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Ayodhya as a Text: Playing Difference and Dismantling Secularism

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Abstract:

The narrative of a nation is the narrative of its people and the narrative flux in India provides a spectacle of a theatrical kind that exhibits a nation torn in conflict between two dominant communities of India — the Hindus and the Muslims. Whence, on the one hand, India is unequivocally hailed for being a secular country on the other growing, communal conflicts are effectively catalyzing the dismantling of that secularism. The disputed structure of Ayodhya is one such highly dramatized issue fuelled time and again by the politician actors who govern the nation or those who desire to govern the nation. The communal conflicts in Ayodhya is an outcome of the powerful installation of hatred exercised through difference within the conscience of the plural Indians by the one who have a fetish for the power of governance. Ayodhya, taken this way symbolizes a text that plays the communal difference between the Hindus and the Muslims through the mechanization of violence based on the economy of subordination and exclusion, strategically plotted for individual interests.

Keywords: Ayodhya, narrative, secularism, drama, Hindus, Muslims, theatre.

1. Ayodhya: A Theatre in Performance

Politics and theatre are inseparable. Every action in politics is inherently charged with the attributes of theatricality. For the political parties the nation or the state is a stage and its citizens the audience. Thus, the political leaders are the actors and their performance constructs the narrative of the theatricality. The theatrical action involves the *modus operandi* of the different ideologies of different political parties who try to shape the destiny of a nation. These actions ruthlessly interweave the interests of individual political parties or political leaders who are addicted to the fetish of governing a set of people under them. Most of the times the actions thus avowed are spectacular attempts to capture the attention of the masses at large and to mobilise the audience who are the citizens of the nation with the party's ideology or agenda inciting them to take active part in the political theatricality. Thus, politics is the theatre and the people of nation or the world at large is its audience. According to Sudipta Kaviraj, the theatrical instrumentalisation for deliberate impact on the spectators involves three dimensions of theatre that can be closely found functioning in such drama of politics. Firstly, it involves instrumental calculations of power, secondly, discursive acts which persuade people about the rightness or appropriateness of political action and lastly, the rhetorical moves involved in the action¹. One of the theatres of the kind is the Ayodhya dispute that has been going on since Babar's reign (1526-1530 AD). Babar seems to have committed an inexcusable crime by constructing a mosque in Ayodhya for which both the Hindus and the Muslims are still atrociously aggressive towards each other. Their actions lead to dishonouring the concept of secularism which the Indian Constitution aims at achieving. This paper attempts to configure the theatricality involved in the dispute over the historical site of Ayodhya. It sets out to interrogate how the political parties in India have transformed the place of worship into a dais of debate between the Hindus and the Muslims. For lucidity and transparency a brief reconstruction of some special events of the issue of Ayodhya is incorporated here. As will be evident in due course of this paper, secularism which ought to keep religion away from politics in the real sense has alternatively, gained a subverted meaning over the years under the manoeuvre of the much trivial politics in India.

India is witnessing the theatricality of confrontation in politics of governance of the republic which has become a battlefield for the country's two most inflexible political parties — the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). These parties who are supposedly the representatives of the democratic people of India have been using Ayodhya — debating on the question of possession of the holy place, as a prime issue of religious discrimination, spiritual deprivation and spectacle of imposition frequently provoking the Hindus against the Muslims or reversely, the Muslims against the Hindus. The whole conflict centres on the possession of the site to exhibit communal supremacy establishing thereby the right to rule. Violence reached its height on December 6, 1992 when extremist Hindus demolished the Babri Mosque and seized the structure, an act eventually referred to Lucknow Bench of Allahabad High Court. Strangely enough the Allahabad High Court's verdict of September 30, 2010 has not been effective in settling the contention by dividing the "disputed structure" equally amongst the three parties — the Ram Lalla party, the Sunni Waqf Board and the Nirmohi Akhara, but is ridiculed and challenged in the Supreme Court. This part of the Ayodhya drama is dealt in the later part of the paper.

To begin with, Ayodhya is a metaphor for communal conflict in India which provides a stage where the collision between the Hindus and the Muslims is played on the difference and thereby spearheading at dismantling the decorum of secularism. This violent play of difference of the two communities that has perturbed Ayodhya has been as old as the Mughal invasion. Babar was approached by two *pirs* to construct a mosque in the holy place of Ayodhya. These two *pirs* who initially came to Ayodhya, to learn devotional methods from the sadhu Syamanand convinced Babar that if he built a mosque replacing the temple they would make Babar and his descendants the emperors of India. He then ordered his viceroy Mir Baqi to build a mosque at the site of a ruined temple. Babar constructed the mosque, but after facing great difficulties². This is an incidence of enormous proportion of replacement of religious shrine of one religion by the other which set the drama of demolishing secularism. It tells about the intrusion of the Muslims in the worshipping place of the Hindus where the desire of one community to replace the worshipping place of the other with its own has prominently surfaced. This counts as the first scene in the text of the play of Ayodhya. Though Babar is said to have allowed worshiping of both the communities within the compound and there is no evidence of suppression of Hinduism or secularism during the days of Babar the way the mosque was sought to be built by the *pirs* and their persuasion that convinced Babar was an anomaly in secularism. Sir V. S. Naipaul in one of the interviews for the *Times of India* has given his view on this³.

Babar, you must understand, had contempt for the country he had conquered. And his building of that mosque was an act of contempt for the country. In Turkey, they turned the Church of Santa Sophia into a mosque. In Nicosia churches were converted into mosques too. The Spaniards spent many centuries re-conquering their land from Muslim invaders. So these things have happened before and elsewhere. In Ayodhya the construction of a mosque on a spot regarded as sacred by the conquered population was meant as an insult. It was meant as an insult to an ancient idea, the idea of Ram which was two or three thousand years old.

Dr. N.S. Rajaram, a mathematician and author of books on Indian Heritage, condemns Babar as a terrorist. Again David Frawley, an American Hindu author and the founder and director of the American Institute for Vedic Studies in Santa Fe, New Mexico, says that Ram Janambhoomi site belongs to Hindus and it should be returned to the Hindus.

The second scene in the text of the play of Ayodhya is again on the communal desire for possessing the holy ring during the reign of the *Nawabs* in the eighteenth century. But this time the Sunnis rose against the *Shia Nawabs* who succeeded the Mughal and formed their dominant regimes in the Northern part of the country — initially in Ayodhya. The *Nawabs* offered the Hindus important offices during their reign and patronized building Hindu temples whereby the status quo of Ayodhya was raised to a place of Hindu pilgrimage. *Nawabs* depended on the Hindus for the administration was mainly with the *kayasthas*, a caste of Hindu scribes and the military was mostly run by the Shivaite *nagas*. The ascent of the Hindus in this Muslim regime brought concomitant expansion to the realm of the *Nawabs* and Nawal Ray, the *diwan* repaired several temples in Ayodhya. Safdar Jang, (1739-54) the second *Nawab*, who succeeded Sa`adat `Ali Khan granted free land to the abbot of the Nirmohi Akhara Abhayramdas for building a temple on the Hanuman's hill where stood the fortress of Hanumangarhi. However, the capital was later shifted to Faizabad and ironically the modern literature marks this shift as the liberation of the Hindus from Muslim oppression.⁴ Until the eighteenth century when the British had yet not come the Hindus and the Muslims worshipped in the same compound. With the British invasion the power of the *Nawabs* gradually eroded and collision between the Hindus and the Muslims germinated. Actions taken by the British solely for pecuniary gain and power to rule favoring one community over the other without any rational judgement aggravated the drama of difference between two communities more than it did in the sixteenth century. It was at the time of the last of the *Nawabs* of Awadh, Wajid Ali Shah who became a puppet at the hands of the British the Sunni leaders began to assert themselves against the *Shia Nawabs*. In 1855, the Sunni Muslims of Ayodhya led by Ghulam Husain claimed that there had been a mosque inside Hanumangarhi and attacked Hanumangarhi to open this mosque for Muslim worship but they were defeated by the Ramanandis who were the *nagas*. The British annexed Awadh, put an *iron railing* around the Babri mosque so that the Muslims could continue to worship within the mosque and the Hindus were forced to make their offerings on a platform raised outside the fence. Thus, peaceful coexistence of the Muslims and the Hindus was vanquished by the *iron railing* of the British and fuelled the communal drama that was initially directed by the fetish for possessing the holy site by both the communities ascertaining simultaneously the British autonomy in India. Thus, the white other entered into the theatre of politics with its policy of "divide and rule" whence secularism got amalgamated with politics only to worsen the whole situation. The Muslims and the Hindus were divided and the division was marked by the physical distance that was created through the *iron railing*. This *iron railing* made the Muslims and the Hindus stand in their *inside / outside* positions with respect to the coveted worshiping place, which in Brechtian terms is called *gestus* clearly symbolizing the ideological, social and economic rift that was deepening between the two. The British Raj took advantage of the distrust between the two communities and dramatized the conflict to further the chasm which has come to equip the country's two most dominant political parties—the Congress and the BJP to use it for their partisan interests.

The involvement of these two political parties can be considered the third scene which is still in continuum. Established on December 28, 1885, the Indian National Congress a party of Gandhi and Nehru tried to unite the people of the nation coming from various religions into one thread of secularism. This secularism respected all religions but never let alone religion. Rather religion was taken as an instrument for strengthening the political dominance and advocating power on democracy. Thus democracy and secularism being crushed and pulverized what came into existence was the governing centre constituted by leaders of individual biased interests. Religious difference was corrupted to provoke and misguide the people's conscience. Congress although initially, emphasized on the unity of all communities to fight against the colonial imperialism could not let pure democracy or secularism sustain for long. Hindus, Parsees, Jews, Sikhs, Dalits, Muslims, Buddhists and Christians did not remain under one umbrella and the Congress sponsored *lingua franca* Hindustani failed to bridge the gulf between the Sanskritised Hindi and the Persianate Urdu. The Hindu Rightist party BJP, created in 1951 as the parliamentary front of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), ruthlessly opposed Congress manoeuvre

for pluralistic construction of the nation's identity since it demonized Muslims as the other. The BJP came to power in the NDA government in Delhi in 1998 which failed in a year but came to power again in 1999 and governed till 2004. During all these years the dispute over this historical site did not rest in the question of whether it was the property of the Hindus or the Muslims but it was a metaphor of the breakdown of the republic of India that underscored the division between these communities all over the country. Thus, Ayodhya is a text that parades the divide between the Hindus and Muslims in India and this parade is protracted by many actors with their dazzling performances.

2. Actors and Performers

These actors mostly include the political leaders like Nehru, sadhus and people of eminence like Naipaul, whose presences are ambivalent by nature. One of the significant roles played in this way was by Swami Chinmayanand who established the communalist movement of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in 1964 to unite the religious organisations of the Hindus for common purposes. It propagandized the unity through a spectacular *distribution of the holy water* of the Ganges all throughout the country. Truckloads of water carried in enormous bronze pots were distributed throughout the villages in India to create a unity among Hindu communities. But why such a community? The VHP politically gained support out of such an activity as it united the Hindu India to a certain extent with marginalization of the Muslims. Another spectacular display the drama of VHP is the "liberation movement" started by the VHP in 1984 to liberate the Hindu gods by removing the mosques from the Hindu sacred places. These included along with Ayodhya the birthplace of Ram those of Krishna's in Mathura and Shiva's in Banaras. Thus, although it sentimentally surfaced the "Hindu unity," it stressed the antagonism between the Hindus and the Muslims. Their words at public hearings invoked the dubious position of the Hindus and overexposed their incapability. Indian independence of 1947 had no gainful impact on the belligerent Hindus; they were still second-rate citizens who were exploited by political parties and leaders alike to provoke the people to keep alive the drama of Hindu monopoly. A very powerful speech was delivered by Paramhansa Ramchandradas who was the abbot of the Digambara Akhara. He asked loudly, "Where are the Ramanandis of Ayodhya? Does it not interest them that their God is in a Muslim jail?" The VHP here used the sadhus as their pawns in their propaganda of dividing the nation against the Muslims. Another sadhu Ram Dayal Saran became the leader of the devotional singing, on behalf of the Ram Janambhumi Seva Committee, that was intended to go on till the Hindu God was liberated from the Muslim jail and gradually made himself the sole authority refuting others as a tough *goonda* would to amass an estimated one hundred thousand rupees per year that came from offerings of devotees. The third sadhu Ramcaritradas, the president of Ram Janambhumi Seva Committee was more a moneylender and entrepreneur than the abbot of the *Ramanandi nagas* who looked like a fearsome wrestler and had a violent reputation derived from his money lending business and other commercial activities. Rather than leading a celibate life he has a wife and two sons who are his *chelas*. Madhu Purnima Kishwar, Senior Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), based in Delhi, says that the Sangh Parivar (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)) poses a grave threat to the Indian polity and society, not so much because it mixes religion and politics, but because it resorts to criminal acts. The deposed and recently murdered *mahant* of the Ram Janambhumi Mandir, Baba Lal Das, openly stated in various interviews that after demolishing the Babri Masjid, the VHP cadres barged into the Ram Lalla *mandir*, looted the cash box containing a month's offerings and stole ancient idols worth several crore.

Now as mentioned at the beginning of the paper, following the verdict of the Allahabad High Court the parties approached the Supreme Court. Professor Mohammed Sulaiman, a senior member of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board told rediff.com reacting on the verdict that they would approach the Supreme Court as the High court has "dismissed the case on technical grounds on account of adverse possession". However, he expressed his party's happiness that "the court had nowhere ruled that the Muslims demolished a temple and built a mosque". Dr S Q R Ilyas convenor of the Babri Masjid Action Committee expressed his dissatisfaction on the verdict and argued that before the Hindus were worshipping in the *Chabutra* part of the disputed site, the Muslims were worshipping there and since there was no evidence of a temple being demolished by the Muslims there is no question of the place to be given to others and shared with the Hindus. Similar was the comment of the chairman Nitya Gopal Das of Ram Janambhumi Nyas who welcomed the Allahabad High Court verdict but gave a more aggressive remark challenging as to why one-third of the disputed land will be allotted to the Sunni Central Waqf Board stating that "Ram's history goes back lakhs of years and the history of Ayodhya thousands of years. The entire land is of Ram; we are not happy with getting just 33% of it." Das carefully added the readiness of his group for an "amicable" solution but also said that they would approach the Apex court. Haji Mahboob Ahmad said it was not a happy feeling to know that the house where he lived for years was only 33% his. The BJP spokesperson Prakash Javedekar welcomed the judgement as "positive" and Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi said that the road for the construction of a magnificent Ram temple at Ayodhya has been paved. The RSS remarked that the verdict is not anybody's victory or defeat and sought people's support inviting even the Muslims too to build the Ram temple. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad international General Secretary Dr. Pravin Togadia expressed his happiness on the verdict but also added that they would go to the Supreme Court if there is question of their defence later. The ruling Congress Party's General Secretary Janardan Dwivedi said that the verdict of the court should be accepted. These views of the different leaders expressed their positions of power but displayed more their hatred and covetousness which has no place in secularism. They in fact forgot where to censor their fetish for power. The disputed site appeared threatening and also lucrative at the same time much as the fetish that Lacan's psychoanalysis deals with. The threat lay in its symbolic character. The disputed site as such has very little significance but for the tale associated with it because it signified an object of desire which if possessed will help one community to gain supremacy over the other. This desire is the desire to fulfill the lack. The lack here is equivalent to insecurity and greed mixed with covetousness and abhorrence.

3. Spectacular Interludes

Insecurity and concomitant greed that has become monumental in Ayodhya issue merits mention of some spectacular interludes which bare the fears, intensions, precautions and the underlying hunger to display supremacy. One such was the *Ramayan Mela* held in the last week of November 1984 in Ayodhya where the *Ramayana* was recited by different sages from home and abroad. The *Mela* was organized under three different banners: one under the government of Uttar Pradesh, one under the national government, and one of Ramchandradas when the first two *melas* were successful, the one organized by Ramchandradas was a failure. The people participated in the first two *melas* showing great support to the Governments at centre and state with enthusiastic belief that governments will really liberate the Hindu God from the Muslim jail. Mrs. Gandhi, the then Prime Minister was considered a bridge between Ram and the people as Mrs. Gandhi was also a believer of the *Ramayana*. Then came the affect of the *Cow-Protection Movement* which this time turned the situation in favor of the Hindus. The sacrifice of the cows during the Bakr-Id festival of the Muslims was rioted in 1912 and 1934 greatly. The Hindus launched an attack on the Babar mosque. Hundreds of Muslims have been massacred and the Hindu-Muslim communal strife started gaining impetus in the early twentieth century. Once again, the British levied punitive tax on the Hindus. This act of levying tax on the Hindus by the British shows the autonomy with which the whites started extracting from the natives and close to this runs the tale of how indigenous contentions created gaps for the British to fill in with their power and exercise colonialism to the extent that secularism became extinct. The most interesting spectacle displaying the nervousness of the political icons could be seen prior to the verdict of the Allahabad High Court. There were speculations as to whether Allahabad verdict will at all be delivered on September 24, 2010 and if delivered whether it will be in favor of either communities in dispute entailing which was the question if the defeated party will rush to the Supreme Court and lastly if the verdict will be an ambiguous one. Sheela Dutt from *rediff.com* reported the nervousness of the leaders. The parties were afraid of people's agitation that may lead to law and order situation threatening the government if the verdict goes in favour of either of the two communities. The Mayawati-led Uttar Pradesh government deployed additional security to control any communal tension and asked her Bahujan Samaj Party to avoid making any reference to Ayodhya issue in their speeches. However, the Ayodhya issue and the forthcoming judgment were to be top issues of the country that would forecast the future years of India to a great extent. Not only was the ruling Congress party at centre nervous but the BJP was also worried since the verdict would weaken the alliance of Nitish Kumar government in Bihar where assembly election was scheduled in October-November. The central government in Delhi was worried about its impact on the Commonwealth Games which awaited many VVIP visits to India starting from the visit of President Barak Obama, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev and French President Nicholas Sarkozy and then the Prime Minister's visit to Malaysia and Vietnam.

4. An "Open-Ended" Text

All these make the Ayodhya drama work with a textual strategy. The tension in the plot of the Ayodhya drama is unceasingly growing and as evident from the statements of the eminent leaders the verdict of the Allahabad High court has widened the rift between the Hindus and the Muslims. Now they have found new grounds to argue with and there is ample space to believe that Apex court verdict when it comes will not be true to pave the way for peaceful co-existence since it can hardly be expected of the legal system of a nation to have elements sentimentality to curb feelings which breeds the antagonistic attitudes. Intolerance and violence in the name of religion will soon break one's misapprehension about India being "a land of unity in diversity" and will only witness a dismantling of the whole concept of secularism embedded in the phrase. Then, is religion the source of friction throughout the country? History only furnish evidence of secularism in the days of Akbar in India who not only allowed matrimonial alliances between the two religions and recruited people on the basis of merit rather than favoring their religious backgrounds but also abolished the tax that had long been exacted by kings from the pilgrims traveling to worship at sacred Hindu shrines. This is an example of how secularism, in its true sense can sustain and the people of the kingdom benefited. Even today religious harmony is maintained in isolated places which might not be in the knowledge of all the Indians. One such place is Hajo located at 26° 15' 0" North, 91° 32' 0" East on the North bank of river Brahmaputra in the district of Kamrup, Assam. Hajo is a *Panchatirtha* for the Hindus with temples dedicated to Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati, Lord Ganesha, god Kameshwar, and god Kamaleshwar. The temple of Madhava Deva, the Man-Lion incarnation of Vishnu standing on the Manikuta Hills, which has mentions in *Purans* and *Tantras* is also held by the Buddhists as their place of worship and Buddhists from neighboring Bhutan come there to pray. Subho Tagore, after his visit from China came there and opinion that the temple had relation even to the old belief of Chinese in Horse worship. Hajo is a place of worship for the Muslims too. The mosque Poa Mecca (quarter of Mecca) situated on the Garurachal Hills is said to be built by Iraqi prince turned preacher Ghiyasuddin Aulia in 12th century A.D. whose tomb is also there. It is also held that the mosque was built later on in 1657 by Mir Lutfulla Siraj during the reign of Emperor Shah Jahan. Being rich in such religious background Hajo has exemplary practices of inter religious tolerance. It is noteworthy that on the *Purnima* (full moon day) of the month of *Jaistha* the Hindu women go to Poa Mecca the place of Islam to pray through "nama - kirtana". On the 1st of the month of *Magha* a procession is started from the foot of Poa Mecca where the *Doloi* (the chief priest and controller of the Hindus) and the '*Gaon Burha*' and Mullah of the Muslims lead the procession side by side with their flags bearing religious emblems. After covering half the passage the Hindu and the Muslim Leaders exchange their flags to show marked respect for the one religion by the other. The procession ends at the foot of Madhava Temple. Shri Sambhu Datta Sarma writes "When the Idol of the temple comes out in visits in celebrations and goes to Sualkuchi in *Ashokastami* the Muslim volunteers hold in their hands sticks of Madhava Mandir ornamented with gold and silver and leads the procession of the Idol removing debris and obstacles, if any, on the road. They ensure that nobody wears any headgear or uses umbrella in front of the Idol. It is also relevant to mention here that in the elections to the executive council of the Hindu temple Madhava Mandir around 250 Muslim voters cast their votes."⁵ Contrary to the example of this small village in India which has been keeping alive secularism in the true sense, Ayodhya has become a battlefield displaying the crisis in secularism. And this drama seems

to be growing rather than ending. The Lok Sabha member of the Indian parliament from Hyderabad and president of All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen Asaduddin Owaisi recipient of the Excellence Award for his visionary leadership and effective representation of a minority, especially those of Muslims, in the Indian Parliament feels that India's reputation as a country governed by the rule of law is harmed by the Allahabad High Court's verdict and hence it is in the national interest to take the matter to the Supreme Court. He argues that Ram Lalla is treated as a party who owned the place by virtue of his birth but Babri Masjid was not accorded the same legal standing. This ironically shows the calculated dethroning of the God from a pedestal of worship to a nominal head of party who can be put to trial under the Indian Constitution signifying the play with gods that men have subjected to alterations with respect to their needs and requirements. He also alleged that the court's verdict was based on the dubious archaeological findings of 2004 and therefore, the verdict should not be counted as a final decision. Such fundamentalisms surrounding the Ayodhya would further stretch the issue and negotiations in the form of dialogues of the political leaders would further aggravate the rift of the communities. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in their project during 1975 to 1985 examined fourteen different sites of Ayodhya and reported to have found the pillar bases resembling bigger structure than the structure of the Babri Mosque which they presumed to be that of a temple. The report was published in the RSS magazine *Manthan* in October 1990. The *Indian Express* on July 4, 1992 reported to have found religious sculptures and a statue of Vishnu by eight eminent archaeologists at Ramkot hill. The objects examined by them included terracotta Hindu images of the Kushan period (100-300AD) and sandstone images that resembled Vishnu and deities Shiva-Parvati. They concluded that these fragments belonged to a temple of the Nagara style of 900-1200AD. During the demolition of the Babri mosque in December 1992 three inscriptions on stone were found. The most important inscription was the Hari-Vishnu inscription on a 1.10X 56 metre slab with 20 lines provisionally dated to ca 1140. The temple seemed to be dedicated to Vishnu and Ram was an incarnation of Vishnu. It was written in Nagri Lipi, a Sanskrit script of the 11th and 12th century. Ajay Mitra Shastri the Chairman of the Epigraphical Society of India and a specialist in Epigraphy and Numismatics examined the Hari-Vishnu inscription and stated it to be in high-flown Sanskrit verse in Nagari lipi. But these findings were hotly debated. The *Outlook* weekly reported that the ASI did not expose the fact that two Muslim graves were also recovered during the excavation which they photographed and video graphed in April 22. Anirudha Srivastav a former ASI archaeologist informed that in some trenches, some graves which indicated Muslim habitation were found and surmised that the existence of a mosque could also be presumed. The findings of the excavation of 2003 on the direction of the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court revealed that amongst the findings were several brick wall "in east-west orientation," "in north-south orientation," "decorated coloured floor," "pillar bases" and a "1.64-metre high decorated black stone pillar (broken) with *yaksha* figurines on four corners" as well as "Arabic inscription of holy verses on stone." The ground-penetrating survey of the Canadian geophysicist Claude Robillard with the help of radar in January 2003 only made him feel the presence of certain anomalies underneath the destructed Babri Masjid which he could not define as to what those structures might be so immediately. There were attempts by the Babri Masjid supporters to stop the archaeological surveys but the Supreme Court rejected all prohibitions. Such manipulations on the prohibition by the eminent groups on the excavations add to the humor in the text of the Ayodhya drama. The situation is ironical. On the one hand the country waits for the solution and the verdict of the court on the issue but on the other there is a delay propagandized by such acts that interfered with the archaeological surveys. The reason behind such prohibition by the Babri Masjid Action committee was that the ASI is a part of the Ministry of Human Resource Development headed by Murli Manohar Joshi who was himself an accused in the Babri Masjid demolition case. Therefore, they expressed doubts on the reports produced by the ASI.

Ayodhya issue, incident of demolishing Babri Masjid including even the Allahabad High Court verdict have now again surfaced following the stay order of the Supreme court of India issued on May 9, 2011. A bench comprising Justices Aftab Alam and Justices R M Lodha disapproved the approach of the High Court. It is ruled that the verdict on the partition of the land cannot be accepted as no party to the suit had asked for it and that the matter should be referred to a Constitution bench. The Apex court has made it clear that worship at the makeshift temple at Ayodhya will continue as was being done till January 7, 1993. However, no religious activity will be permitted on 67 acres of land acquired by the Centre in 1993 following demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 by "kar sevaks". There is indication that the matter may be referred to a constitution bench and this may again be debated on the floor of parliament leading to constitutional amendments. Mr Joshi, Sopan expresses the fear of a long judicial process "It could well be five to 10 years before the Supreme Court begins to hear the 60-year-old Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid land dispute of Ayodhya. Hundreds of thousands of pages of court documents will need to be translated from Hindi and Urdu and Persian and Arabic before arguments begin. There will be most likely a new generation of lawyers handling the case for the 25-odd parties in the dispute." ⁶ The matter as at present has remained with the judiciary of the nation and no party to the suit has yet shown any marked response to the staying of the Allahabad verdict. However, as winners and losers will come to be the game of drama will re-begin. Apart from the existing roles of the VHP, the Congress and the BJP, the Sunni Central Waqf Board and Nirmohi Akhara, the Buddhists have also come up with a claim as *The Indian Express* on Jan 07, 2011 reports. A Special Leave Petition (SLP) has been filed in the Supreme Court claiming that a Buddhist monastery (Baudh Vihar) existed at the site of Babri mosque and hence the disputed land at Ayodhya should be handed over to followers of the faith. The SLP was filed by Udit Raj, the Chairman of Buddha Education Foundation. Thus, the end is not only open but scenic setting is uncertain as to the point of beginning of the drama and the roles and the characters.

5. Textualising Ayodhya

The dispute of Ayodhya, analysed in this way becomes a dramatic text. But can Ayodhya be a text is not so easy to answer. The performers of the drama are politicians, notaries, mullahs and sadhus and violent mobs at times. The drama of Ayodhya exists in real time that cannot be edited before being performed. The drama that was originated during the reign of Babar has survived till date. Can Babar be considered the playwright of this drama then or the *Nawabs* of Ayodhya or the Congress or the BJP? The explanation of a

text is always sought in the man or woman who produces it and the single voice behind it which is that of the author.⁷ But the Ayodhya drama has more than one *sutradhar*. There is a need to reconceptualise Barthes's "death of the author with the birth of the text" when we read or consider texts like Ayodhya which are not written but which gets performed in the real world. The text is not enclosed in a concrete piece of work as in a book, but it is in performance without a manuscript and so the author question is a difficult one to answer but an interesting one to pursue. However, in this case, the author does not exist prior to the text but rather lives within the performing text. The text of conflict is plotted out strategically and the authors who are the rulers or political leaders live within the performing text fuelling the narrative. The author(s) in this text are not the past of the text but live simultaneously with the text and manipulate its sudden twists and turns through the spectacles as seen above. The text of Ayodhya has more than one author but the narrative force centres on the *dismantling of secularism*. This narrative force drives the text of Ayodhya.

Technically, it perhaps supersedes the Brechtian epic theatre that always attempts to stage reality in its state of flux. Or it can be said that Brecht's epic theatre is in live performance much before the text of the theatre is transcribed into a work. The German playwright depicted the social reality that always remained in a state of change with the intention that the audience will be able to confront the reality through the *verfremdung effect*⁸. This effect translated as "estrangement" or "defamiliarisation" would help the audience to put a check on its emotions exactly at the moment when a critical introspection of the situation played on the stage is required. Thus, the audience as well as the actors will not be lost in the illusionary effect produced by the fourth wall of the narrative of the play. On the contrary, they will become conscious spectators and would think on the political issue raised in the play and find out alternatives *nicht, sonder prinzip*, with which such problems or issues in society could be dealt with or be changed. In the drama of Ayodhya in fact, one can find a close resemblance of the Brechtian epic theatre. The actors, political leaders and mostly the sadhus mentioned above are not performing unaware. They have their own critical and selfish motives. The spectators are the people of the nation — experts who are often seen on TV screens giving their opinion on the various political issues, academia, reporters and journalists, writers, social activists, students of universities and so on who fall in one or the other community. They cannot detach themselves from the religious sentiment but also act with critical reasoning when the time comes. There where we find the *verfremdung effekt* at work in the conscience of the people of the nation.

6. Ayodhya: An Ironic Metaphor for Third World Secularism

As we have seen, the verdict of the Allahabad High Court did not douse the fire of communal conflict but raised questions of injustice from both the communities. The parties have approached the Supreme Court as the division of the disputed structure into three equal parts is considered an insult for many. The desire to possess the whole is not fulfilled and the drama of conflict in Ayodhya, thus, has become a never ending plot that will strategically repeat itself in the years to come. In the race for the acquisition of the disputed site, the parties have left behind secularism — a founding pillar Indian nation which they asserted at the birth of the nation and made them responsible for taking care of. Passing through the ages since the time of Babar India witnesses Ayodhya as a dais of dispute rather than a holy site of worship. This is ironic of the concept of secularism that the constitution of India once adopted for giving equal statue to all religions. Religion being a matter of belief and tradition held above logical analysis should be left alone but the flaw lies in the fact that religion is inanely presented for political propagandizing and communal superiority. This is how Ayodhya stands as the metaphor for a third world country which exhibits secularism in its deformed state by dividing the Hindus and the Muslims as two counterparts of the same land.

7. In Lieu of a Conclusion

The so called 'disputed structure' of Ayodhya symbolizes the conflict of two major communities in India in the most stunning way through the episodes of spectacle strategically performed by the political leaders, sadhus, mullahs and the parties in conflict. The conflict created during the reign of Babar has still persisted and acted to widen the gap between the country's two major communities. The same division was heightened by the British Raj through its "divide and rule policy." Now the political parties and religious factions have reinforced the drama with additional acts bringing Buddhists also to the scene. Secularism in India has now become a way of acknowledging the primacy of the Hindu majority.⁹ The euphoria of governing the nation to live peacefully is now irreparably reversed as the government is always in a state of being threatened. The conflict over this long disputed structure of Ayodhya shows the ways in which secularism in the nation has been played with, deprived of its esteem and dismantled of its all originality. Ayodhya provides a spectacle both within and outside the country. Inside the periphery of the nation, it aggravates the communal conflict and outside it represents the irony behind calling India a secular country. Thus, Ayodhya for the past five centuries have gained the existence of a text where the centrality of secularism as a unifying force for the two communities of the nation is challenged day in and out.

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