I practise value-based politics," he famously underlined.

Hegde failed to realise that the other side was well prepared to take the matter to a conclusive end. The issue came up in Parliament, with Union Minister of Communications Bir Bahadur Singh announcing that some 50 telephone numbers had been tapped in Karnataka. He cited evidence, including orders signed by the DIG (Intelligence), for tapping telephones of people, to back his assertion.

On August 10, 1988, Hegde tendered his resignation and was succeeded by his party colleague S R Bommai. The political objective realised, everybody gave up on the issue. Though it did not mark the end of Hegde's political career, he ceased being a front-runner for the top job.

Three years later, in March 1991, allegations of snooping resulted in another casualty, triggering the collapse of the Congress-backed Chandra Shekhar government at the Centre, barely four months after it had assumed office.

The allegation that former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi was being spied upon by a couple of Haryana policemen was as bizarre as the arrangement of a 64-member breakaway faction of the Janata Dal enjoying power with the outside support of the 197-member Congress.

On March 2, 1991, the minders of Rajiv Gandhi caught two men, Prem Singh and Raj Singh, from a roadside spot close to 10, Janpath. They were sipping tea hawked by a small-time vendor, when some people suddenly descended on the scene and forcibly took them away. Dressed in plainclothes, the men confessed to being Haryana CID personnel. According to Haryana's political folklore, Rajiv Gandhi was tipped off by Ranjit Singh, younger brother and rival of then Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala, who was among leading lights of Chandra Shekhar's Samajwadi Janata Party (Rashtriya).

> Flash back to the heady days of the late 1980s, when Rajiv Gandhi was on the decline. And Ramakrishna Hegde, the charismatic Janata Party CM of Karnataka, was seen as a potential prime ministerial candidate from the non-Congress camp

That was reason enough for Rajiv Gandhi to pull the rug from under Chandra Shekhar's feet.

The latter tried reaching out to the former to dispel all his misgivings, but in vain. Gandhi was insistent upon Chandra Shekhar's resignation. Left with no choice, Chandra Shekhar put in his papers four days later, on March 6, 1991.

As in the Hegde case, no one showed any interest in getting to the bottom of the snooping charge against the Haryana policemen. It was never disclosed, if at all, who had ordered them to spy on Rajiv Gandhi. And also, what information the two men had gathered or could possibly gather by standing in a bylane of 10, Janpath.

my life & WORK
VIJAYANTA ARYA

'Do I have to go back, my children ask me'

Delhi Police personnel on protest in the Capital last week following a clash with lawyers. *Express photo*

THERE CONTINUES to be a lot of curiosity around women in police. Every time a girl opts for khaki, those around her raise their brows in concern. How will it be like, who will marry her, how will she raise a family, oh there are unlimited work hours, what about her safety?

I remember that as an under-training officer whenever I would be out at night for patrolling or surprise checks, my parents and particularly my father would call and ask, '*Tere naal kinne gunman ne* (How many armed personnel do you have with you)?', and I would emphatically say 'Oh, there are many of us'. It's not easy for our caretakers to reconcile to the fact that their tender ones, who till recently were under constant supervision, guidance and protection, must suddenly take on the world.

Once you wear the khaki, it becomes you, it is your soul, it is inseparable. Even if the journey of a khaki-clad woman is not easy, she gives the uniform a different dimension. When 'she' is khaki, it is the colour of courage, the colour of compassion, the colour of confidence, and above all, the colour of sacrifice in the service of the nation.

> A woman police officer's competence and professionalism get judged every time she encounters a situation. There is a natural comparison with a 'male' colleague, and if he could have done it better than her

In that role, a woman is a police officer, a daughter, a sister, a wife, a daughter-in-law and a mother, all at the same time. Recent incidents in the capital and other parts of the country show that khaki faces challenges of varied kinds from innumerable quarters. And a woman police officer's professionalism and competence get judged every time she encounters a situation. There is a natural comparison with a 'male' colleague, and if he could have done it better.

Facing violent mobs is part of our routine duties, and at times, segments that are part of the crowd use the opportunity to rough up women officers, deriving sadistic pleasure from taking on women in positions of power, with khaki a vivid symbol of it. Also they look upon us as 'soft' targets. They think they can deter us from leading, from doing our duty, and compel us into retreating by violating our personal space.

However, they fail, as they do not understand that injury to any woman or man in khaki is not an assault on the individual but a collective blow against every one of us tied by the thread of khaki. We take pride in it, as we stand up for crimes against women and strive towards making social spaces safer for them.

As part of the job, like every policeman, we sacrifice own families. Most days our children have gone to sleep by the time we reach home. There are no regulated meal times, not just for us but our families too. Asked about my children's ages and classes, I often take a minute before I can reply. The first question my children, aged seven and five, ask me when I get home is do I have to go back. They know that even if I am sleeping next to them at night, I may have to leave anytime because duty calls.

More than half the time police personnel have to seek extension for their children's school homework because we forget to look into their notebooks. My children are growing up without me, literally.

Since my husband is also in the police service (Devender Arya is DCP Southwest) our days are quite similar — endless, routineless. Quality family time is difficult to come by, simply because it is unusual for both of us to be home at the same time. There is no concept of a weekend because the week never ends. And on all occasions warranting celebration like festivals, we have to be extra vigil and alert. There is also a great deal of role reversal, with both of us playing mother or father depending on our availability. But, since police personnel have committed themselves to the service of the nation, I feel families have to be ready for these sacrifices.

While all professions come with their share of hazards, this call for a little extra puts a police job apart. Every time we fall, we resolve to rise up, stronger than ever, surprising everyone, including ourselves.

I write this today, with all my love, for khaki and women in khaki. Dear colleagues, let no one bottle the genie, continue to make magic in everything that you do, wherever you go.

"Har ladai ki tarah, iss kashmkash mein bhi saath hain/Ek dusre se hum hain, hamare ik se jazbaat hain (Like every fight, we are together in this one too/It's not you and me who make we, but we are one and the same)."

Arya is a 2009 batch IPS officer currently serving as DCP, North West Delhi

Out of MY MIND
MEGHNAD DESAI

Dilli Chhodo: Time for a new Capital

I WISH the contract to renovate the surroundings of the Raisina Hills, with Parliament, the North and South Blocks, had not been awarded before the recent Emergency on the air pollution front. Although Delhi air later changed from 'deathly' to 'poor', the viability of Delhi as a habitat needs to be questioned. Delhi is overcrowded, overbuilt, with far too many cars. There is no municipal governance one can discern which has any interest and/or effectiveness in environment control. The AAP government has stopped behaving like a bunch of teenagers and begun to do serious work. But the Opposition behaves in a manner (with BJP leader Vijay Goel flaunting an SUV to defy odd-even regulations) which does not assure citizens (or even a frequent visitor like myself) that they understand the seriousness of the crisis facing Delhi.

The answer to the problem is at hand but requires boldness and an ambitious vision, which means Prime Minister Narendra Modi has to step in. There is a need to decongest Delhi. But this is also the right time, in the 70th year as a sovereign democratic republic, to ask whether India should have a brand new Capital free of the burden of memories of Old Emperors.

Delhi is a capital city by accident. It is at the gate of India, from where invaders used to come through the Khyber Pass. North India is landlocked and Delhi is crucial, for the North. Earlier empires had their capital in Pataliputra/Patna. From Alexander till Babar the conquerors came from the Northwest. The last conquerors came by sea and landed not in the North but on the coastal extremities. They only moved their imperial capital to Delhi less than a century ago. That proved a fatal choice and they did not last in their Lootyens Delhi for long.

The Republic of India has the most extensive territory, larger than any previous Empire it has seen — Hindu, Afghan, Mughal or British. It needs its own Capital. The Capital should be centrally located, equidistant between North and South, East and West. It should be commissioned by the BJP/NDA government, and designed and built by whoever wins a global competition.

But where should it be? I have one suggestion, but there could be others.

There is in the Dandakaranya the ideal ample space to build a new Capital. It is ideal because it straddles North and South, East and West. It touches states from Maharashtra to Odisha, Chhattisgarh to Telangana. It is at the heart of India. Its 90,000 sq km will have ample space and a healthy natural environment to build a fantastic new Capital for new India.

Many nations build their Capital as exclusively for government business and keep their commercial centres separate. The US has Washington DC as a special city for national politics. Malaysia has a similar arrangement. Brazil commissioned Brasilia specially as a new capital away from São Paulo or Rio. Canada has Ottawa, Australia Canberra.

Delhi will always be there as it has been. But the British constructions of 1911-1930 can be abandoned and sold off along with Lootyens Delhi to finance the new Capital. With the political Capital gone, Delhi will breathe again. It can be a proper Union Territory, not mixed up with National Capital.

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रविवार 10 नवंबर 2019

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धैर्य का फल सदैव सुखद एवं मधुर होता है

सर्वोच्च निर्णय

स्वतंत्र भारत के इतिहास का सबसे बहुप्रतीक्षित, महत्वपूर्ण और निर्णायक सिद्ध होने वाला निर्णय आखिरकार आ गया। जो निर्णय आया उसकी प्रतीक्षा दशकों से नहीं, सदियों से की जा रही थी। यह निर्णय करोड़ों-करोड़ लोगों की आकांक्षाओं के अनुरूप ही है। अयोध्या के विवादित स्थल पर राम मंदिर के निर्माण को प्रशस्त करने वाले इस सर्वोच्च निर्णय की अपेक्षा केवल इसलिए नहीं की जा रही थी कि भारतीय समाज के एक बहुत बड़े वर्ग की यह मान्यता थी कि अयोध्या का विवादित स्थल राम की जन्मभूमि है, बल्कि इसलिए भी की जा रही थी कि ऐतिहासिक, सांस्कृतिक और पुरातात्विक महत्व के प्रमाण इसी ओर संकेत कर रहे थे कि राम मंदिर के स्थान पर मस्जिद का निर्माण किया गया। यह मस्जिद को दिए गए नाम बाबरी से ही नहीं, विवादित ढांचे के आसपास बने अनेक मंदिरों से भी स्पष्ट होता था। हिंदू समाज मंदिर की जगह मस्जिद के निर्माण के बाद से ही इस पवित्र स्थल पर न केवल अपना दावा कर रहा था, बल्कि उस पर अपना अधिकार पाने के लिए हर संभव तरीके से प्रयत्न भी कर रहा था। इसके दस्तावेजी प्रमाण उपलब्ध हैं कि ये प्रयत्न लगभग पांच सौ साल से हो रहे थे। विवादित ढांचे के ध्वंस के बाद ऐसे कुछ और साक्ष्य सामने आए जिन्होंने मंदिर के स्थान पर मस्जिद के निर्माण को पुष्ट किया, लेकिन संकीर्ण राजनीतिक कारणों से उनकी अनदेखी की गई। ऐसा इस तथ्य से भली तरह अवगत होने के बाद भी किया गया कि राम इस देश में रचे-बसे हैं और अयोध्या की तो पहचान ही राम की नगरी के रूप में है। राम केवल हिंदू समाज के आराध्य ही नहीं, राष्ट्र की सांस्कृतिक चेतना के प्रेरणा पुरुष भी हैं। यदि समय रहते यह समझा जाता कि राम के बिना भारतीय मानस की कल्पना ही नहीं की जा सकती और अयोध्या के विवादित स्थल पर राम मंदिर के निर्माण को सहर्ष सहमति दी जाती तो उससे परस्पर सद्भावना का ऐसा संचार होता जिसकी अनुभूति पूरा देश करता। ऐसी स्थिति में एक मिसाल कायम होती जो देश ही नहीं, दुनिया को भी प्रेरणा देने का काम करती। दुर्भाग्य से एक महान अवसर गंवा दिया गया। इस पर अफसोस जताने के साथ ही यह समझा जाना चाहिए कि ऐसा किन कारणों से हुआ ताकि भविष्य के लिए सबक सीखा जा सके। यह अच्छा-बिल्कुल अच्छा नहीं हुआ कि आक्रमणकारी बाबर को राम के बराबर खड़ा करने की कोशिश की गई और इस क्रम में यहां तक पूछा गया कि इसके क्या प्रमाण हैं कि राम का जन्म अयोध्या में हुआ था?

अब उचित यही है कि अयोध्या में भव्य राम मंदिर निर्माण की अभिलाषा राष्ट्रीय आकांक्षा का रूप ले और उसमें सभी की सहमति शामिल हो

सुप्रीम कोर्ट के फैसले को सबको स्वीकार करना ही होगा, क्योंकि इससे ही उस सद्भाव की पूर्ति होगी जिसकी देश को आवश्यकता है। इससे इन्कार नहीं कि इस फैसले से कुछ लोगों को मायूसी होगी, लेकिन कोई भी समाज हो वह नियम-कानूनों से ही चलता है और ऐसा कोई फैसला नहीं हो सकता जो सबको समान रूप से संतुष्ट कर सके। चूंकि सर्वोच्च न्यायालय से बड़ी कोई अदालत नहीं इसलिए उसके फैसले को स्वीकार करने के अलावा और कोई उपाय भी नहीं। अब उचित यही है कि अयोध्या में भव्य राम मंदिर निर्माण की अभिलाषा राष्ट्रीय आकांक्षा का रूप ले और उसमें सभी की सहमति शामिल हो। यह मंदिर एक ऐसी साझा सांस्कृतिक धरोहर बनना चाहिए जो उन मूल्यों और मर्यादाओं का प्रतिनिधित्व करे जिनके संदर्भ में रामराज्य का उल्लेख किया जाता है। मर्यादा पुरुषोत्तम माने जाने वाले राम किसी एक समुदाय या वर्ग तक सीमित नहीं किए जा सकते। इसका सबसे बड़ा प्रमाण रामराज्य की कल्पना साकार होने की कामना है। यह कामना और बलवती होनी चाहिए और इसमें सभी को भागीदार बनना चाहिए। इससे ही अयोध्या में बनने वाले राम मंदिर की भव्यता और महत्ता स्थापित होगी। राम मंदिर के निर्माण की दिशा में आगे बढ़ने के साथ ही अयोध्या में मुस्लिम पक्ष को मस्जिद निर्माण के लिए जो पांच एकड़ जमीन दी गई उसके प्रति भी सभी की सहमति होनी चाहिए। यह सहमति व्यक्त करने के साथ-साथ यह भी ध्यान दिया जाना चाहिए कि सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने आस्था के आधार पर निर्णय नहीं दिया, लेकिन उसने आस्था की अनदेखी भी नहीं की। शायद इसीलिए उसने यदि रामलला को विवादित स्थल सौंपा तो मस्जिद के लिए भी भूमि उपलब्ध कराने का आदेश दिया। स्पष्ट है कि न्याय केवल हुआ ही नहीं, बल्कि होते हुए दिखा भी है। अयोध्या विवाद पर सुप्रीम कोर्ट के फैसले के साथ ही एक अभिलाषा पूरी हुई, लेकिन अभिलाषाएं और भी हैं और वे सब तब पूरी होंगी जब राष्ट्रीय एकजुटता और समरसता को राम का काज समझा जाएगा। यह समय हर्ष-विषाद का नहीं, बल्कि संतोष भाव के साथ राम मंदिर के साथ-साथ राष्ट्र निर्माण के लक्ष्य को पूरा करने को सर्वोच्च प्राथमिकता देने का है। ऐसा करते हुए यहध्यान रखना ही होगा कि सबका कल्याण ही रामराज्य की संकल्पना है।

नया इतिहास लिखने वाला फैसला

संजय गुप्त

उच्चतम न्यायालय के फैसले के साथ ही अयोध्या विवाद को लेकर हो रही राजनीति का पटाक्षेप तो होना ही चाहिए, हिंदू-मुस्लिम समाज के बीच की दूरियों को भी खत्म किया जाना चाहिए

जिस फैसले की प्रतीक्षा पूरा देश दशकों से नहीं, बल्कि सदियों से कर रहा था वह आखिरकार उच्चतम न्यायालय की ओर से सुना दिया गया। यह सचमुच एक नए इतिहास का निर्माण करने वाला फैसला है। यह नया इतिहास लिखने की जिम्मेदारी भारत के सभी लोगों की है। इस जिम्मेदारी का निर्वाह न्याय के प्रति सम्मान भाव प्रकट करने से ही हो सकेगा। भारत के मुख्य न्यायाधीश जस्टिस रंजन गोगोई की अध्यक्षता वाली पांच सदस्यीय संवैधानिक पीठ ने अयोध्या मामले का पटाक्षेप कर एक नया अध्याय लिखने का काम किया है। इसीलिए उसका फैसला मील का पत्थर है। इस फैसले के लिए संविधान पीठ को भी बधाई दी जानी चाहिए। अपने इस ऐतिहासिक निर्णय में देश की शीर्ष अदालत ने विवादित स्थल पर मंदिर निर्माण के पक्ष में आदेश दिया। इसके साथ ही उसने मुस्लिम पक्ष को मस्जिद निर्माण के लिए अयोध्या में ही किसी स्थान पर पांच एकड़ जमीन आवंटित करने का भी निर्देश दिया। उच्चतम न्यायालय ने केंद्र सरकार को इसका जिम्मा सौंपा है कि वह तीन महीनों में एक ट्रस्ट बनाकर मंदिर निर्माण के लिए उचित कार्ययोजना तैयार करे। इस निर्णय ने हिंदू समाज की आशा पूरी कर उसे उत्साहित किया है, लेकिन उसे उत्साह के स्थान पर संतोष भाव प्रदर्शित करना चाहिए। उसे सामाजिक सद्भाव की न केवल चिंता करनी होगी, बल्कि उसे हर हाल में बनाए रखना होगा। उत्साह या असहमति के चलते ऐसा कोई कदम नहीं उठाया जाना चाहिए जिससे देश का माहौल बिगड़े। वास्तव में यह सभी का दायित्व है कि वह इस बात को सुनिश्चित करे कि देश का सामाजिक तानाबाना सुरक्षित रहे। यह इसलिए सुनिश्चित किया जाना चाहिए, क्योंकि राम सबके हैं और सबका कल्याण ही उनके जीवन का ध्येय था। इसी के लिए वह जाने जाते थे और इसीलिए सबके मन में बसे थे।

स्वतंत्रता के पहले की तरह स्वतंत्रता के बाद भी अयोध्या विवाद को सुलझाने की कोशिश हुई, लेकिन वह सफल नहीं हुई। सदियों पुराना अयोध्या विवाद समय के साथ हिंदुओं और मुसलमानों के बीच विवाद के रूप में तब्दील हो गया और उससे सामाजिक सद्भाव को क्षति पहुंची। यह क्षति इसलिए पहुंची कि अयोध्या में मंदिर-मस्जिद के कुछ पैरोकारों ने इस विवाद को वोट बैंक आधारित राजनीति का प्रश्न बना दिया। विडंबना यह रही कि उन्होंने इस विवाद को आपसी बातचीत और सहमति से सुलझाने की कोशिश ईमानदारी से नहीं की। वास्तव में इसीलिए यह विवाद लंबे समय तक उलझा रहा। 1992 में विवादित ढांचे के ध्वंस के बाद इस विवाद को नए सिरे से सुलझाने की कोशिश शुरू हुई, लेकिन वह भी सही तरह से आगे नहीं बढ़ सकी। निःसंदेह अयोध्या के विवादित ढांचे को जिस तरह गिराया गया वह ठीक नहीं था। इस ध्वंस से मुसलमान आक्रोशित हुए।

अवधेश राजपूत

यह आक्रोश इसलिए उपजा, क्योंकि मुस्लिम समाज को यह बताकर गुमराह किया गया कि बाबरी मस्जिद राम मंदिर की जगह नहीं बनाई गई थी। इसीलिए यह जिद सही नहीं थी कि जहां पर ढांचा था वहीं पर मस्जिद बने। इस जिद का इसलिए भी कोई औचित्य नहीं था, क्योंकि इस्लामी मान्यताएं यही कहती हैं कि झगड़े की जमीन पर बनी मस्जिद पर नमाज मंजूर नहीं होती।

2010 में इलाहाबाद उच्च न्यायालय ने जब इस विवाद पर अपना फैसला सुनाया तो उसे किसी पक्ष ने स्वीकार नहीं किया। वास्तव में इस फैसले से किसी का भी भला नहीं हो रहा था। विवादित जमीन को तीन हिस्सों में बांटकर इलाहाबाद हाईकोर्ट ने किसी पक्ष को संतुष्टि नहीं प्रदान की थी, लेकिन इस फैसले ने विवाद सुलझाने की आधारशिला रखी। इलाहाबाद उच्च न्यायालय के आदेश पर भारतीय पुरातत्व सर्वेक्षण यानी एएसआइ ने विवादित स्थल का उत्खनन कर जो साक्ष्य जुटाए उन्होंने यह साबित किया कि मस्जिद का निर्माण खाली जमीन पर नहीं किया गया और वहां मंदिर के अवशेष मिले। ये साक्ष्य इस मान्यता के अनुरूप थे कि विवादित स्थल पर राम मंदिर था, जिसके स्थान पर बाबर के सेनापति ने जबरन मस्जिद का निर्माण कराया। एएसआइ के उत्खनन अभियान का हिस्सा रहे केके मुहम्मद ने बार-बार यह कहा कि विवादित स्थल पर प्राचीन मंदिर होने के प्रमाण मिले थे, लेकिन उनकी अनदेखी की गई। इतना ही नहीं एएसआइ की रपट को खारिज करने की भी कोशिश की गई। ऐसा नहीं किया जाता तो शायद विवाद पहले ही सुलझ जाता।

इसमें किसी को कोई संदेह नहीं हो सकता कि राम का जन्म अयोध्या में हुआ। चूंकि अयोध्या राम के नाम से ही दुनिया भर में अपनी पहचान रखती है इसलिए ऐसे तर्क उकसाने वाले ही थे कि इसके क्या प्रमाण कि राम का जन्म अयोध्या में हुआ? अफसोस यह रहा कि देश के तमाम इतिहासकार और राजनेता एक लंबे अर्से तक यह दावा करते रहे कि अयोध्या में राम मंदिर पर हिंदू समाज का कोई दावा नहीं बनता। इस दावे को खारिज करने के लिए तमाम मनगढंत बातें कही गईं। उच्चतम न्यायालय में 40 दिन की सुनवाई के दौरान भी कुछ पैरोकार राम मंदिर के विरोध में थोथी दलीलें देते रहे। वे जोर दे रहे थे कि यहां मंदिर का निर्माण नहीं होना चाहिए था। चूंकि उनके तर्क बेतुके और हास्यास्पद थे इसीलिए उच्चतम न्यायालय ने उन्हें स्वीकार नहीं किया। अब जब उच्चतम न्यायालय ने आस्था नहीं, बल्कि साक्ष्यों के आधार पर यह पाया कि अयोध्या के विवादित स्थल पर हिंदू पक्ष का दावा सही साबित होता है तब फिर सभी को उसके फैसले को स्वीकार करना चाहिए। यह ठीक नहीं कि जब करीब-करीब सभी राजनीतिक दल और यहां तक कि सुन्नी वक्फ बोर्ड सुप्रीम कोर्ट के फैसले को स्वीकार कर रहा है तब फिर ओवैसी जैसे नेताओं को कोई बखेड़ा करने से बचना चाहिए। यह स्वागतयोग्य है कि चंद लोगों और वह भी ओवैसी जैसे सांप्रदायिक राजनीति करने वाले नेताओं को छोड़कर आम मुस्लिम समाज इस फैसले को स्वीकार करता दिख रहा है। यह भी उल्लेखनीय है कि हिंदुओं की ओर से भी इस फैसले को जीत के तौर पर नहीं देखा जा रहा है। यही सही तरीका है।

यह समय आगे बढ़ने का और सद्भाव को पुष्ट करने का है। अब कोशिश इस बात की होनी चाहिए कि उच्चतम न्यायालय के फैसले के साथ अयोध्या विवाद को लेकर हो रही राजनीति का भी पटाक्षेप हो। केवल इतना ही नहीं, हिंदू-मुस्लिम समाज के बीच जो भी दूरियां हैं उन्हें कम करने की कोशिश हो। यह कोशिश दोनों ही पक्षों की ओर से होनी चाहिए। ऐसा करते हुए एक-दूसरे की भावनाओं का आदर किया जाना चाहिए, क्योंकि यही भारतीय परंपरा है और इससे ही देश आगे बढ़ेगा।

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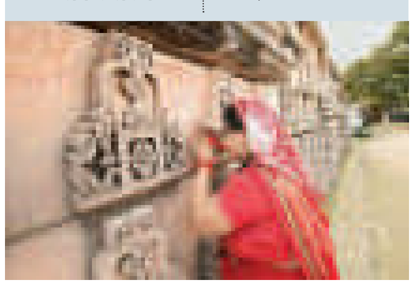
अयोध्या से आगे की राह

भारत में मंदिर सदैव सद्भाव और सामंजस्य बनाने की कड़ी रहे हैं। यह भी स्मरण रहे कि यहां मस्जिदों और गिरिजाघरों को बनाने का कभी विरोध नहीं हुआ तो अब मंदिर के लिए भी नहीं होना चाहिए। सुप्रीम कोर्ट के फैसले का सभी द्वारा खुले दिल से स्वागत करके एक नए युग का आरंभ करना चाहिए। आखिर, सदियों की प्रतीक्षा, आश्वासनों और संघर्ष के बाद अयोध्या में रामजन्मभूमि पर पुनः मंदिर बनने का मार्ग बना। इसके लिए हिंदुओं ने जो धैर्य दिखाया वह विश्व इतिहास में अभूतपूर्व है। किसी अन्य धर्मावलंबी समुदाय ने कभी कहीं इतना संयम दिखाया हो, ऐसा उदाहरण दुनिया में नहीं मिलता। अयोध्या एक अति-विशिष्ट स्थान है। इसका उल्लेख वेदों में भारत के सात सबसे पवित्र स्थानों में है। इक्ष्वाकु वंश की राजधानी के रूप में अयोध्या का सम्मान केवल हिंदू ही नहीं, बौद्ध, जैन और सिख परंपराओं में भी रहा है। स्वयं गौतम बुद्ध ने खुद को राम का वंशज कहा था। विश्व के सबसे प्राचीन ग्रंथ ऋग्वेद में सरयू नदी का वर्णन तीन सबसे पावन नदियों में से एक के रूप में रहा है। अयोध्या श्रीराम के पहले से ही सूर्यवंश के महान शासकों की राजधानी रही थी। दो हजार वर्ष पहले कोरिया की रानी सूरीरत्ना (सूर्यरत्ना) को भी मूलतः अयोध्या की ही राजकुमारी माना जाता है। इस परंपरा से आज भी कोरिया के लोग जुड़े हैं। थाइलैंड, इंडोनेशिया और कंबोडिया आदि कई देशों में रामायण के जीवंत प्रसंग मिलते हैं। अयोध्या, राम और रामायण केवल भारत ही नहीं, विश्व के कई देशों में आदर पाते हैं।

पिछले कुछ दशकों से यह गलत धारणा फैलाई गई कि अयोध्या में रामजन्मभूमि-बाबरी मस्जिद विवाद एक महत्वपूर्ण स्थल के लिए दो समुदायों के बीच का झगड़ा था, जैसा यरुशलम के लिए यहूदियों और मुसलमानों के बीच रहा है। यह सच नहीं है। मुस्लिमों के लिए अयोध्या का कभी कोई महत्व नहीं था। न धार्मिक, न ऐतिहासिक। फिर भी इसके लिए हिंदुओं को लंबा संघर्ष करना पड़ा। इसके पीछे एक सभ्यतागत चेतना है। समूचे उत्तर भारत में राम मंदिरों का लगभग अभाव है जबकि रामायण, राम कथा से जुड़े स्थल और राम की पूजा व्यापक रूप से होती है। तब क्या उत्तर भारत में राम के मंदिर नहीं बने थे? यदि बने थे तो उनका क्या हुआ? स्पष्टतः सदियों के आक्रमणों में उन सभी को सचेत रूप से मिटाया गया, क्योंकि राम केवल ईश्वर अवतार ही नहीं, मर्यादा

विविध मतावलंबियों के संबंध सभी पक्षों द्वारा किन्हीं समान सिद्धांतों का सम्मान करके ही सद्भावपूर्ण बनाए जा सकते हैं

शंकर शरण



पुरुषोत्तम शासक भी थे। जिनका रामराज्य आदर्श रूप में भी जन-गण के मन में स्थापित था। इसीलिए राम मंदिरों को मिटाना एक मजहबी मतवादी ही नहीं, एक रणनीतिक उद्देश्य भी रखता था। क्या वही मनोवृत्ति इस आखिरी चरण में भी नहीं देखी गई?

अयोध्या मामले में आरंभ से ही तथ्यों पर कोई विवाद नहीं था। मंदिर पर अतिक्रमण के बाद भी हिंदू वहां पर पूजा करते रहे और उस स्थान पर पुनः अधिकार के लिए लड़ते रहे। अंग्रेज शासकों ने भी माना था कि बाबरी मस्जिद से पहले मंदिर था, लेकिन उन्होंने इसे यूं ही रहने दिया। 1947 में आजादी मिलने के बाद हिंदुओं को लगा कि अब तो उन्हें रामजन्मभूमि मिल जानी चाहिए, मगर प्रधानमंत्री जवाहरलाल नेहरू ने उन वामपंथी विचारों और आंदोलनों को बढ़ावा दिया जिनके लिए राम और रामायण अरुचिकर थे। नेहरूजी के बाद कांग्रेसी शासकों ने भी यही रवैया जारी रखा। इतने महत्वपूर्ण स्थल के लिए स्वतंत्र भारत में केंद्र और राज्य सरकारों ने जैसी उपेक्षा दिखाई वह भी हैरत की बात रही। कई देशों में स्वतंत्रता मिलने के बाद विदेशी साम्राज्यवादी प्रतीकों, इमारतों को हटाकर राष्ट्रीय स्वाभिमान की पुनर्स्थापना की गई। ग्रीस, बुल्गारिया, सर्बिया, पोलैंड और रूस में ऐसे तमाम उदाहरण हैं। अतः भारत जैसी महान सभ्यता को भी बाहरियों द्वारा खड़े किए गए अपमानजनक प्रतीकों को हटाकर अपनी धर्म परंपरा पुनर्स्थापित करने का अधिकार था। कम से कम महत्वपूर्ण हिंदू श्रद्धा स्थलों पर तो यह होना चाहिए था।

विवादित ढांचा विध्वंस से पहले तक ऐसे अनेक मुस्लिम थे जो वहां मस्जिद के नीचे मंदिर रहे होने का प्रमाण मिल जाने पर स्थान हिंदुओं को दे देने के पक्ष में थे, लेकिन सेक्युलर-वामपंथियों ने उन्हें बरगला कर रोका। इस पृष्ठभूमि में मुसलमानों को पूरे मामले पर आत्मचिंतन करना चाहिए। न केवल पिछले दशकों की उठापटक, बल्कि सदियों का भारतीय इतिहास और दूसरे देशों, समुदायों, धर्म-परंपराओं और राजनीतिक व्यवहारों के मद्देनजर उन्हें न्याय और सत्य की तलाश करनी चाहिए। यह कोई भी देख सकता है कि इस्लाम को आदर के नाम पर दुनिया भर में जो अपेक्षा रहती है, उसका दसांश भी हिंदू धर्म-परंपरा के लिए नहीं दिखाया जाता। रामजन्मभूमि पर पिछले तीस वर्षों की राजनीतिक, वैचारिक प्रक्रियाएं भी इसका प्रमाण हैं। बाबरी मस्जिद एक्शन कमेटी, मार्क्सवादी इतिहासकार और अनेक दलों ने बार-बार अपने रुख बदले। पहले बाबरी मस्जिद के नीचे मंदिर रहे होने का प्रमाण मांगा गया। जब अनेक पुरातात्विक प्रमाण मिलने लगे तो हाईकोर्ट का फैसला मानने की बात की गई। मगर फैसला आने पर, उसे मानने के बदले सुप्रीम कोर्ट में अपील की गई। फिर, जब सुप्रीम कोर्ट में बहस गंभीर दौर में पहुंची तब विचित्र दलील आई कि 16वीं सदी के शासक बाबर द्वारा किए गए कामों पर मौजूदा न्यायालय को विचार करने का अधिकार ही नहीं। एक तरह से हर हाल में हिंदुओं को वंचित रखने की जिद रही। क्या ऐसे रुख से सामाजिक सद्भाव बन सकता है? भारतीय मुस्लिमों को इस पर नए सिरे से विचार करना चाहिए। विविध मत वाले समुदायों के संबंध केवल समानता और सभी पक्षों द्वारा किन्हीं समान सिद्धांतों का सम्मान करके ही सद्भावपूर्ण बनाए जा सकते हैं। विशेषाधिकार या एकतरफा आधार पर नहीं। अयोध्या विवाद के समाधान के बाद एक समान कसौटी बनाने के लिए खुलकर विचार करना आवश्यक है। इसी में सामाजिक संबंधों की सहजता और सद्भाव बनने की कुंजी है। इस दिशा में मुस्लिम समुदाय के विवेकशील लोगों को पहल करनी चाहिए।

(लेखक राजनीतिशास्त्र के प्राध्यापक एवं वरिष्ठ स्तंभकार हैं)

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ऊर्जा

प्रसन्नता का मंत्र

विश्वप्रसिद्ध उपन्यासकार और कवि थॉमस हार्डी का जीवन संघर्षों में बीता था। उन्होंने मानव जीवन की परेशानियों को बड़े नजदीक से देखा और बहुत संजीदगी से महसूस किया था। मानव के प्रसन्न रहने की लालसा के संबंध में उनका यह कथन अति प्रेरणादायी है, 'दर्द के सामान्य नाटक में खुशी कभी-कभार आने वाली घटना है।' किंतु दुर्भाग्यवश जीवन में खुशियों के बारे में इस कड़वी और कालातीत सच्चाई को हम जीवनपर्यंत समझ ही नहीं पाते हैं और खुशियां प्राप्त करने की राह महज एक मृगमरीचिका बनकर रह जाती है।

दुनिया में हर व्यक्ति खुश रहना चाहता है। खुशी प्राप्त करने की मानव स्वभाव के इस लिहाज से यहां पर एक प्रश्न का उठना काफी लाजिमी हो जाता है कि आखिर एक इंसान क्या करे जो वह हमेशा खुश रहे और उदासी का साया कभी भी उसके जीवन में दुख का सौगात लेकर नहीं आ पाए। वैसे गौर से सोचें तो यह समझते देर नहीं लगती है कि हमारा खुश होना और दुखी होना हमारी मनोस्थिति पर निर्भर करता है। मन में उमंग हो और सब कुछ अच्छा चल रहा हो तो हम खुद को खुशी से लबरेज महसूस करते हैं। किंतु जब मन विषाद से भरा हो, दर्द हो और कुछ भी आपकी सोच के अनुकूल नहीं हो रहा हो तो फिर मन उदासियों से भर जाता है। अर्थात इंसान का मन उसकी खुशियों की चाभी के रूप में काम करता है।

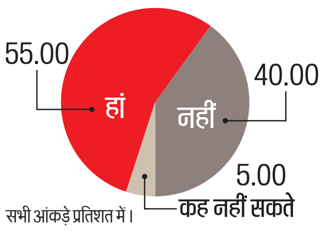
इसका आशय यह है कि खुश रहने के लिए हमें अपने मन को समझाना होगा। इसके लिए गौतम बुद्ध ने बहुत अच्छी बातें बताई हैं। उन्होंने कहा है कि प्रसन्न रहना एक कला है और इसके लिए बीते हुए कल पर सोचना बंद करने और दूसरों से खुद की तुलना पर रोक लगाने की जरूरत है। जब हम बीती हुई घटनाओं पर पश्चाताप करने लगते हैं और दूसरों के तथाकथित खूबसूरत शीशे में खुद का अक्स ढूंढने लगते हैं तो मन का भाव कसैला हो उठता है। वर्तमान में रहते हुए और खुद के जीवन को ईश्वर की सर्वोत्तम रचना समझकर जीवन जीने में ही प्रसन्न रहने का मूल मंत्र छुपा होता है।

श्रीप्रकाश शर्मा

जागरण जनमत

कल का परिणाम

क्या नोटबंदी का फैसला अपने उद्देश्यों में सफल रहा?



सभी आंकड़े प्रतिशत में।

आज का सवाल

क्या अयोध्या पर सुप्रीम कोर्ट के फैसले से देश में सामाजिक तानाबाना मजबूत होगा?

अपनी राय और अधिक लोगों तक पहुंचाने के लिए अपने मोबाइल के मैसेज बॉक्स में जाकर **POLL** लिखें, स्पेस देकर **Y, N** या **C** लिखकर 57272 पर भेजें
Y –हां, **N**–नहीं, **C**–कह नहीं सकते

परिणाम जागरण इंटरनेट संस्करण के पाठकों का मत है।

जनपथ

तोड़े संग–संग बैठकर सत्ता के सब ग्रास,
अब करवाने में जुटे अपना ही परिहास।
अपना ही परिहास भाजपा अरु शिवसेना,
कभी साथ थे आज न मिलते दिखते नैना।
विपक्षियों के साथ जा रहे रिश्ते जोड़े,
रिश्ते जिनके साथ जा रहे उनसे तोड़े।

– ओमप्रकाश तिवारी

भारतीय समाज में मंदिरों की महत्ता

सुप्रीम कोर्ट के निर्णय से अयोध्या में राम मंदिर निर्माण का मार्ग प्रशस्त होने के साथ ही यह स्पष्ट हो जाना चाहिए कि भारत में आदिकाल से ही मंदिर महत्वपूर्ण रहे हैं। हालांकि वैदिक पूजा पद्धति में मंदिर या मूर्ति की प्रमुखता नहीं थी। फिर भी विभिन्न देवी-देवताओं, यक्ष, पितर, ग्रह-नक्षत्र, ग्राम देवताओं इत्यादि की पूजा-अर्चना का चलन हमेशा से रहा है। प्रकृति और मातृ शक्ति के लिए पूजन स्थल स्थापित करने की परंपरा ही कालांतर में चलकर पौराणिक देवी-देवताओं के लिए भव्य मंदिरों के निर्माण में परिवर्तित हो गई। इसमें चौथी-पांचवीं शताब्दी से गांधार और मथुरा की बौद्ध मूर्तिकला का भी प्रभाव देखने को मिलता है। भक्ति काल में मंदिरों की महत्ता और भूमिका अपने आधुनिक रूप में विकसित हुई। मध्यकाल के दौरान हिंदू मंदिर सामाजिक जीवन और लोकप्रिय संस्कृति पर अपने प्रभाव के चरम पर थे। आरंभिक काल से ही मंदिर सामाजिक गतिविधियों के केंद्र रहे हैं। कुल और परिवार के मंदिर, ग्राम और नगर के मंदिर और सभी वर्गों में विख्यात प्रसिद्ध तीर्थ-स्थलों के मंदिर हिंदू समाज के न सिर्फ आध्यात्मिक, अपितु आर्थिक, सामाजिक, अध्ययन एवं कला के भी केंद्र रहे हैं। इसके साथ ही प्रमुख मंदिर अपने-अपने क्षेत्र में सबसे महत्वपूर्ण आर्थिक इकाई भी

अभिनव प्रकाश

हिंदू समाज के लिए मंदिर केवल पूजा-स्थल न होकर आर्थिक, सामाजिक, अध्ययन और कला के भी केंद्र रहे हैं

होते थे। मंदिरों के नित्य कर्म पर हजारों लोगों का रोजगार जुड़ा होता था। जैसे कि शिल्पकार, राज मिस्त्री और बुनकर जैसे तमाम तबके इन पर आश्रित होते थे। मंदिर उपभोग का भी प्रमुख केंद्र हुआ करते थे जहां नारियल, चंदन, चावल, हल्दी, तेल, घी और अगरबत्ती के अलावा फल-फूल जैसे उत्पादों की बड़े पैमाने पर खपत होती थी। इससे स्थानीय अर्थव्यवस्था को आवश्यक गति मिलती।

दक्षिण में तो मंदिर बैंक की भूमिका भी निभाते थे। दूसरे देशों के साथ भारतीय व्यापार को संचालित करने में मंदिर व्यापारियों को निधि उपलब्ध कराते। उस पर मिलने वाला प्रतिफल मंदिरों की समृद्धि का एक अहम कारक हुआ करता था। भारत के तटीय इलाकों में तमाम मंदिर इस परंपरा से जुड़े हैं। जैसे गुजरात का हरसिद्धि माता का मंदिर जो नाविकों और समुद्री व्यापारियों की संरक्षक मानी जाती हैं। व्यापार में मंदिरों के महत्व का अनुमान इस तथ्य से लगाया जा सकता है कि पिछली सदी के आरंभ में हमलावरों द्वारा मंदिर विध्वंस का सीधा असर समुद्री व्यापार के कमजोर होने में दिखाई देता है।

मंदिर भारत में कला के अद्वितीय केंद्र रहे हैं। मंदिरों की स्थापत्य कला समाज की कलात्मक पराकाष्ठा की अभिव्यक्ति हुआ करती थी। मंदिर कल्पना, योजना, अभियांत्रिकी, मूर्तिकला और समाज की साधन-संपन्नता के भी प्रतीक हुआ करते थे। इसके साथ ही मंदिर गीत और नृत्य, नृत्यशाला और नाट्यकला के भी महत्वपूर्ण केंद्र होते थे। भारतीय शास्त्रीय संगीत और शास्त्रीय नृत्य के विकास में मंदिरों की प्रमुख भूमिका रही। ज्ञान-अर्जन और अध्ययन के केंद्र के रूप में भी मंदिरों की महत्ता रही है। मंदिरों को दिए गए दान से और राज्य एवं बड़े व्यापारियों द्वारा दी गई संपत्ति से तमाम आश्रम संचालित होते थे। आज भी मंदिर सामाजिक हित में तमाम गतिविधियां भी चलाते हैं जिनमें स्कूल, अस्पताल और धर्मशालाएं जैसी सुविधाएं शामिल हैं।

मंदिर सामाजिक जीवन का केंद्र हैं। इससे एकता और समरसता की भावना मजबूत होती है। मंदिरों की यह भूमिका खासतौर पर विदेशों में रहने वाले भारतीयों के लिए बेहद महत्वपूर्ण है। उन्हें यह न केवल अपने धर्म और संस्कृति से जोड़े रखती है, बल्कि उनके लिए समर्थन का आधार भी उपलब्ध कराती है। तमाम संतों ने अपने सामाजिक सुधारों के जरिये मंदिरों के माध्यम से सामाजिक भेदभाव को चुनौती दी है। मंदिरों को केवल पूजा-स्थल के रूप में ही नहीं देखा जा सकता, वे हिंदू समाज के आर्थिक, सामाजिक एवं कलात्मक अभिव्यक्ति के केंद्र रहे हैं।

यह शायद मंदिरों का ही महत्व था कि विदेशी आक्रांता भी उन्हें ही निशाना बनाया करते थे। मंदिरों का विध्वंस धार्मिक उत्पीड़न से अधिक सामाजिक मनोबल तोड़ने वाला हुआ करता था। इसी मकसद से भारत में हजारों मंदिरों को ध्वस्त किया गया। राम मंदिर इनमें से एक है। उत्तर भारत में शायद ही कोई मंदिर होगा जो दो सौ वर्ष से पुराना हो, क्योंकि वे ध्वस्त किए गए। इनमें से अधिकांश का पुनर्निर्माण मराठा साम्राज्य के शिखर काल में संभव हुआ। इनमें अहिल्याबाई होल्कर का शासनकाल खासा अहम रहा। असल में उन्हें यह भान था कि हिंदू समाज में वास्तविक एवं प्रतीकात्मक रूप से मंदिरों की क्या महत्ता रही और नष्ट कर दिए गए मंदिरों का पुनर्निर्माण क्यों इतना आवश्यक है?

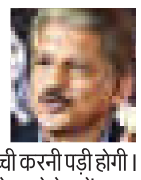
(लेखक दिल्ली विश्वविद्यालय में प्राध्यापक हैं)

response@jagran.com

ट्वीट-ट्वीट

यह केवल भारत जैसे स्वाभाविक रूप से धर्मनिरपेक्ष देश में ही संभव है कि देश की 80 प्रतिशत बहुसंख्यक आबादी अपनी आस्था के केंद्र पर निर्णय के लिए 70 वर्षों तक प्रतीक्षा कर सकती है। धार्मिक सहिष्णुता पर भारत को भाषण देने वाले पश्चिमी देशों को खुद अपने अतीत पर गौर करना चाहिए।

मिन्हाज मर्चेंट@MinhazMerchant



पांच लोग। एक फैसला जिसका 130 करोड़ लोग इंतजार कर रहे हों। इसका निर्णय करने वाली पीठ का हिस्सा होने के लिए कितनी हिम्मत चाहिए और इसमें किसी निष्कर्ष पर पहुंचने के कितनी माथापच्ची करनी पड़ी होगी। मैं उन लोगों को नमन करता हूं जिन्होंने हमारे देश में न्याय सुनिश्चित करने के अपने दायित्व का पूरे मनोयोग से निर्वहन किया।

आनंद महिंद्रा@anandmahindra

फैसले का विरोध कर रहे असदुद्दीन ओवैसी को शायद यह नहीं पता कि अयोध्या में और भी मस्जिदें हैं। उन्हें तो किसी ने हाथ नहीं लगाया और न ही लगाएंगे। यहां मसला केवल रामजन्मभूमि के ऊपर ढांचा खड़ा करने से जुड़ा था।

अद्वैता काला@AdvaitaKala

अयोध्या पर फैसले के लिए सुप्रीम कोर्ट बधाई का पात्र है। अब इसे मूर्त रूप देने के इंतजाम किए जाएं। इसके बाद हमें उन मुद्दों पर ध्यान देने में जुट जाना चाहिए जो हमारे देश को दुनिया में सबसे बेहतरीन जगह बना सकते हैं।

तापसी पन्नू@taapsee

संस्थापक-स्व. पूर्णचन्द्र गुप्त. पूर्व प्रधान संपादक-स्व.नरेन्द्र मोहन. संपादकीय निदेशक-महेन्द्र मोहन गुप्त. प्रधान संपादक-संजय गुप्त, जागरण प्रकाशन लि. के लिए: नीतेन्द्र श्रीवास्तव द्वारा 501, आई.एन.एस. बिल्डिंग,रफी मार्ग, नई दिल्ली से प्रकाशित और उन्हीं के द्वारा डी-210, 211, सेक्टर-63 नोएडा से मुद्रित, संपादक (राष्ट्रीय संस्करण) -विष्णु प्रकाश त्रिपाठी *
दूरभाष : नई दिल्ली कार्यालय : 011-43166300, नोएडा कार्यालय : 0120-4615800, E-mail: delhi@nda.jagran.com, R.N.I. No. DELHIN/2017/74721 * इस अंक में प्रकाशित समस्त समाचारों के चयन एवं संपादन हेतु पी.आर.बी. एक्ट के अंतर्गत उत्तरदायी। समस्त विवाद दिल्ली न्यायालय के अधीन ही होंगे। हवाई शुल्क अतिरिक्त।

व्यक्ति, समाज और मर्यादा

साकेत कुमार सहाय

ईमानदारी मात्र एक गुण नहीं, बल्कि स्वस्थ आचरण है। यह परस्पर साहचर्य, विश्वास, प्रेम और प्रगाढ़ता का पर्याय है। व्यक्ति अगर अपने जीवन में ईमानदार है, तो सहज ही लोग उस पर विश्वास करेंगे। अगर हम अपने जीवन में कोई भी कार्य बेईमानी से करते हैं, तो उसका अपराधबोध जीवन भर हमारा पीछा नहीं छोड़ता।

इसलिए जरूरी है कि हम ईमानदारी को अपनी जीवनशैली का अनिवार्य अंग बनाएं। इसके लिए शुरू से ही परिवार, समाज और संस्थानों को अनुशासित तथा ईमानदार जीवन निर्माण के तत्त्वों की स्थापना के लिए कार्य करना होगा। हम अपने दैनिक जीवन में रोज ही ऐसी घटनाएं देखते हैं, जिनमें काफी लोग अपने कर्तव्य और दायित्व से विमुख होते हैं। कई कर्मचारी अपने कार्यालय में देर से आते हैं, मगर पूछने पर दोष किसी और पर मढ़ते हैं।

छोटे-छोटे आचरण ही हमारे अंदर भ्रष्ट आचार-व्यवहार की नींव डालते हैं। इसलिए आवश्यकता है कि हम अपने बच्चों में प्रारंभ से ही ईमानदार और अनुशासित जीवन जीने का बीज रोपें और उसे सींचे। हमारी शिक्षा-व्यवस्था अपनी जड़ों की ओर लौटे। इसके लिए शिक्षा-व्यवस्था में बदलाव की आवश्यकता है। वर्तमान मानसिकता एक ज्ञानवान समाज के मुकाबले धनवान समाज को ज्यादा ललचायी नजरों से देखती है, जो हमारे समाज में व्याप्त बेईमानी और अन्य सामाजिक समस्याओं का कारण है। आवश्यकता इस बात की है कि प्रत्येक व्यक्ति समाज में एक आदर्श प्रतिमान स्थापित करने की कोशिश करे।

आज भ्रष्टाचार हमारे सामाजिक, राजनीतिक, आर्थिक जीवन का हिस्सा-सा बन गया है। बिना इसके किसी काम की कल्पना भी नहीं की जा सकती। इसमें आकंठ डूबा व्यक्ति अपनी गलती आसानी से दूसरे के मत्थे मढ़ देता है या उसके लिए ये सारी बातें ऐसी होती हैं, जैसे दूध में पानी मिला होता है। आज हर विभाग में भ्रष्टाचार दैत्याकार रूप ले चुका है। अब व्यक्ति की पहचान सिर्फ उसके पैसे से होती है। यह पैसा उसने किस प्रकार और कैसे कमाया, यह कोई नहीं देखता। ऐसा इसलिए भी होता है कि ज्यादातर लोग किसी न किसी रूप में यही कर रहे हैं। जो नहीं कर पा रहा, वह इसके प्रयास में है। पद, रसूख के बावजूद जो ईमानदार है, वह बिल्कुल आज के दौर में महात्मा की तरह है। पर दुर्भाग्य यह भी है कि ऐसे लोगों को कई बार परिवार, समाज भी बर्दाश्त नहीं करता। वर्तमान में लोभ-लिप्सा की वजह से भ्रष्ट व्यवस्था शीर्ष पर विराजमान है और यह व्यवस्था देश के विकास में सबसे बड़ी बाधा बन गई है।

ईमानदार बनने के लिए हमें अपनी उन प्रवृत्तियों पर अंकुश लगाना होगा, जो हमें चादर से ज्यादा पांव फैलाने को उकसाती हैं। रोटी, कपड़ा और मकान हमारे जीवन की अहम जरूरत है, पर हमारी ये जरूरतें लगातार बढ़ती जाती हैं और फिर हमारी सारी शक्ति उनकी पूर्ति में लग जाती है। इस तरह इन आवश्यकताओं की पूर्ति में हम खुद एक पैसा कमाने की मशीन बन कर रह जाते हैं। युवाकाल में हमारे रचनात्मकता के स्वप्न धरे के धरे रह जाते हैं। नतीजतन आज सामाजिक, राजनीतिक, आर्थिक जीवन के प्रत्येक पक्ष में सच्ची निष्ठा और ईमानदारी का अभाव स्पष्ट रूप से देखा जा सकता है। आवश्यकता इस बात की है कि हम जीवन के प्रत्येक पक्ष के असली मकसद से जुड़ें। असली मकसद ही इंसान को सफलता के पथ पर अग्रसर और उसकी प्रगति को चिर स्थायी बनाता है।

> राष्ट्र, समाज और संगठन के प्रति ईमानदार होना हमारी चरित्र निष्ठा का महत्त्वपूर्ण पक्ष है। यह सही है कि वर्तमान में हमारे देश में व्याप्त भ्रष्ट परिस्थितियों से कोई भी संतुष्ट नहीं। इन परिस्थितियों से निपटने के लिए जरूरी है कि जीवन के सभी क्षेत्रों में ईमानदारी और कानून के नियमों का पालन हो।

यह अकाट्य सत्य है कि जिंदगी की शुरुआत शून्य से होती है और शून्य पर ही खत्म हो जाती है। अंत में हमारा मूल्यांकन सिर्फ हमारे कर्मों से होता है। उसी के दम पर हम याद किए जाते हैं, न कि पैसों की वजह से। हर इंसान का यह दायित्व बनता है कि वह जब तक जिए, इस संसार में अच्छे कर्म करे, ताकि जब वह इस संसार से विदा हो तो पूरा जग उसके लिए रोए। अच्छे कर्मों की यह सोच हमें सत्य और ईमानदारी की राह की ओर उन्मुख करेगी। इससे हमारे अंदर समाज और राष्ट्र के प्रति सच्ची निष्ठा उपजेगी।

हालांकि यह नहीं कहा जा सकता कि हमारे समाज में सर्वत्र भ्रष्टाचार और असत्य का बोलबाला है। पर, अगर व्यापक रूप में देखें तो यही निष्कर्ष निकलता है कि समाज में नैतिकता और मर्यादा का तेजी से क्षरण हो रहा है। हम जैसा सोचते हैं वैसा ही बनते हैं। समाज में भ्रष्टाचार की उपज एक दिन में नहीं हुई होगी, यह सब कुछ नया भी नहीं है, बल्कि यह सब कम या ज्यादा सदा विद्यमान रही है। पर समाज में चूंकि नैतिकता का स्तर पहले अप्रतिम था तथा अनैतिक कार्यों के लिए कठोर दंड का प्रावधान था। पर समय के साथ यह स्थिति बद से बदतर होती गई। ब्रिटिश गुलामी को भी इसके लिए उत्तरदायी ठहराया जा सकता है। पर दोषी ठहराने से क्या होगा? देश तो हम सभी का है। इसलिए यह प्रवृत्ति कि यह सब दो सौ वर्षों की गुलाम मानसिकता, सामंतवादी प्रवृत्ति आदि की उपज है।

इसके लिए सबसे अधिक दोषी हमारा समाज, हमारी आधुनिक शिक्षा-व्यवस्था है। आधुनिक समाज धनिकों को ही योग्य मानती है, चाहे वह धन किसी भी प्रकार से कमाया हुआ हो। शीघ्र धनवान बनने और चमक-दमक को ही तरक्की समझ लेने की मानसिकता ही हमें गलत करने को उकसाती है, जिसका परिणाम है ऐसी स्थिति। जरूरत है इस घाव के रक्त शोधन की।

समाज में ईमानदारी, निष्ठापूर्ण कार्य-व्यवहार की स्थापना के लिए जरूरी है कि भ्रष्ट परिस्थितियों के निर्माण के मूल में काम करने वाली विकृत मनस्थिति में बदलाव लाने की कोशिश की जाए। अन्यथा एक समस्या का उपचार होने से पहले ही दस नई समस्याएं उठ खड़ी होती हैं। हमें इन समस्याओं के समूल विनाश के लिए उनकी जड़ तक जाना और उनके मूल स्रोत को नष्ट करना होगा। इसके लिए पहली आवश्यकता है जनमानस में जड़ें जमाई हुई निकृष्ट स्वार्थपरकता को निरस्त करके चरित्र निष्ठा की उच्च स्तरीय आस्थाओं का प्रतिमान स्थापित किया जाए।

राष्ट्र, समाज और संगठन के प्रति ईमानदार होना हमारी चरित्र निष्ठा का महत्त्वपूर्ण पक्ष है। यह सही है कि वर्तमान में हमारे देश में व्याप्त भ्रष्ट परिस्थितियों से कोई भी संतुष्ट नहीं। इन परिस्थितियों से निपटने के लिए जरूरी है कि जीवन के सभी क्षेत्रों में ईमानदारी और कानून के नियमों का पालन हो।

सरकारी हो या निजी, दोनों तरह की संस्थाओं में ईमानदारी की व्यवस्था कायम होना बेहद जरूरी है। इसके लिए संवैधानिक तंत्र यानी कार्यपालिका, विधायिका और न्यायपालिका को यह सुनिश्चित करना होगा कि समाज और व्यवस्था में ईमानदारी तथा पारदर्शिता से सभी कार्य संपन्न हों। इसके साथ यह भी महत्त्वपूर्ण है कि सभी अपने स्तर पर ईमानदारी के सिद्धांत का प्रतिबद्धता से पालन करें। ईमानदार जीवन शैली को अपना कर ही हम एक सशक्त समाज एवं राष्ट्र का निर्माण कर सकेंगे।

नदियों का जीवन

वीरेंद्र कुमार पैन्यूली

जल जीवन मिशन का एक प्रमुख लक्ष्य है 2024 तक हर घर तक पेयजल पहुंचाना। अभी देश के आधे घरों में ही ऐसी सुविधा है। उनमें भी पानी चौबीस घंटे नहीं, औसतन दो घंटे, कभी-कभी तो कुछ मिनट और कुछ स्थानों पर एक दो दिन छोड़ कर पहुंचता है। हालांकि भारतीय मानकों में सुचारु जल आपूर्ति व्यवस्था वह मानी गई है जब प्रति व्यक्ति प्रति दिन चालीस लीटर साफ पेयजल उपलब्ध हो। पर विकास के साथ और विकास के लिए भी पानी की मांग बढ़ जाती है। एक व्यक्ति की स्वास्थ्य जरूरतों, जैसे साफ-सफाई, खाने-पीने आदि में औसतन करीब पच्चीस लीटर पानी लग जाता है। ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में घरेलू आवश्यकताओं के साथ पशुओं के लिए पेयजल की जरूरत भी जुड़ी होती है। देश के करीब एक चौथाई क्षेत्रों में, जो अक्सर सूखाग्रस्त रहते हैं, आसपास जल स्रोतों के न होने से इस मानक पर खरे उतर पाना मुश्किल होता है।

फिलहाल हर घर तक पेयजल पहुंचाने के लिए अगले पांच सालों में वर्तमान प्रयासों के चौगुने प्रयास करने होंगे। इस बीच दिक्कत यह भी बढ़ती जा रही है कि उपलब्ध जलस्रोत भी प्रदूषित होते जा रहे हैं। इसलिए जल के शुद्धीकरण में बहुत अधिक समय और धन लग रहा है। पानी को बिना उपचारित किए और सुरक्षित बनाए सीधे घरों में पीने के लिए नहीं भेजा जा सकता है। पर दुखद यह भी है कि अस्सी प्रतिशत पानी, जो घरों में पहुंचता है, बेकार मान कर बहा दिया जाता है।

अभी भारत में करीब आधी जल आपूर्ति भूमिगत जल से होती है। पर अत्यधिक दोहन और सर्वत्र सतह पर सीमेंट कंकरीट से बनी सड़कों, भवनों आदि के विस्तार से बरसाती पानी के भूजल भंडारों में पहुंचने की राह मुश्किल होती जा रही है। परिणाम स्वरूप खासकर नगरों, महानगरों में भूमिगत जलस्तर बहुत गहराई में पहुंच गया है। साथ ही पास की खेती, उद्योगों या कूड़े-कचरे के भूमिगत जलभंडारों को प्रदूषित भी कर रहे हैं। इस कारण अब चिह्नित हैंडपंपों पर यह चेतावनी देने के लिए निशान भी लगाए जा रहे हैं कि इन हैंडपंपों का पानी पीना घातक हो सकता है। दूसरी तरफ उन प्रसिद्ध विशाल झीलों, तलाबों में भी, जिनसे दशकों से नगरों, महानगरों और राज्यों की राजधानियों को पेयजल आपूर्ति होती रही है, कूड़ा-कचरा, मलमूत्र और प्रदूषण का जमवाड़ा होता जा रहा है। इन झीलों का परिमाप भी कम होता जा रहा है। इसलिए आवश्यकता है कि जल जीवन मिशन के लक्ष्यों को पाने के लिए नदियों की क्षमता और संभावनाओं का भी विवेचन हो।

देश में चार सौ से ज्यादा नदियां हैं। राष्ट्रीय नदियों के संरक्षण के लिए एक अलग निदेशालय भी है। कुछ नदियां बंगाल की खाड़ी में जाती हैं, कुछ अरब सागर में। नदियों से निकली नहरें भी कई नगरों-महानगरों में पेयजल आपूर्ति की प्रमुख स्रोत होती हैं। मगर नदियां भी निरंतर नए संकटों में घिरती जा रही हैं। मनुष्य ही इसके लिए मुख्य रूप से दोषी है। अनुपचारित और तथाकथित उपचारित जल-मल, कूड़ा-कचरा और मलबा पहुंचने से नदियों का जल पीने की बात तो छोड़िए, नहाने लायक भी नहीं रह गया है। आज नदियां मर रही हैं और मारी भी जा रहीं हैं।

अगस्त, 2018 में एनजीटी को गंगा के संदर्भ में बताया गया था कि गंगा पर स्थापित सत्तर मॉनीटिरिंग स्टेशनों में से केवल पांच के क्षेत्र में गंगा का पानी पीने और सात में नहाने योग्य है। केंद्रीय प्रदूषण नियंत्रण बोर्ड के अनुसार कावेरी, कृष्णा, गोदावरी और नर्मदा की स्थिति भी बहुत अच्छी नहीं है।

अपने में प्रचुर जल प्रवाह से कुछ हद तक स्वयं को प्रदूषण मुक्त करने की जो ताकत नदियों को मिलती है, आज वे स्थितियां भी खासकर जलविद्युत परियोजनाओं के लिए बने बांधों से खत्म होती जा रही हैं। नदियों और वन जैसे प्राकृतिक संसाधनों पर मानवीय असंवेदनशीलता और गिद्ध दृष्टि भारत में ही नहीं है। पूरे विश्व में ऐसी स्थितियां हैं। इसलिए पृथ्वी और मानव मात्र को बचाने के लिए प्रकृति संरक्षण के उपायों के अंतर्गत प्राकृतिक संसाधनों को जीवित मानव का दर्जा दिए जाने की मुहिम जोर पकड़ रही है।

पूरी दुनिया में नदियों को व्यक्ति के रूप में वैधानिक मान्यता देने का उद्देश्य लोगों को नदियों से उनके व्यवहार में ज्यादा जिम्मेदार बनाना है। इक्वेडर प्रकृति को वे सारे मौलिक अधिकार देता है, जो मनुष्य को हासिल हैं। इसके अंतर्गत प्रकृति को बने रहने, अपने रखरखाव और अपने तथा अपने चक्रों को पुनर्जीवित करने और अपने कार्य करने का अधिकार है। 20 मार्च, 2017 को गंगा, यमुना को जीवित मनुष्य जैसा माने जाने के नैनीताल हाईकोर्ट के आदेश से भारत को भी दुनिया में विकसित होती इस वैधानिक प्रणाली और वैधानिक सोच में आगे बढ़ने का मौका मिला था, मगर वह फिलहाल इससे चूक गया है। क्योंकि इस आदेश पर केंद्र और राज्य सरकार की आपत्तियों के कारण 7 जुलाई, 2017 को सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने स्थगन आदेश मिल गया था।

> संदर्भ
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> मानव जीवन के लिए जैसे शरीर में आक्सीजन का होना आवश्यक है, वैसे ही गंगा यमुना या अन्य नदियां भी न मरें, इसके लिए आक्सीजन का उनके पानी में होना आवश्यक है। मगर नदियों में सीवरेज और रासायनिक अपशिष्टों के बहाव से आक्सीजन की कमी से जलचरों की मौत बढ़ती जा रही है।

आदेश में कहा गया था कि नदियां सांस लेती हैं, वे जिंदा हैं। पर्वतों से लेकर सागर तक ये नदियां समुदायों के जीवन को बनाए रखती हैं। भौतिक और सामाजिक सांस्कृतिक तौर पर लोगों का नदियों से संबंध है, इसलिए भी इनको वैधानिक मानव का दर्जा देकर समाज की आस्था को बचाना है। गंगा दुनिया की पांचवीं सबसे ज्यादा प्रदूषित नदी है। गंगा के बाद मध्यप्रदेश सरकार ने स्वयं नर्मदा नदी को वैधानिक मानव का दर्जा दे दिया था। मानव जीवन के लिए जैसे शरीर में आक्सीजन का होना आवश्यक है, वैसे ही गंगा यमुना या अन्य नदियां भी न मरें, इसके लिए आक्सीजन का उनके पानी में होना आवश्यक है। मगर नदियों में सीवरेज और रासायनिक अपशिष्टों के बहाव से आक्सीजन की कमी से जलचरों की मौत बढ़ती जा रही है।

सबको पेयजल देने के सपने को पूरा करना है, तो नदियों को जिंदा रखने की मुहिम आवश्यक है। प्रदूषित नदियां अपने पार्श्व के भूजल स्रोतों को भी क्षैतजिक रिसाव से प्रदूषित कर सकती हैं। अगर हम नदियों को जीवित व्यक्ति-सा मान लें, तो नदियों को जिंदा रखने के लिए हमारे प्रयास नई ऊर्जा और नए विकल्प पा सकते हैं। नदियां स्वस्थ और जिंदा रहेंगी, तो नदियों में आया पानी देर-सबेर घर में आए पानी का हिस्सा हो जाएगा।

देश में नदियों की सफाई की सोच 1985 में गंगा की सफाई योजना से बनी थी। नदियों को वैधानिक मानने की भी सोच को जमीन देने का काम गंगा के वैधानिक मानव स्तर को वैधानिकता देकर होनी चाहिए। हमें उन्हें केवल हमारी सेवा विकास के लिए संसाधन नहीं माना चाहिए। केंद्र सरकार ने तो अक्तूबर, 2010 में तत्कालीन केंद्र सरकार ने अपने अटॉर्नी जनरल के माध्यम से दिए गए शपथ पत्र से सुप्रीम कोर्ट को बताया था कि 2020 तक गंगा प्रदूषण मुक्त कर दी जाएगी। 2020 तो दरवाजे पर ही है।

इस मंदी के दौर में

वित्तमंत्री देर से पहुंचीं एक्सप्रेस अड्डा में पिछले हफ्ते। सो, मुझे फुर्सत मिली वहां आए बड़े उद्योगपतियों और कारोबारियों के साथ बातें करने की। बातें शुरू होने से पहले उन्होंने मुझसे आश्वासन मांगा कि उनके नाम नहीं छपेंगे। आवाज धीमी करके उन्होंने कहा, 'माहौल खराब है इसलिए मुंह खोलने से डरते हैं हम।' आश्वासन दिया मैंने तो उन्होंने खुल कर बातें कीं। कहा कि अर्थव्यवस्था पर जो मंदी के बादल छाए हुए हैं पिछले कुछ सालों से, अब और घने हो गए हैं, इसलिए कि जो उम्मीदें उनको मोदी के दूसरे दौर के पहले बजट से थीं, वे पूरी नहीं हुई हैं। 'यही कारण है कि अब भी लोग निवेश करने से कतराते हैं और यही कारण है कि हजारों की तादाद में भारतीय निवेशक देश छोड़ कर भागे हैं। हमने सोचा था कि बजट में कुछ राहत मिलेगी हमें, लेकिन उल्टा हुआ।'

आगे उन्होंने कहा कि उनको खबर है कि बजट भारत सरकर के आला अफसरों ने तैयार करके वित्तमंत्री को दिया। 'इसमें निर्मला सीतारमण का हाथ नहीं था, ऐसा कहा जाता है, इसलिए बजट के बाद उन्होंने कई घोषणाएं की हैं निवेशकों के हौसले बढ़ाने के लिए। शायद इनसे थोड़ा-बहुत फर्क पड़ेगा माहौल में, लेकिन फिलहाल मायूसी फैली हुई है।'

एक्सप्रेस अड्डा एक पांच सितारा होटल के आलीशान, चमकते महलनुमा कमरे में रखा गया था। मैं वहां जल्दी पहुंची थी इस इरादे से कि मंच के पास जगह मिल जाए, ताकि वित्तमंत्री से मैं उस सवाल को पूछ सकूं, जो कई दिनों से पूछना चाहती थी। सवाल वित्तमंत्री के एक बयान से जुड़ा हुआ था। बजट पेश करने के बाद वित्तमंत्री से जब पूछा गया कि उन्होंने 'सुपर-रिच' (अति-अमीर) लोगों पर क्यों एक नया टैक्स लगाया है, जो उनकी मुश्किलें और बढ़ाएगा, तो वित्तमंत्री ने जवाब दिया कि इस सुपर-रिच श्रेणी में सिर्फ पांच हजार लोग आते हैं। इस तरह कही यह बात मंत्रीजी ने जैसे उनको गर्व है कि हमारे इस 'समाजवादी' देश में अमीरों की तादाद इतनी थोड़ी है। मैं उनसे पूछना चाहती थी कि उनको इस बात की शर्मिंदगी नहीं होती है कि सवा सौ करोड़ आबादी वाले इस देश में इतने थोड़े लोग इस श्रेणी में आते हैं। सो, मौका मिलते ही मैंने यह सवाल मंत्रीजी से पूछा। पट जवाब आया- 'मुझे खुशी होगी जब इस श्रेणी में लाखों लोग शामिल होंगे।' एक्सप्रेस अड्डा में मंत्रीजी ने उस दिन स्पष्ट किया कि वे अपने आप को समाजवादी नहीं मानती हैं।

> गरीबी हटाने का एक दूसरा तरीका है, जिसे वे लोग अपनाते हैं जो अपने आप को समाजवादी नहीं मानते हैं। यह तरीका है ऐसा आर्थिक माहौल बनाना, जिसमें निवेशक दौड़े-दौड़े सामने आएं और निवेश इतने बड़े पैमाने पर करने लगें कि करोड़ों नई नौकरियां पैदा होने लग जाएं।

अच्छा लगा इस बात को सुन कर, क्योंकि मोदी के दौर में गलती यही हुई है कि जिन समाजवादी आर्थिक नीतियों ने देश को गरीब रखा है, उनको मोदी ने त्यागने के बदले अपनाया है। इन नीतियों की बुनियाद है गरीबों के लिए बड़ी-बड़ी योजनाएं तैयार करना, जिनमें इतने सूराख होते हैं कि गरीबों तक पहुंचने से पहले आधा पैसा गायब हो जाता हैं। गरीबी हटाने का एक दूसरा तरीका है, जिसे वे लोग अपनाते हैं जो अपने आप को समाजवादी नहीं मानते हैं। यह तरीका है ऐसा आर्थिक माहौल बनाना, जिसमें निवेशक दौड़े-दौड़े सामने आएं और निवेश इतने बड़े पैमाने पर करने लगें कि करोड़ों नई नौकरियां पैदा होने लग जाएं। ऐसा दौर तब देखा हमने जब लाइसेंस राज हटा कर निजी निवेशकों को प्रधानमंत्री नरसिंह राव ने आमंत्रित किया था, अर्थव्यवस्था में भाग लेने के लिए।

देखते-देखते माहौल ऐसा बदला कि कम से कम तीस करोड़ लोग गरीबी रेखा से ऊपर आकर माध्यवर्ग में शामिल हो गए थे। भारतीय निजी कंपनियां इतनी धनी हो गई थीं इस दौर में कि विकसित देशों में निवेश करने लायक हो गई थीं। भारत की छवि बनने लगी थी एक आर्थिक महाशक्ति की। फिर सोनिया गांधी जब आईं तो उन्होंने उन्हीं गरीबी हटाओ आर्थिक नीतियों को अपनाया, जो उनकी सास इंदिरा गांधी की पहचान हुआ करती थीं। सो, मनरेगा जैसी योजनाएं बनने लग गईं, जो रोजगार देने के बदले बेरोजगारी भत्ता देने का काम करने लगीं।

मोदी जब पहली बार प्रधानमंत्री बने थे, तो उन्होंने खुल कर मनरेगा की आलोचना की थी लोकसभा के अंदर, लेकिन उसके बाद इस योजना में निवेश कम करने के बदले उन्होंने दुगना कर दिया। वही समाजवादी आर्थिक माहौल बना रहा है। इसको बदलने के लिए वित्तमंत्री को साबित करना होगा अपनी नीतियों से कि उनकी सोच समाजवादी नहीं है।

तू डाल डाल मैं पात पात

जब समाज लंपटाय जाता है तो वही होता है, जो तीस हजारी में हुआ। चैनलों ने जो सीन लाइव दिखाए, वे साफ बताते थे कि जरा-सी बात पर वकीलों और पुलिस में मारा-मारी हो गई। वकील दौड़ा-दौड़ा कर पुलिस कर्मियों को मारते दिखते थे। एक व्यक्ति सीसीटीवी का तार खींचता दिखा। कुछ वकील एक पुलिस अफसर को मारते, धक्का देते दिखे। पुलिस भी 'एक्शन' में दिखी, लेकिन ज्यादातर चैनलों की प्रसारित कहानी में पुलिस पर वकील हावी नजर आए।

दिन भर सब कुछ लाइव आता रहा। सब खबर चैनलों पर एक से सीन रहे। पढ़े-लिखे सभ्रांत लोग आपस में गुंथे दिखते थे! ऐसी गुंडई को देख दर्शक अफसोस और डर महसूस करते थे कि यह क्या हो रहा है? जो हमारी रक्षा के लिए नियुक्त है, वही सरेआम पिट रही है। जब पुलिस असुरक्षित है, तो बाकी की क्या औकात? हम सोचते कि क्या वकील ऐसे ही होते हैं? क्या पुलिस इतनी दयनीय है? क्या आम आदमी का अदालत जाना सुरक्षित है?

चैनलों ने जम के इस तरह की गुंडई की निंदा की। चर्चाओं में रिटायर्ड पुलिस अफसर अफसोस जताते और कहते रहे कि जो जिम्मेदार हैं उनके खिलाफ सख्त कार्रवाई हो। एक एंकर कहता रहा कि यह बहुत दिनों की दमित भावना है, जो अचानक बाहर आ गई है।

पुलिस की बेचारगी अगले दिन और साफ हुई, जब दिल्ली पुलिस के अधिकांश सिपाही ड्यूटी छोड़ पुलिस मुख्यालय के सामने बारह घंटे तक न्याय की गुहार लगाते रहे। ये दृश्य अभूतपूर्व किंतु भीषण थे। आइटीओ की सड़कें पुलिस वालों से भरी थीं उनके बीवी बच्चे तक न्याय की मांग की पट्टी लिए नारे लगाते थे। चैनलों में पूरे दिन बार-बार प्रसारित उनकी पिटाई ने उनको अपमानबोध और क्षोभ से भर दिया था। यह इतना अधिक था कि जब पुलिस आयुक्त उनको शांत करने आए। पुलिसवालों ने उन तक को 'हूट' किया। फिर एक के बाद एक कई जूनियर अफसरों ने पुलिसवालों को समझाना चाहा। वे तब भी न माने। उनका कहना था कि जो सबकी रक्षा के लिए हैं, अगर वही असुरक्षित हैं, तो उनकी सुरक्षा कौन करेगा? हमारे कई अफसरों को मारा गया, उनको चोटें आईं। पुलिस की गाड़ियां जलाई गईं। उनकी बंदूकें छीनने की कोशिश की गई। वे अपने दो अफसरों के सस्पेन्शन से नाराज थे। उनके बड़े अधिकारी उनको न्याय दिलाने के लिए बड़ी अदालत में अपील नहीं किए, इस पर वे बहुत नाराज थे।

शाम को सारे सीन इंडिया गेट से आए। देर तक वहां भी प्रदर्शन किया, उनकी नाराजी बनी रही। मुश्किल से वे वहां से टले।

इस बीच साकेत कोर्ट के वीडियो ने बहुत कुछ प्रमाणित कर दिया। सीन में आन ड्यूटी, अपनी मोटर साइकिल पर सवार एक पुलिस अफसर की पीठ पर सफेद कमीज पहने एक तगड़े से आदमी ने पहले दो बार कोहनी मारी, फिर गाल पर दो तमाचे मारे, फिर उसे हेलमेट मारा। जवाब में उसने मोटर सइकिल भगा कर अपनी जान बचाई!

> एक चैनल ने हवा में कुल आठ किस्म के जहरीले पदार्थ घुले होने का दावा कर हमारे जैसों को तो एकदम डरा दिया कि अब गए बेटा! मगर ज्यों ही हमने हवा विशेषज्ञों, एंकरों और रिपोर्टरों के स्वस्थ चेहरों को देखा, त्यों ही तसल्ली हुई कि यह सब एनजीओबाजी है।

तीस हजारी का एक और वीडियो फुटेज दिखा कर एक एंकर ने बताया कि किस तरह कुछ वकील एक महिला पुलिस अधिकारी का कालर खींचते हुए उसे धकियाते दिखे।

प्रतिक्रिया में अगला दिन वकीलों का रहा था। उन्होंने दिल्ली की सभी अदालतों के अंदर पुलिस की ज्यादती के खिलाफ विरोध प्रदर्शन किए। कैमरों में आकर वकील पुलिस की क्रूरता के बारे में बताते रहे और न्याय की मांग करते रहे।

उसके बाद यह कहानी जांच समिति के हवाले हो गई और खबर खामोश हो गई।

लेकिन तीस हजारी कांड ने एक उपकार किया। दिल्ली की हवा के जहरीलेपन के सूचकांक को व्यवसाय बना देने वाले एनजीओज और एंकरों-रिपोर्टरों की सारी हवा निकाल दी। ऐसा लगा कि उस दिन दिल्ली की हवा शुद्ध हो गई हो। तीस हजारी की कहानी ने हवा की कहानी बजाने ही नहीं दी, लेकिन जैसे ही दिन गुजरा दिल्ली की हवा को अति जहरीला सिद्ध करने वाले आ बैठे। एक चैनल ने हवा में कुल आठ किस्म के जहरीले पदार्थ घुले होने का दावा कर हमारे जैसों को तो एकदम डरा दिया कि अब गए बेटा! मगर ज्यों ही हमने हवा विशेषज्ञों, एंकरों और रिपोर्टरों के स्वस्थ चेहरों को देखा, त्यों ही तसल्ली हुई कि यह सब एनजीओबाजी है। अगर हवा इतनी ही जहरीली होती तो उसे रिपोर्ट करने वाले क्या अब तक रिपोर्ट करने लायक होते?

यारो! प्रदूषण को राक्षस बना कर 'मास्क' और 'एअर प्यूरीफायर' न बेचो। जो क्रिकेटर कल तक धुंए के खतरे बेचता था, आजकल एअरप्यूरीफायर बेचता नजर आता है। आदरणीय मुफ्त में तो कृपा न कर रहे होंगे!

यह सब कुछ नखरे वाली नाजुक मिजाज मध्यवर्ग की खातिर और उसी के नजरिए से किया जा रहा है। दिल्ली में जो लाखों मजदूर किसान रिक्शेवाले, आटोवाले, झल्लीवाले खोंमचेवाले आदि को रोज कमाना-खाना है, तुम्हारी खतरनाक कहानी में वह कैसे जिंदा है इसकी तो बात करो!

लेकिन इस बार के अभियान ने भक्त और भगवान तक को डरा दिया और वाराणसी के शिवभक्तों ने जहरीली हवा से बचाने के लिए शिवलिंग को भी मास्क पहना दिया! क्यों न पहनाएं! जब नंदी दूध पी सकते हैं, तो भगवान भी जहरीली हवा की चपेट में आ सकते हैं! इसे कहते हैं भक्ति की भक्ति और मजाक का मजाक!

यह सप्ताह महाबली भाजपा की रोज की महाफजीहत देखने में गुजरा। धन्य है शिवसेना कि उसने बिग ब्रदर की सारी अकड़ निकाल दी। संजय राउत रोज सीएम के लिए 'पूर्व निश्चित' फिफ्टी-फिफ्टी की शर्त रखते रहे और रोज भाजपा प्रवक्ता चैनलों के जरिए अपनों को तसल्ली देते रहे कि जल्दी ही फडणवीस की सरकार बन जाएगी!

मगर अभी तक सब कुछ अधर में है! एबीपी ने बताया कि शनिवार तक सरकार बन जानी जरूरी है, वरना राष्ट्रपति शासन लग जाना है!

इस बीच शिवसेना ने अपने विधायकों को पांच सितारा होटल में टिका कर पोचिंग के रास्ते भी बंद कर दिए। तू डाल डाल मैं पात पात इसी को कहते हैं।