

**BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY**

RAM RATH YATRA

September - October 1990

The BJP's first yatra, contrary to what the pseudo-secularists claim, was not merely a part of the Mandir-Masjid dispute centred around Ram Janmabhumi at Ayodhya. Although linked to the liberation of Ram Janmabhumi, its aim was to raise three fundamental questions that had all along lurked in the collective sub-conscience of the nation but nobody had dared ask them, fearful of retribution from the pseudo-secularists who had ruled India by default since 1947. These questions were:

- > What is secularism? What is communalism?
- > Can national integration be achieved by constantly pandering to minority communalism?
- > Cannot Government reject the cult of minorityism?

The Ram Rath Yatra began from Somnath on September 25, 1990, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya's birth anniversary, and was supposed to culminate at Ayodhya on October 30, after traversing 10,000 km.

Why Somnath? And, why Ayodhya?

It was at Somnath that the assault on Hindu temples and shrines, the living symbols of an ancient nation, by Islamic invaders began ~- in 1026 the Somnath shrine was ransacked and its riches plundered by Mahmud Ghaznavi. The temple was rebuilt, only to be put to sword again, and again, and yet again. But not all the armies of the invaders could kill the spirit of Somnath. In 1950, the destroyed temple was rebuilt at the initiative of Sardar Patel as a symbol of resurgent Indian nationhood.

Shri Advani chose Somnath as the starting point of his yatra because the reconstruction of the shrine on the rubble of loot and plunder was the first chapter in a journey to "preserve the old symbols of unity, communal amity and cultural oneness". The Yatra was scheduled to conclude at Ayodhya because the liberation of Ram Janmabhumi would be the second.

This simple message of oneness, of cultural nationalism, of questioning the conventional wisdom of appeasement and minorityism, caught the imagination of the people. The yatra was a tremendous success -- no other effort at political mobilisation had drawn such a popular response. The yatra brought into sharp focus the contrast between "lok shakti", as represented by the masses, and "raj shakti", as represented by the elitist rulers in Delhi.

The moral and revolutionary dimension of the Ram Rath Yatra made it comparable to the Salt Satyagraha or "Dandi march" of Gandhi in 1930. The yatra effectively drove home the point that if Ram represented the ideal of conduct, Ram Rajya represented the ideal of governance. The sheer magnitude of popular support made it comparable to Tilak's appropriation of Ganesh Chaturthi to mobilise public opinion against colonial rule. The cultural dimension of the yatra made it comparable to the anti-cow slaughter campaign of Gandhi.

The awesome tidal wave of nationalism unleashed by the yatra unnerved the pseudo-secularists. 'Jai Shri Ram' became more than a traditional greeting: it became a roaring endorsement of the BJP's view that secularism does not mean a rejection of our history and cultural heritage, the very foundations of this great nation. The two leading champions of pseudo-secularism, Shri Mulayam Singh Yadav and Shri Laloo Prasad Yadav, swung into action, using the only means with which they are comfortable -- repression and terror. Shri Advani was arrested in the wee hours of the morning on October 23 in Bihar at Samastipur and held captive at Masanjore. In Uttar Pradesh, a brutal crackdown was ordered against the votaries of resurgent nationalism.

Ironically, despite such marshalling of the state's might, "raj shakti" had to suffer a humiliating defeat at the hands of "lok shakti". Vishwanath Pratap Singh, who had tried to cynically exploit caste and religious identities to perpetuate his rule. had

to make an ignominious exit. Today, his party, the Janata Dal, is a near extinct political species, barely alive with the help of the Congress. The disputed structure over which Muslims were egged on to shed blood by their self-appointed 'secular' guardians, does not exist any more. The man who had the audacity to halt the Ram Rath and arrest Shri Advani, today stands exposed as a venal politician driven by pelf and power.

Today, the BJP is the largest political party in the country, thanks to the journey that began from Somnath during the Navaratri of 1990. The procession that began with a handful of nationalists led by an uncompromising nationalist is today a roaring stream of nationalist fervour. The pilgrimage will be over the day Ram Lalla finds his rightful place in a temple commemorating the sacred site of his birth.