



**Dalitality**  
**SURAJ YENGDE**

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# The slow muffling of love by society

LOVE IS the wildest human emotion granted to the oppressed as a liberating tool. However, a dejected society wants to control the staple flow of love-energy that is light as air and heavy as a drowning thought. We've made love a conservative adaptation. Ever since childhood, love is among the first things parents and others in the family and society constantly reinforce to a child. However, that love is not the one that can confidently declare its sumptuous abilities to live the fairy tale dream delivered in the utopia of children stories.

Each child has her world and prefers living in it. She constructs identities, names, architectures, human relations, and tries to navigate the tenderness of one's emotions in that civilisation. In that childhood utopia, we find the highest achievable standards of life, mental and physical health and love as a process of human-photosynthesis. There we consume and exhale love. This world is so beautiful that one who is privileged to have such childhood often wants to live in it. The child wants to freeze the time zone of that journey. However, as soon as it notices the child living in her wildest imagination of possibilities, society seizes this from her. Mad, insane, senile are some of the oft-

repeated vocabularies inserted into children's mental dictionaries as they attempt to grow. Why is it that society wants one to regulate one's actions to a fixed discipline of life? We are capable of living the way we want to. After all, independence and autonomy are what we constantly seek.

The men in India need to be mothered, which is to be loved properly. This mothering requires mothers to affectionately indoctrinate their feminine love and fathers to withdraw their patriarchal decree. In whole, men need to be feminised in their love. The femininity of love has no gender, neither sexual orientation. It simply talks about the other in tender, calm and responsible way. The entire Indian-man make-up is to thwart motherly affections and instead gangsterise one's posture to present phallic manliness. Polygamy as a ritual of celebrating one's manhood is now part of cultural hooliganism. Patriarchy sucks up everything human values endear and instead bolsters one's filial terrors. A man is not taught about woman sexuality and her needs. In the absence of such education, the love that child was taught turns out to be a lust-pacifying anger. To mistreat a woman and denounce her sexual autonomy then becomes

a reason for one to be a man. Due to the lack of sexual dialogue in our society, many husbands and wives have difficulty encountering their suppressed needs and desires.

## FORGIVING LOVE

After repeated assaults and attacks, society asks the victim to be forgiving. How can one muster courage to deny the possibility of hatred and revenge, by matter of mere confession on the part of the convict? Love then becomes a cheap ticket sold in the market of bodies. It doesn't bring the awesomeness of its full potential. Love is not a practice, it is an ethic. One lives by it. Why love the one who is hell-bent on destroying you and ensuring that your credibility is devastated? People from mountain tops will sermon like the pontiff about the beauty of love until the assault reaches their shores. Therein they start finding self-preservation. Then one questions the credibility of love retailers who preach love as didactic. Estimating love through religion becomes smuggling of stolen human emotions.

This irreligious and badly made definition of love is only there for preaching

but not practice. Once in a while perhaps there is an occasion to celebrate the moments of love. How do you teach this to a child who has been robbed of his/her innocence, when 40-odd million child labourers toil in the field, on the road, at construction sites, begging outside temples, streets, foraging in the junkyard?

We continue to witness such spectacle and have charitable, momentary pity. Even we might think of doing something but we want to activate our most powerful brain cell — forgetfulness. We would like to forget and move on. Offer justification — we cannot do anything, or worse, 'they are in this condition because they deserved it' is our blunt reaction. We all have done something of this sort once in our lifetime. Redemption for ourselves is only what we seek. We have categorised human emotions and our response to a calamity based on one's last name.

In this practice, women and men take active part. In a society bound by the religion of endogamy, loving is a treacherous act. Love is pure and impure. Loving is poisonous vitriol. Only mad people chose to love and test the audacity of its limits. Any sane person would follow the ritual of

Indian life. Birth — teenage — grow casteist — youth — become an agent of caste — heterosexual marriage — transform into mature casteist — to children transport casteism — old age — despise everyone — death — die a casteist.

In India love is not free. It is strictly put in chains, bound for generations. If one dares to participate in love, the love giver and receiver face unmeasurable wrath. Parents and society who teach us so much about love do not demonstrate how to love. They become hypocrite agents of such troubled narration. They inject conditioned love that is impossible elsewhere but possible in caste conditions patrolled by strict rules.

The child upon witnessing such a story goes back to the doors of his/her imagination that is infused with careful possibilities. That state of free mind is incumbent to breaking barriers and halts on enjoyment of freedoms.

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**Fifth COLUMN**  
**TAVLEEN SINGH**

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# Rahul beyond Rafale

RAHUL GANDHI finds his way into this column after a long absence for two reasons. The first because the Supreme Court's ruling on the Rafale deal last week brought back memories of his childhood campaign filled with reckless accusations. The second reason is that I have it on good authority that Rahul will return soon as president of our oldest political party. I hear that when he is done with his spiritual holidays and whenever he thinks that his batteries are fully charged, he will return. Sadly, nothing else will change. The people who advised him to attack Narendra Modi where he was least vulnerable continue to surround him. And, the heir to the mighty Dynasty continues to flaunt his political heritage in that same entitled way.

In recent days, he has been relatively silent in public. But, the task of reminding India of the political birthright the Gandhi siblings believe they inherited, appears to have been taken over by his sister. On Jawaharlal Nehru's birth anniversary, she tweeted, "My favourite story about my great-grandfather is the one about when as PM, he returned from work at 3 am to find his bodyguard exhausted and asleep on his bed. He covered him with a blanket and slept on an adjacent chair." Were there no other beds in Teen Murti House? When are Nehru's heirs going to realise that instead of silly anecdotes they need to remind young Indians of Nehru's enormous political contribution? He managed to keep liberal democracy alive in India in a time when despots and military dictators ruled everywhere in our neighbourhood.

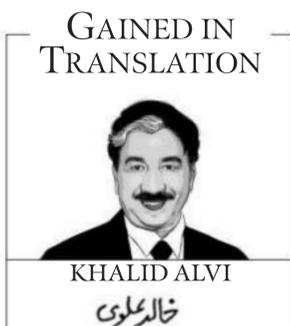
Nehru's economic policies may have taken us down the wrong road but it says something for him that not even 'rightist' Mr Modi has been able to step away from the socialist road. What he has stepped away from is Nehru's political legacy, which was his deep commitment to the fundamental principles of democracy. Modi, as I have discovered the hard way, despises dissidence and, without it, democracy immediately becomes an illiberal thing. This has become frighteningly evident since he won re-election. As has an arrogant triumphalism.

While the Prime Minister was away in Brazil, it was left to his ministers to comment on the Supreme Court's judgment on Rafale. And, they came across as bullies competing for Modi's attention. The worst performance came from Ravi Shankar Prasad, a man I have always thought of as decent and humble. He appeared on national television to demand in menacing tones that Rahul 'must apologise to the people of India.' The same words could have been said without menace and would have sounded fine. But, he chose to sound like a bully reminding ordinary Indians that the man who called himself the 'pradhan sevak' (first servant) could be turning into a demagogue. There are those who have said in recent days that he was always a demagogue and I was the one who did not see this. But, I continue to believe that Modi won a second term because ordinary Indians did not see him as a demagogue either.

He won a second term for other reasons as well, of which, in my view, an important one was the immature and very shrill campaign that his main opponent ran. On the day that the Supreme Court declared that they saw no hanky-panky in the Rafale deal, some news channels ran old clips of Rahul's election speeches. These included the one in which he declared that even the Supreme Court had accepted that the country's 'chowkidar' was a thief. He has apologised for this lie and so has been let off with a warning, but it was a stupid lie that worked against him and not Modi. On top of this, he reduced political discourse to endlessly chanting 'chowkidar chor hai' and endlessly repeating that the Prime Minister had 'stolen' Rs 30,000 crore from this deal and 'put it in Anil Ambani's pocket'. Not even illiterate voters believed that more than half of the contract's money could have been 'stolen'. Nor did they believe that Modi was personally corrupt.

It is since he became prime minister a second time that weaknesses have begun to show from behind the bluster and braggadocio, and if the Congress wants to become a credible opposition party, it needs to focus on these. The biggest chink in Modi's invincibility is his failure to revive economic growth. This has begun to manifest itself on the ground in the failure to create jobs. The other weakness evident even to observers who watch India from distant lands is his paranoia about dissidence. India is beginning to be seen as an 'illiberal' democracy. So the best way for the Congress party to revive its fortunes will be to stand up for Nehru's real political legacy: liberal democracy. This is more important now than ever before.

# In the shadow of Ayodhya



**GAINED IN TRANSLATION**

**KHALID ALVI**  
خالق علی

THE FIRST depiction of Ayodhya's social life is in the 'Uttar-Kand' of Tulsidas's epic *Kavitawali*. The poet says: "Dhoot kaho Awdhoot kaho, Rajpoot kaho, Julha kaho koi/Tulsi sarnaam ghulam hai Ram ko, jake ruche so kahay kachhu oyul/Maang key khebo, Mseet ko soyibo, Lebo ko ek na Debey koi doi/Call me a cunning person or a saint, an upper caste Thakur or an outcast weaver/One can give me any sobriquet but I regale in Ram's servitude/I ask for alms and sleep in the mosque, I neither take anything from anybody nor do I give."

Ayodhya was always a religious centre, but after Nawab Sadat Ali Khan laid the foundation of the Awadh dynasty in 1722, his court in Faizabad became a centre of cultural mingling. People started celebrating the festivals of all religions. Nawab Naseeruddin Haider appointed Lala Ram Prasad and Maharaja Mewaram as his ministers because they were from Ayodhya. An Urdu poet describes the beauty of Ayodhya: "Hazaaron deviyon ko yahan ki paryon ney pachhada hai/Nahin Ajodhya, ye Raja Inder ka akhada hai (Thousands of women of virtue have made the fairies bite dust here, it's not just Ayodhya it's Raja Indra's assembly)."

Altaf Husain Haali, a close associate and biographer of Ghalib, has described Ram endearingly as "Hubb-e Watan". "Paon uthta tha us ka ban ki tarajf/Aur khinchta tha dil watan ki tarajf/Guzrey ghurbaat mein is qadar mah-o-saal/Par na bhoola Ayodhya ka khayal/Teer ik dil mein aa key lagta hai/Aati thi jab Ayodhya ki hava (Though he was heading to the woods, his heart was in his homeland. He spent many years in alien lands but couldn't forget Ayodhya, whenever he sensed the aroma of Ayodhya's zephyr, it pierced his heart)."

Kumar Pashi's *Ayodhya Main Aa Raha Hoon* (Ayodhya, I am approaching you) is known for personifying the town. Pashi shares his longing for the city, which seems to share the poet's torment.

"Ayodhya aa raha hoon main/Main teri koh sey janma/teri godi ka pala hoon/Teri sadyon purani samwali mitti sey khela hoon/Mujhey maloom hai tu mujh sey roothi hai/Magar ab door tujhsey reh nahi sakta/Paraye desh mein guzi hai jo mujh par/Zara sar to utha aur dekh/Ke kaimi door sey tujh ko mananey aa raha hoon main/Tujhey terey hi kuch ch qissey sunaney aa raha hoon main/Wo khud sey bhi abhi main keh nahi sakte (Ayodhya, I am approaching you, I have

taken birth from your womb, played in the lap of your centuries-old soil, I know you have grown despondent, be sure I can't be away from you. I can't even recall what I have endured in the strange land. Look here, I am coming to tell you your own stories, which I can't tell to even myself)."

Interestingly, this poem was composed decades before Ayodhya was embroiled in controversy.

Kaifi Azmi's *Doosra Banbas* may not have the lyrical charm of Pashi's poem. But it does convey the message of exile.

"Ram banbas sey jab laut key ghar mein aaye/Yaad jungal bahut aaya jo nagar mein aaye/Raqe e deewangi aangan mein jo dekha hoga/Chhey December ko Shri Ram ney socha hoga/Iney deewaney kahan sey mere ghar mein aaye (When Ram returned from exile, he would have missed the woods very much. Seeing the dreadfully violent dance at his home, he would have thought on December 6, where did so many insane people come from to my home)?"

"Ram yeh kehthey huey apney dwarey sey uththey/Rajdhani ki faza raas nahi aayi mujhey/Chhey December ko mila doosra banbas mujhey (Ram got up from his pedestal and said that Ayodhya's milieu didn't suit him. On December 6, he said, he had been exiled a second time)."

In Aaliya's *Ayodhya kho Gaya*, the protagonist has a picture of Ayodhya on his wall. One day he finds that Ayodhya has disappeared from the picture and an unruly crowd with weapons has taken its place. The protagonist, a saint, cries and thinks that the God is angry at him. Suddenly, Ram appears and tells the saint that he was not angry with him but sad at the disappearance of Ayodhya. Both then go in search of Ayodhya.

Qurratulain Hyder's *Aag Ka Darya* has several references to Ayodhya as well as to Kapilvastu, Prayaag and Gaya. Even the minor characters tell the story of Ayodhya and Raja Dasharath. Beneath thick layers of philosophy lies Hyder's thesis that religion is influenced by its milieu. She cites a piece of Islamic poetry which talks of Sita as the ideal woman, also mentions Ram and a sacred place called Ayodhya. An important character, Champa, who appears several times in the novel, mentions the tragedy of Hanuman garhi, where Wajid Ali Shah ordered that Muslim clerics be fired upon in order to save a temple.

Intezar Hussain is famous for citing Jatakas and Hindu mythology in his stories. He does not refer much to Ayodhya but describes Ramayana as the real story of Hindus. The novella *Sita-haran* has one of the few references to Ayodhya. "Ayodhya is more dearer to me than Baikunth", Ram says in the novella.

Kunwar Narain's *Ayodhya 1992* captures the despondency of the times. "Is sey bada kya ho sakta hai/Hey Ram, jivan ek katu yatarth hai/Aur tum ek Mahakavya (What can be bigger than this? Oh Ram, life is a bitter truth, and you just an epic)."

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**She SAID**  
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TEN YEARS ago, when I was getting into politics, I was advised that as a woman, I can't have an impactful political career unless I came from a politically connected family or I was a well-established celebrity or someone with lots of money. But for me, politics was an opportunity to be the change I was seeking. I wanted to break the overwhelmingly negative narratives for women who sought to be equal partners in policy making. So that is how my journey began — I put on hold my entrepreneurial venture and made my family second priority since it was about changing the way women themselves perceive their space in politics and limit their participation in it.

This in no way implies that I have been the only one attempting this, but it is the story of plenty of women who continue to struggle in their individual spaces in politics and have been unable to leverage this space to make their voices heard as a critical and collective mass/effort. I say this at the cost of being criticised — it is because we women in political spaces aren't a collective voice that we have been continuously denied reservations or kept away from specific policies that encourage us rather than confine us to merely being voters, not leaders.

When the Constituent Assembly framed our Constitution, participation of women in politics was perceived as a natural outcome as it gave the country and every citizen the right to vote and participate in the political sphere. However, with every passing decade of the Republic, women kept getting sidelined and relegated to the fringe. I am happy that many regional parties are willing to change the status quo and many, including mine, have started to address this issue in earnest.

It surprises me when people who do not know enough of the Shiv Sena rush to label it as a misogynist party. The truth is far from that. Of its 91

corporators in Mumbai, 50 are women. Many women were given tickets in the open category seats, the ones not reserved for women. Through its Pratham Ti (Woman First) initiative, the party is not just grooming young women leaders, but giving them equal organisational responsibility along with important tasks. The party's election manifesto had several women leaders taking the lead in drafting it. Pratham Ti teams, who were also at the forefront of the election campaign, have now been entrusted to reach out to farmers and help address their problems.

While the sad reality is that not many women choose politics as their first choice,

# My space, my politics



Illustration: Suvajit Dey

it is the responsibility of political parties to chart out a roadmap for those who do.

It is not surprising that it is the woman who is under constant pressure to prove her worth and capability at every rung of her political growth story. She is judged on various parameters, not just internally in her political organisation, but also by political opponents outside of her own party. A woman choosing to fight this head on and move forward in her political role is always assessed as someone who got things too soon, with an implied connection to some godfather or some compromise. It is indeed strange to see two sets of reaction

for those who climb the success ladder — one for the man and the other for the woman. For the man, it's 'commitment' that ensures success, but for the woman, it is 'compromise'!

There are several examples of women politicians being publicly shamed with insinuations on their character — Jaya Prada, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Mayawati, Sushma Swaraj, Hema Malini, Vasundhara Raje, Jayalalitha, Sonia Gandhi, have all been subjected to this. Powerful women all. Now imagine women who are struggling in their own political spaces.

My political journey has been wit-

nessed by many and spoken about by many, especially on social media platforms, but it is a journey I have traversed on my own terms. I regret not one bit of it. I knew what I signed up for when I chose to undertake this journey — the uncertainties, the ups and downs, the power games, the internal fight for survival, the external persona, the personal becoming public and vice-versa, yes, everything. Nothing comes easy these days except for criticism, memes and sick and judgmental jokes cracked at someone's expense.

Since I have been the media face, it is natural that many people across the nation were invested in me and I do respect that. I have always maintained that while I have been overwhelmed with the love I have got over the years, I have been equally appalled but not deterred when I have seen people crack cheap jokes just to hit back at me.

I have always wondered if those indulging in personal slander and vulgar memes or jokes about me have paused to think that my 16-year-old tech-savvy son could be seeing those messages or if my 12-year-old daughter could be impacted? Of course my children aren't the nation's responsibility, but do pause and think before making that joke on anyone in public life — are you attacking the individual or her idea or her identity or her decisions?

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**Out of MYMIND**  
**MEGHNAD DESAI**

IT IS easy for the winner to say there is no winner and no loser. The loser is the one who has to be truly magnanimous, swallowing the humiliation of the loss and not ask for a review of the verdict. It was said immediately after the Supreme Court verdict on the Ram Janmabhoomi case on November 9 that this will provide a closure. Maybe, as to legal proceedings, it might. But will the wounds heal?

That depends on the winners showing true magnanimity. So far there has been no sign. What would truly reverberate is for the VHP to say sorry for the

# Now, RSS turn to show magnanimity

destruction of the Babri Mosque. It did serve their purpose after all. They broke the law and won the site. Instead we learn that they demand of the government that the guilty *karsevaks* have their cases withdrawn. If the government complies, that would be an open invitation to them to start on Mathura and Kashi regardless of the Supreme Court citation of the Places of Worship Act, 1991. Having broken the law once and secured their aim, what would stop anyone from repeating the same? It would have to be for the BJP/RSS to lay down the law and stop any such possibility. In 1992, the Parivar was harbouring a sense of deprivation and exclusion. Now being

in power, it should accept responsibility. Legal judgments are binding pro tem. They are based on the legal myth that the rival parties stand on an equal footing. But they rarely do. This is why legal judgments never settle troublesome issues which arise from inequalities of power. How many decisions of the colonial courts are accepted by any of us?

The Supreme Court Bench was aware of the political minefield it was treading. Hence, the unanimity as well as the anonymity, both devices preserving the names of individual justices from appearing in public. But there have been attempts already to breach the defences. There is talk of different fonts having been

used in different parts of the thousand-page judgment as a clue to who wrote what. Let us hope the secret is preserved.

Reading the many subsequent articles in half-a-dozen newspapers over the days since the judgement, it would appear that as each day passes, there are more conflicting opinions. Yet, they are not divided by obvious Hindu/Muslim binary. On both sides of the issue, members of both communities appear. That is a sign that gives one hope.

Imagine the alternative. The Supreme Court, the temple of Justice as Prime Minister Narendra Modi reminded us, could have pronounced that the destruction of the mosque — not to say the instal-

lation of the Ram Lalla in 1949, Rajiv Gandhi's unlocking of the doors and his permission of Shilanyas — being illegal, the government should establish a trust to rebuild the mosque. And that Ram Lalla Virajaman should get 5 acres in the neighbourhood to build the temple.

Could that judgment have been welcome with similar enthusiasm, not to say a sense of relief? Very unlikely. The beauty of the present judgment is that it accommodates the realities of power with requirements of legality in a way which bequeaths a legitimacy which is conducive to public peace if not harmony.

Let us face it. We may not be always so lucky.