

SAHMAT

20 YEARS

1989-2009

A Document of
Activities and Statements



2 PUBLICATIONS

SAHMAT – 20 YEARS, 1989-2009
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Safdar Hashmi

1954–1989

Twenty years ago, on 1 January 1989, Safdar Hashmi was fatally attacked in broad daylight while performing a street play in Sahibabad, a working-class area just outside Delhi. Political activist, actor, playwright and poet, Safdar had been deeply committed, like so many young men and women of his generation, to the anti-imperialist, secular and egalitarian values that were woven into the rich fabric of the nation's liberation struggle. Safdar moved closer to the Left, eventually joining the CPI(M), to pursue his goal of being part of a social order worthy of a free people.

Tragically, it would be of the manner of his death at the hands of a politically patronised mafia that would single him out. The spontaneous, nationwide wave of revulsion, grief and resistance aroused by his brutal murder transformed him into a powerful symbol of the very values that had been sought to be crushed by his death. Such a death belongs to the revolutionary martyr.

Safdar was thirty-four years old when he died. Those years, during which he had initially tried to find himself in an academic career, eventually encompassed an intense period of revolutionary activity when circumstances and a maturing inclination brought together an early interest in theatre and a growing political commitment. They were years of political theatre, street theatre, and finally the growth of the Jana Natya Manch (Janam) into a forum for evolving a conception of an alternative people's theatre and culture.

The goal of strengthening bonds of democratic unity among creative artists had been an important focus of Safdar's aesthetic and political activities during this period. That it should have been achieved so significantly through his death and through the solidarity surrounding the activities of the Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust, has sustained and strengthened the resolve of those who uphold the values and objectives that Safdar has come to symbolise.

Looking back over twenty years from the vantage point afforded by Sahmat's position today in the cultural landscape, is all about recognising a scenario of momentous change. Many of the creative individuals who lent the cultural scene a depth and resonance then, have passed on. In Kaifi Azmi and Bhasham Sahni, Sahmat has lost two mentors who could always be relied upon for wise counsel when most needed. Others have withdrawn from active production and political engagement as the years take their toll. Yet several more have come in with their own concerns and commitments, to enrich the domain of cultural endeavour. And all through, we who have been associated with it would like to believe, Sahmat has remained constant in terms of its basic mission, standing up for creative freedom and cultural autonomy as values central to the realisation of a true democratic order. There may have been contingent disagreements between us as individuals associated with Sahmat, but the record of the platform as reflected in this volume, has been one of steadfast commitment to principle.

This volume brings together all the statements issued by Sahmat over the last two decades. These are statements that between them constitute, with forgivable gaps and omissions, a retrospect on the evolving scenario of cultural production and its social and political environment. The modes of dissemination of these statements has spanned the rapidly changing technological formats of the last two decades: from word of mouth and conventional mail, to internet and the e-mail. Sahmat has also depended on the media, or at least those sections that can be reliably counted on to stand up for shared values. We recognise that the media has over these two decades, acquired various mutant forms and shapes. But Sahmat, we believe, has remained constant.

Sahmat came into existence early in 1989, as a spontaneous gesture of solidarity by the cultural community after Safdar Hashmi, one of our best and brightest was killed most brutally by political hooligans. A government was in power then with an unassailable parliamentary majority, but highly infirm political convictions. As Sahmat came into existence, the Ayodhya controversy was just beginning to ascend to a new plane of violence, with ritual mobilisations by the Hindutva combine in various parts of the country sparking off savage bouts of communal rioting. Ayodhya has cast a long shadow over the country's recent history. And it has been, in terms of its various ramifications, a central concern of Sahmat's two decades.

Within weeks of the demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya on December 6, 1992, Sahmat organised a day long music festival, *Anhad Garje*, that brought together on one platform the best of the practitioners of the Sufi and Bhakti traditions from India and abroad. It was an affirmation by the entire cultural community of the broad and rich traditions of India, their openness, diversity and tolerance of all faiths. Set against a background of strident majoritarianism and the opposite, defensive reaction of minorities who were tending then to shrink into a cocoon, this was a call for transcending the narrowness that competitive communalism invariably induced.

This pursuit of all that is authentic in Indian culture and tends by that virtue to unite rather than sunder communities, took Sahmat to Ayodhya in August that year. Choosing the symbolic day of August 9, anniversary of the Quit India resolution that inaugurated the climactic phase of the country's freedom struggle, Sahmat inaugurated a cycle of cultural programmes all over the country. The best of India's musicians, theatre artistes, painters, academics and others gathered at Ayodhya, for *Mukt Naad*, symbolically lifting the siege of the historic city by Hindutva forces.

The visual and thematic backdrop to these cultural programmes was an exhibition titled *Hum Sab Ayodhya*, depicting the geographical, historical, religious, architectural and cultural evolution of the site, with all its resonances in Indian history. The exhibition was the outcome of a unique collaboration among India's most eminent historians, who worked closely with design experts to put up a visual and textual narrative of great richness.

Within three days of its opening, the exhibition was attacked by Hindutva squads, which systematically ripped up and shredded several panels. A scurrilous rumour was floated that the exhibition had questioned the very nature of the relationship between the main protagonist of the Ramayana epic and his consort. Security personnel on duty at the venue of the exhibition stood aside and watched as Hindutva vigilantes carried out their mission of destruction.

The incident resounded through the halls of India's parliament, though not in the manner that most right-thinking people would have expected. One after the other (though with exceptions that we remember with gratitude) parliamentarians who should have known better, stood up to distance themselves from the theme of exhibition, buying into the outrageous fiction that it featured a poster depicting an incestuous relationship between Ram and Sita. In all good faith, Sahmat invited the said individuals to visit the exhibition which had by then been put up at a prominent venue in Delhi, only to be met with a furious or at best embarrassed rejection.

Those were perhaps the most trying moments of Sahmat's two-decades, with the Delhi police shutting down the exhibition, seizing all its material and filing charges against us for "promoting enmity between different groups on account of religion" and deliberately raising issues hurting "religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs".

It took eight long years for this particular millstone to fall from Sahmat's shoulders. But when it came, vindication was

resounding and unequivocal. The Delhi High Court in July 2001 held that the stated basis on which the exhibition was banned in Delhi showed “that there was no application of mind by the authority concerned”. The authorities had in other words, merely functioned as “a rubber-stamp” and had failed to make out even a semblance of a case for their strong-arm action.

Sahmat had won a notable victory, but by then we had got used to the idea that the most well-reasoned judicial ruling was unlikely to be a deterrent to the determined pursuit of the communal agenda. The tide of intolerance was rising and if at one time the Babri Masjid had been the singular focus of the communal mobilisation against history and culture, the choice of targets after that structure was effaced, became more dispersed and unpredictable.

A pattern soon emerged. Creative individuals who had explored new vistas and challenged hidebound conventions were in a broad sense, the targets. If they happened to possess names that suggested rootedness in any of the minority faiths, they were likely, the first in the line of fire. In October 1996, M.F. Husain, India’s most eminent living painter – then as now – was charged by the authorities in Maharashtra, under the same sections of law that had been invoked against Sahmat just over three years before. An exhibition featuring his work in Ahmedabad was attacked and many important works of art – both his and others’ – destroyed. The criminal charges meanwhile, multiplied, with litigants in every corner of the country seeking to prove their fealty to the true cultural ethos of India by joining in the persecution of her greatest painter. Then on what was meant to be a short sojourn abroad, Husain soon opted for virtually permanent exile, fearing that returning to India would be fraught with the risk of arrest, or even in the event of the judiciary dismissing the charges against him, the possibility of a violent reprisal by somebody seeking to gain easy fame.

In May 2008, the Delhi High Court ruled that one set of cases that had been lodged against Husain was without foundation. Delivering his judgment, the learned judge warned against invoking the criminal justice system “as a convenient recourse to ventilate any and all objections to an artistic work”. The persistent litigants took the case upto the Supreme Court, only to have it summarily dismissed. Yet the inertia of the judicial process means that other cases registered against Husain on like grounds remain potential sources of harassment.

In like vein, the film thespian Dilip Kumar was pilloried by the Hindutva lobby for having accepted an award from the government of Pakistan – a gesture devoid of politics, recognition merely of the great popularity of Hindi films in Pakistan and the fact of the actor’s birth in Peshawar.

The theatre doyen Habib Tanvir was targeted in 2003 by Hindutva hordes who followed his troupe as it travelled around Madhya Pradesh. Again, works of creativity that sought to raise critical awareness and build solidarity across traditional sectarian divisions, were held guilty of deepening precisely those divisions. These incidents again highlighted how politics as usual, which thrives on schisms, is deeply threatened by cultural production that speaks to the sense of the universal.

Whether on the matter of the banning of Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, or of Taslima Nasreen’s victimisation by fundamentalist clerics first in Bangladesh and then in India, the politically fuelled public hysteria over the telecast of a serial on Tipu Sultan, the censorship by mob violence of the screening of the film *Fire*, or the scuttling of the filming of its sequel *Water*, Sahmat has voiced its unwavering belief in a consistent set of norms on artistic freedom and creative expression. Alongside this commitment, the recovery of the authentic in Indian history and culture has been the leitmotif of Sahmat’s political and social engagement.

Circumstances have been far from propitious. And yet we

would like to believe that without Sahmat being around as a reliable platform from which voices of sanity could make themselves heard, things would have been ever more gloomy. From the early years of the new millennium, older obsessions of majoritarian communalism have been giving way to newer themes. By 2002, Ayodhya was quite clearly a spent bullet. The Hindutva forces made one final effort to whip up a frenzy over the unfinished task of erecting a grand temple to a revered hero of myth, but gained no traction. The enterprise then shifted to the realm of the technical – aided by highly questionable judicial guidance, the communal lobby actively promoted an archaeological examination of the site where the Babri Masjid had stood as a way out of the long stalemate.

Though the issue was not quite as politically explosive as it once was, Sahmat kept a keen watch over the progress of the excavation, commenting at every stage on the dubious procedures followed and the questionable findings they revealed. These statements are part of the twenty-year history of Sahmat and remain available as part of the record, for future students of these years of turbulence.

Ayodhya was by about 2002 decisively supplanted in the communal lobby's calculations, by *terrorism* as the issue to raise mass hysteria over. And terrorism is a self-fulfilling prophecy. If vulnerable minorities are terrorised and relentlessly victimised, made cruelly and painfully aware that they have no legitimate recourse in the quest for justice since all institutionalised processes are heavily weighted against them, they will choose the path of vigilantism. Sahmat was a platform, among many others, for shocked and horrified citizens to gather in 2002 to denounce the pogrom that was let loose in Gujarat by the Hindutva hordes. Aside from the loss of life, there was a conscious effort to efface the cultural patrimony of the Muslim community, to deny the very legitimacy of its identity within the vast cultural expanse that is India. Though these tendencies had been evident in earlier

episodes of communal violence, never were they more brutally manifest than in Gujarat in 2002.

As the violence raged in the streets, the effort to skew an already precarious institutional balance further against those of the Muslim faith proceeded apace. This has been another consistent focus of Sahmat's two-decades long struggle: the recovery of institutional autonomy, the preservation of the limited public space that has been created in independent India for the pursuit of cultural authenticity. Even before Hindutva became entrenched within the apparatuses of governance, it was beginning to encroach into the autonomy of the scholarly and cultural realms, by orchestrating a public furore over the constitution of bodies charged with oversight of these activities. The attack on cultural sensibilities was often bitter and personalised and as Hindutva consolidated its hold, it began to take control of these bodies through the age-old technique of packing them with compliant personnel and rewriting the charters governing their functioning.

Here again, Sahmat felt compelled on numerous occasions to intervene. Whether it was the appointment of historians and archaeologists who had been propagandists for the Ayodhya campaign to the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), the questionable educational philosophy propounded by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) or the summary termination of the tenures of outstanding public intellectuals appointed to the board of the Prasar Bharati Trust, Sahmat was ready with its critiques and its calls for action.

When *Towards Freedom* — an effort by historians to recapture the true Indian perspective which had been lost in earlier documentation of the freedom struggle — was stopped in its tracks, Sahmat mobilised a unique coalition of individuals to resist. The ICHR wilted under public pressure and the project though delayed, has been put back on track.

Similarly, when NCERT sought to patent the principle that

history texts should be tailored to the sensitivities of current-day religious leaders, we did not hesitate to point out the absurdity of the proposition. From the guiding philosophy of education to the fine-print of textbooks, we put the NCERT through a searching examination just when it was under the gravest threat of subversion from within.

We have not hesitated to tackle the global issues that have dominated the years since we came into existence. Economic globalisation and imperialism, the permanent damage caused to the cultural heritage of all humanity by wars and civil conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq – these have all been the focus of our attention, all part of the indivisible fabric of a universal cultural humanism.

A generation has passed in our lives and the life of the nation. The threats that were incipient at the beginning of Sahmat's twenty year journey have today grown to full-blown proportions and they menace the foundations of all cultural and creative activity. There is by no means an end-point in this struggle. But for anybody who picks up this volume and goes through it, we hope that the light it sheds on the last two decades will offer some glimmers of optimism for the unending struggles ahead.

SAHMAT
December 23, 2008

20 Years of SAHMAT

1989–2008

1989

1 January 1989

Attack on Safdar Hashmi and his theatre group Jana Natya Manch (Janam) in Sahibabad, on the outskirts of Delhi, while performing a play; Safdar is fatally injured

2 January 1989

Safdar dies in hospital. Protest march from Rabindra Bhavan to the Home Minister's residence.

3 January 1989

Delhi bids farewell to Safdar

4 January 1989

March from Rabindra Bhavan to Sahibabad. Janam performs their unfinished play, *Natak Jari Hai*, in Sahibabad

5 January 1989

Silent march from Shivaji Park, Minto Road to Home Minister's residence

9 January 1989

Meeting of artists and cultural activists at Rabindra Bhavan, and torchlight procession. Demand raised for College Street at Mandi House circle to be renamed Safdar Hashmi Marg

12 January 1989

Protest statement against Safdar's murder read out by Shabana Azmi at the awards event of the 12th Film Festival of India, Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi

24 January 1989

D.Litt. conferred (posthumously) on Safdar Hashmi by
University of Calcutta

February 1989

Formation of Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (SAHMAT)
and Committee

12 April 1989

Safdar's birthday commemorated as National Street Theatre
Day with 30,000 performances all across India

12–15 April 1989

Safdar Samaroh

12 April

Protest march from Mandi House to Home Minister's
residence. Plays by Janam and other street theatre groups in
various localities of Delhi

Book releases: Books based on Safdar's writings on theatre/
culture and his poems/plays for children, illustrated by
artists: *Duniya Sabki* (collection of poems, illustrated by
Bindia Thapar); *Natak ki Duniya* (collection of children's
plays); *Ped* (poem, illustrated by Mickey Patel); *Red Flower*
(poem illustrated by Mona Rai); *Bansuriwala* (poem,
illustrated by Arpita Singh); *Holi* (poem, illustrated by
Mohandas N.N.) ; *Gadbad Ghotala* (poem, illustrated by
B.V. Suresh); *Bagh ki Sair* (poem, illustrated by Vasudevan
Akkitham); *Right to Perform* (collection of essays)

Other publications: *Safdar* (a document of protest); *Singing
in the Dark Times* (programme brochure); *Artists Alert*
(catalogue of artworks)

Kavi Sammelan and Mushaira

13 April

Play: *Mote Ram ka Satyagrah*, directed by Habib Tanvir
Kavi Sammelan and Mushaira

14 April

Modern dance by Astad Deboo. Puppet play by Dadi Pudumjee

15 April

Seminar on 'Street Theatre'. Film screenings: Kamal Swaroop's *Om Darbardar* and Manjari Datta's *The Sacrifice of Babulal Bhuiyan*. Kathak dance recital by Pt. Durga Lal. Odissi dance by Madhavi Mudgal

12–16 April 1989

Artists Alert exhibition

Participating artists: K.M. Adimoolam, Krishen Ahuja, Akhilesh, Altaf, Amit Ambalal, Vasudevan Akkitham, Amitava Banerjee, Maitreyi Banerjee, Prabhakar Barwe, Manjit Bawa, Bishen Bhardwaj, Veena Bhargava, R.B. Bhaskaran, Jyoti Bhatt, Harinder Singh Bhatti, Pulak Biswas, Usha Biswas, Shobha Broota, Arpana Caur, Jayashree Chakravarthy, Jagdish Chander, Kanchan Chander, Suneela Bindra Chopra, Bijon Chowdhury, Dhiraj Chowdhury, Jogen Chowdhury, Walter D'Souza, Devraj Dakoiji, Pratibha Dakoiji, Amitava Das, Biman Das, Jatin Das, Dharmanarayan Dasgupta, Robin David, Jagdish Dey, Ajay Desai, Meera Devidayal, Atul Dodiya, Ajit Dubey, Siddhartha Ghosh, K. Laxma Gaud, Ganesh Haloi, Somnath Hore, M.F. Husain, Rummana Husain, Nirmal Kapoor, Naresh Kapuria, Kishori Kaul, Bhupen Khakhar, Krishen Khanna, K. Khosa, Devyani Krishna, Kanwal Krishna, Lalita Lajmi, Madan Mahatta, Sheila Makhijani, Nalini Malani, Alex Mathew, Anjoli Ela Menon, Robin Mandal, Leila Mukherjee, Meera Mukherjee, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Reddeppa Naidu, Badri Narayan, Naren Nath, Navjot, Akbar Padamsee, Jyoti Pandya, Prashant Panjiar, Mukul Panwar, Madhavi Parekh, Manu Parekh, Gieve Patel, Jeram Patel, Nagji Patel, Sudhir Patwardhan, Ashok Prajapati, Om Prakash, Surya Prakash, Pushpamala N., Ram Rahman, Mona Rai, Raghu Rai, A. Ramachandran, Raghavendra Rao, D.L.N. Reddy, Ravinder Reddy, Rekha Rodwittiya, Shyamal Roy, Suhas Roy, Jehangir Sabavala, Piraji Sagara, G.R. Santosh, B.C. Sanyal, Paritosh Sen, Himmat Shah, Parthiv Shah, Shamshad, Satish Sharma,

Archana Shastri, Lalu Prasad Shaw, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Nilima Sheikh, Ketaki Sheth, Deepak Shinde, Vilas Shinde, Siddharth, Arpita Singh, Gurcharan Singh, Paramjit Singh, Prem Singh, Raghubir Singh, Tejbir Singh, K.G. Subramanyan, Anupam Sood, Sudha, Vivan Sundaram, B.V. Suresh, J. Swaminathan, Soni Taraporevala, Vasundhara Tiwari, S.G. Vasudev, Umesh Verma, S.S. Vohra, Yusuf, Moti Zharotia

16 April

Auction of artworks from *Artists Alert* exhibition Screening of Sashi Kumar's film *Safdar*

29 July 1989

Workshop to conceive Janotsav

13–15 September 1989

Chauraha: All India Street Theatre Festival, Delhi
Participating theatre groups: Jan Kala Manch (Bhavnagar, Gujarat), Jana Natya Manch (Delhi), IPTA (Patna), Duggar Manch (Jammu), Praja Natya Mandali (Andhra Pradesh), Ritwik (West Bengal), Jagar Ladhau Lok Kala Aghadi (Maharashtra), Chennai Kalai Kuzhu (Chennai), Samudaya (Karnataka)

16 September 1989

Convention on the Dramatic Performances Act

1990

1 January 1990

Day of Resolve. March from Rabindra Bhavan to Ambedkar Chowk, Sahibabad. Exhibition of portraits by Vivan Sundaram, Arpana Caur, Manu Parekh and Amitava Das, and a 44-foot-long collective painting by Sumantra Sen Gupta, Debabrata Dutta, Sudipta Sharma, Sushant Dutta, Swapna Kumar, Uttam Bhaskar, Ashley Bhaduri, Savarkar

2 January 1990

Homage to Safdar. Kankana Banerjee, Shanti Hiranand,

Indrani Rahman, Om Puri, Krishen Khanna, Zohra Sehgal, Roshan Seth, Malini Bhattacharya, Moloyashree Hashmi, Shabana Azmi, Javed Akhtar, Dance by Bharat Sharma, Vishwakant. Renaming of College Street as Safdar Hashmi Marg

2 January 1990

Sashi Kumar's film *Safdar* telecast on Doordarshan's national network

4 February 1990

National Street Theatre Day poster competition; posters awarded by a jury headed by Vikas Satwalekar. Release of books based on Safdar's writings: *Chowk Chowk Par Gali Gali Mein* (a collection of street plays); *Kitaben* (poem, illustrated by Surendran Nair); *Moteram Ka Satyagraha* (play); *Sare Mausam Acchhey* (poem, illustrated by Nilima Sheikh) released by Dr. Ashok Mitra

12 April 1990

National Street Theatre Day Poster released

October–November 1990

Janotsav: a month-long interactive programme of workshops and performances in Mangolpuri, a slum resettlement colony in Delhi

Workshop coordinators: Music (Kajal Ghosh, Madangopal Singh), Photography (Parthiv Shah), Fine Art (Paul, Pratibha Dakoji), Theatre (Habib Tanvir, Ashish Ghosh), Street Theatre (Rati Bartholomew, Janam), Environmental Projects (Romi Khosla, NISTADS), Visual Arts (Vivan Sundaram, Shamshad), Literature and Poetry (M.M.P. Singh, Gauhar Raza), Dance (Bharat Sharma, Madhavi Mudgal), Video/TV (Sashi Kumar, CENDIT), Puppetry and Creative Writing (Dadi Pudumjee, Randhir Khare), Newsletter (Anil Chandra, IIMC)

3–5 October 1990

Chauraha: All India Street Theatre Festival, Delhi

Participating theatre groups: Rang Chetna (Trichur, Kerala)

Abhinaya (West Bengal), Vihan (Banaras, Uttar Pradesh), Aavahan (Bhilai, Madhya Pradesh), Sahas (Cuttack, Orissa), Goregaon Cultural Unit (Mumbai), PWA Theatre Group (Tamilnadu), Garage Studio (Ahmedabad, Gujarat), Jana Natya Manch (Delhi)

1991

1 January 1991

Artists Against Communalism (AAC): a seventeen-hour cultural sit-in at Safdar Hashmi Marg, New Delhi
Participating artists: Bhisham Sahni, Habib Tanvir, Rahi Masoom Raza, Javed Akhtar, Sonal Mansingh, Shubha Mudgal, J. Swaminathan, Manjit Bawa, Indrani Rahman, Jatin Das, Arpana Caur, Bansi Parimoo, Amjad Ali Khan, Asad Ali Khan, Raja & Radha Reddy, Joy Michael, M.K. Raina, Vivan Sundaram, Fahimuddin Dagar, Rajan & Sajan Mishra, Moloyashree Hashmi, Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Shanti Hiranand, Dagar Bandhu, Yamini Krishnamurti, Uma Sharma, Wadali Brothers, Kiran Sehgal, Madhup Mudgal, Ali Sardar Jafri, Gopi Gajwani, Shafat Ahmad Khan, Bansi Kaul, Astad Deboo, Arpita Singh, Paramjit Singh, Birju Maharaj, Leela Samson, Sharon Lowen, Krishen Khanna, Prayag Shukla, Vishnu Nagar, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Naya Theatre, Jana Natya Manch, Sabri Khan

30 January 1991

Artists Against Communalism in Aligarh, Hyderabad, Baroda, Bombay, Bangalore, Patna
Participating artists in Aligarh: Rita Ganguli, Gopal Das, Sonal Mansingh, Lalit Rao, Yunus Husain Khan, Habib Tanvir's Naya Theatre (play: *Jamadarin*), Vivan Sundaram, Manjit Bawa, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Pt. Narendra Sharma, Dadi Pudumjee, Ale Ahmad Saroor, Shaharyar, Sharon Lowen

12 April 1991

National Street Theatre Day Poster released
Images and Words, Delhi. Exhibition of visual/textual statements against communalism contributed by 400 artists,

writers, poets, photographers, media persons, theatre persons and film-makers from all over India, in all languages. The statements, each made on an 11 x 11 inch canvas, are incorporated into 3 x 3 foot panels.

Contributions by: Abbas Batliwala, Abdul Bismillah, V.G. Abhimanue, Abid Alami, Adam Gondavi, Ajay Desai, Ajeet Caur, Ajit Dubey, Ajmal Ajmali, Akhilesh, Ali Jawed, Ali Sardar Jafri, Alif Ahmed Barq, Altaf, Amaresh Pathak, Amarjit Kaunke, Amarkant, Amarnath Sehgal, Amit Ambalal, Amitabh, Amitava Das, Amritlal Madan, Anand (P. Sachidanandan), Anand Shankar Ray, Anandamoy Banerjee, Anil Chatterji, Anjana Mehra, B. Anoop, Anuradha Banerjee, Archana Shastri, Arpana Caur, Arpita Singh, Aruna Mukhopadhyaya, Arvind M. Desai, Arvind Membro, Asghar Wajahat, Asha Sharma, Ashapura Debi, Ashit Paul, Ashok Mullick, Ashok Prajapati, Ashokan Paduval, V.K. Asthana, Atiq Ullah, Atul Dodiya, Avinash Pasricha, Bachint Caur, Badri Narayan, Bal Chhabda, Balbhadra Agarwala, Balbir Singh Rathi, Balvir Rawat, Balwant Gargi, Bansi Parimoo, Basant Kashyap, Basav Raj, Bashir Badr, Bhagwan Singh, Bharat Bhushan, Bharat Naik, P. Bhaskaran, R.K. Bhaskaran, L.M. Bhaud, Bhasham Sahni, G.S. Bhullar, Bhushan Kaul, Bijon Chowdhury, Bilash Bose, Biman Das, Bireswar Bhattacharjee, Brahm Prakash, Bulbul Sharma, Carlos Valles, S.K. Chaddha, Chanchal Chauhan, Chandana Hore, Chandrakant Devtale, Chillar J.K., Choyal, Dayal Sarbapriya, Dayanita Singh, Debrata De, Debes Ray, G.P. Deshpande, Devilal Patidar, Dhiraj Choudhury, Dileep Jhaveri, Dilip Bhattacharya, Dinesh Dadhichi, Dinkar R. Kaushik, B.S. Ellias, S.R. Faruqui, Fatima Ahmed, Gargi Raina, Gauhar Raza, Ghulam Rabani Taban, Gieve Patel, Gauri Shankar, Gulabdas Broker, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Gurcharan Singh, Gurdial Singh, Gurmukh Singh Jeet, Gurpreet, Habib Jalib, Habib Tanvir, R.M. Hadapad, Haku Shah, Harbhajan Singh, Harbhajan Singh Hundal, Harcharan Singh Bhaty, Hari Om Gulati, Harish Bhadani, Hema Joshi, Hemant Vayangarkar, Hemi Bawa, M.F. Husain, Indira Raj, B. Ingle, Isha Mohammad, Jagdish Chander, Jagdish De, Jagdish Kaushal, Jagdish, Jagdish Nandwana, Jaidev Thakore, Jatin Das, Javed Akhtar,

Jayanta Mahapatra, Jaydev Shukla, Jayesh P. Shukla, Jehangir Sabavala, Jeram Patel, Jin Sook Shinde, Jitendra Singh Baoni, Jogen Chowdhury, Jyoti Bhatt, Jyoti Pandya, Kamal Kansara, Kanchan Chander, Kartar Singh Duggal, Kashinath Salve, Kaushik Mukhopadhyaya, Khushbash Sherawat, Kirat Babani, Kishore Ghosh, Kishore Umrekar, Krishen Ahuja, Krishen Khanna, K.S. Kulkarni, K.N. Kulkarni, Khumar Panipatti, Lalitha Lajmi, Madan Mahatta, Madhavi Parekh, Maheep Singh, Mahendra Bhalla, Mahendra Pandya, Mahinder Soni, Maitreyi Banerji, Malati Pattanashetti, Malini Bhattacharya, Manabendra Bandyopadhyay, Manjit Bawa, Manmohan Bawa, Manoj Dutta, Manu Parekh, Manu Rathod, Medini Choudhury, Meena Kakodkar, Meenu Kulkarni, C.D. Mistry, Mona Rai, Mridula Garg, Mrinal Sen, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Mukesh Papiani, B.R. Musafir, M.K. Muthuswamy, Muzafar Hanafi, Nabaneeta Sen, Naina Dalal, Nalini Malani, Namita Singh, Nand Katyal, T. Narayan, Naren Panchal, Narenderpall Singh, Naresh Kapuria, Natraj Sharma, Naveen Sagar, Navjot, Nawab Punathil, Nazeer Banarsi, Neena Nehru, Neeraj Paul, Neeta Borker, Nida Fazli, Nilima Sheikh, Nirmal Kapoor, Nirmalendu Das, Nisreen, Nita Thakore, Olivinho J.F. Gomes, Orijit Sen, Owais Husain, B.R. Panesar, Paramjit Singh, Parthiv Shah, D.P. Pattanayak, S. Paul, Paul Zacharia, Pavanan, Peter Colaco, Phal S. Girotia, Prabha Shah, K. Prabhakaran, Prabhjyot Kaur, Prafulla Dahanukar, Prakash Singh, Pramod Pushkarna, Prashant Panjiar, Pratibha Ray, Prayag Jha, Prayag Shukl, Prem Singh, Prithpal Ladi, Prabir Gupta, Prakash Karmakar, Promilla Luthra, Pulak Biswas, Punathil Kunhabdullah, Robin Mandal, Raghavendra Rao, Raj Jain, Rajat Kumar Ghosh, Rajendra Kumar Tiku, Rajesh Joshi, Rajesh Vora, Rajinder Kaul, Rajiv Lochan, Rakesh Nagar, Ram Lal, Ram Rahman, A. Ramachandran, Ramahari Jena, Ramesh Bakshi, Ramesh Chandra Patkar, Ramesh Gaur, V. Ramesh, Rameshwar Singh, Ramlal Dhar, Randhir Khare, Ratan Parimoo, Reba Hore, P.T. Reddy, Rekha Rao, Rekha Rodwittiya, N.N. Rimzon, K.K. Rishi, Rummana Husain, A.G. Ryan, Sachida Nagdev, Sadhan Chakraborty, Saghar Khyami, Sam Adaikalasamy, Samar S. Jodha, Samir Roy, Sampurna Rai,

Sandeep Shankar, Sanjay Desai, Sanjay Sharma, Sankho Ghosh, Santokh Singh Dhir, G.R. Santosh, M. Shashidharan, Satakadi Hota, K. Satchidanandan, Satish Sharma, Savinder Sawarkar, P.S. Sehrai, Shaharyar, Shail Choyal, Shakuntala Kulkarni, Shamshad, M. Shanthamani, Shanu Lahiri, O.P. Sharma, Sheela Gowda, Sheila Makhijani, Shibu, Shiv Doblia, Shobha Broota, J.S. Shraddha, Shri Kishorewala, Shrilekha Sikander, Shriprasad, Shuja Khawar, Shukla Sawant, Shuvaprasanna, Shyam Sharma, S.K. Singh, S.N. Sinha, Somnath Hore, Soni Sanjeev, Sreejith, Subha Ghosh, Subodh Gupta, T. Sudhakar Reddy, Sudhir Hasamnis, Sudhir Patwardhan, Sukumar Chatterji, Sumant Shah, Sunila Bindra Chopra, Surendran Nair, B.V. Suresh, Suresh Sharma, Surjit Kaur, Surjit Singh Chaudhury, J. Swaminathan, Swapan Biswas, Tapan Bhowmik, Thakur Dilip Singh, N. Thiagarajan, Tyeb Mehta, Uday Prakash, Umesh Verma, Usha Biswas, Ushakant Mehta, Valson Kolleri, R. Varadarajan, Vasantharao Venkatarao, Vasudevan Akkitham, Vasudevan Nair, Vasudha Thozhur, Veer Munshi, Venkatesh Vasudevan, U. Vijay Kumar, Vilas Shinde, Vinay Dubey, Vinod Tiwari, Virendra Prabhakar, Vishnu Nagar, Vishnu Prabhakar, Vivan Sundaram, Vrundavan Solanki, Waseem Barelvi, Wasi Mohammad, Yurika Lochan, Yusuf, Zahoor Zargar.

Procession from Delhi Gate to Safdar Hashmi Marg

April 1991

Exhibition of photographs made by children during *Janotsav*, at NCPA, Mumbai

10–25 November 1991

Chauraha: All India Street Theatre Workshop

Resource persons: M.K. Raina, Ramgopal Bajaj, Sonal Mansingh, Dadi Pudumjee, Hasan, Joy Sengupta, Sudhanva Deshpande, Alpana Khare, Bhaskar Chandavarkar, Sadanand Menon, R.S. Shelke, Chandralekha, Madangopal Singh, Tripurari Sharma, G.P. Deshpande, Rati Bartholomew, Aishwaraj Kumar

August 1991–March 1992

Images and Words travels to 30 cities: Una, Hamirpur, Kulu, Mandi, Simla, Aligarh, Jaipur, Kota, Ratlam, Indore, Bhopal, Nagpur, Hyderabad, Jabalpur, Allahabad, Lucknow, Kanpur, Agra, Delhi, Karnal, Rohtak, Hissar, Kurukshetra, Udaipur, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Surat, Valod, Pune

1992

1 January 1992

Popular Intervention for Communal Harmony, Delhi Slogans for communal harmony on auto-rickshaws Release of *Images and Words* catalogue

9–17 March 1992

Artists Against Communalism, Mumbai. Slogans for communal harmony on taxis
Images and Words exhibition

10 March

Film screening: Anand Patwardhan's *Ram Ke Naam*

11 March

Street play by Janam

12 March

Seminar on 'Culture and Communalism'
Plays by Janam

13 March

Plays by Janam. Film screening: Anand Patwardhan's *Ram Ke Naam* at different locations

14 March

Twelve-hour cultural sit-in at Shivaji Park
Participating artists: Baharudin Dagar, Kishori Amonkar, Fahimuddin Dagar, Ashwini Bhide Deshpande, Sultan Khan, Shubha Mudgal, Satish Kaleskar, Kankana Banerjee, Ravi Shankar, Sonal Mansingh, Amol Palekar, Raghunandan Pansikar, Amjad Ali Khan, Ulhas Kasalkar,

Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Shiv Kumar Sharma, Dileep Jhaveri, A.K. Hangal, M.F. Husain, Shobha Gurtu, Dadi Pudumjee, Ali Sardar Jafri, Zahiruddin Dagar, Wasifudin Dagar, Nida Fazli, Dhruv Ghosh, Nayan Ghosh, Randhir Khare, Raghunath Seth, C.R. Vyas, Shamim Ahmed, Lalit Rao, Sitara Devi, Mehol, Neela Bhagwat, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Kartik Kumar, Prabodh Parikh, Aarti Ankalikar, Astad Deboo, Maya Upadhyaya, Javed Akhtar, Daya Pawar, Prabhakar Kaslekar, Pt. Jasraj, Ranjit Barot

17 March

Auction of *Images and Words* exhibition panels
Special banners made by 20 artists: Altaf, Aryana Mehra, Bal Chhabda, Deepak Shinde, Jinsook Shinde, Lakshman Shreshta, Lalitha Lajmi, Meera Devidayal, Mehli Gobai, Navjot, Nalini Malani, Owais Husain, Prabhakar Barwe, Prabhakar Kolte, Praful Vahanukar, Pritam Patil, Pushpamala N., Rummana Husain, Shakuntala Kulkarni, Srilekha Sikander, Smin Punegar, Vilas Shinde

12 April 1992

National Street Theatre Day Poster released

14 May 1992

Symposium on 'Freedom of Expression and Growing Intolerance'

September 1992

Formation of Sahmat Film Society

4 September 1992

Film screening: *Vastuhara (The Dispossessed)* by Aravindan

6 September 1992

Film screening: *Monsieur Verdoux*

28–30 September 1992

Homage to Robert Bresson

28 September

Film screening: *Pickpocket*

29 September

Film screening: *L'argent*

30 September

Release of poster on Bresson

17 October 1992

Film screening: *The Wall* by Yilmaz Gunney

27 October 1992

Film screening: *Father* by Istvan Szabo

28 November 1992

Film screening: *The Falcons* by Istvan Gaal

7 December 1992

Protest against demolition of Babri Masjid; delegation meets the President of India and submits memorandum

Issue of 2,00,000 posters with poems by Kabir and Raidas,

11–12 December 1992

Protest against demolition of Babri Masjid, New Delhi

Aaj Koi Nara Na Hoga poster circulated in large numbers

1993

25 December 1992–1 January 1993

Anhad Garje, Delhi

26 December 1992

Lecture: 'Humanism and Popular Religion' by Irfan Habib

28 December 1992

Film screening: *Khayal Gatha* by Kumar Shahani

29 December 1992

Film screening: *Eleven Miles* by Ruchir Joshi

30 December 1992

Play: *Kabira Khada Bazar Mein*, directed by M.K. Raina

1 January 1993

Anhad Garje: an evening of Sufi–Bhakti music

Participants included: Keshav Badge, Allan Fakir, Shubha Mudgal, Kankana Banerjee, Hafiz Khan, Naseeb Pyare, Jaffar Husain Khan, Shanti Hiranand, Bungar Khan, Eltaf Husain Sarahang, Bhai Dilbagh Singh, Gulbagh Singh Kartik Das Baul, Gopal Das Baul, Abdul Rab Fakir, Nitai Das, Randasi Baul, Fakirni, Gulam Husain Niyazi, Shobha Gurtu

Posters by artists: Manu Parekh, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Manjit Bawa, Nalini Malani, Gopi Gajwani, Orijit Sen, Arpita Singh, Akbar Padamsee, Vivan Sundaram, Haku Shah

17–20 February 1993

Anhad Garje, Mumbai

17 February

Film screening: *Khayal Gatha* by Kumar Shahani

18 February

Lecture: ‘Culture and Communalism’ by K.N. Panikkar

19 February

Play: *Na Nagad Na Udhar*, directed by Nadira Babbar

20 February

Sufi–Bhakti music. *Participating artists (in Mumbai, Gujarat and Lucknow: see below) included*: Pt. Jasraj, Kishori Amonkar, C.R. Vyas, Shobha Gurtu, Eltaf Husain Sarahang, Shubha Mudgal, Sweta Jhaveri, Atul Desai, Kankana Banerji, Bungar Khan, Nasib Pyare, Keshav Badge, Warsi Brothers, Nasib Wali, Bhakto Das Baul, Neela Bhagwat, Bhadra Savai, Madangopal Singh, Hemant Chauhan, Shanti Hiranand, Jafar Husain Khan, Wadali Brothers.

24 February

Anhad Garje, Surat

25 February

Anhad Garje, Baroda

26 February

Anhad Garje, Valod

24–27 February 1993

Anhad Garje, Ahmedabad

24 February

Play: *Manas Jat*. Film screening: *Khayal Gatha* by Kumar Shahani

25 February

Lectures: 'Symptoms of Fascism' by Prabhat Patnaik; 'Indian Cinema' by Kumar Shahni

26 February

Play: *Kachra Kundi* by Rang Karmi

27 February

Sufi–Sufi–Bhakti Music

21–25 March 1993

Remembering Danish film-maker Carl Theodor Dreyer

21 March

Film screening: *Ordet*

22 March

Film screening: *Gertrud*

23 March

Film screening: *Vampyr*

24 March

Film screening: *Master of the House*

25 March

Film screening: *Passion of Joan of Arc*

1–3 April 1993

Anhad Garje, Lucknow

1 April

Play: *Muavze*, directed by M.K. Raina

2 April

Lecture: 'Heritage of India's National Movement' by Irfan Habib

3 April

Sufi–Bhakti music

12 April 1993

National Street Theatre Day Poster released

9–21 August 1993

Hum Sab Ayodhya: an exhibition meticulously documented with an assemblage of photographs, prints and architectural drawings, exploring the multi-faceted history, geography, culture and life of the people of Ayodhya, accompanied by cultural programmes; travels to 17 cities: New Delhi, Mumbai, Chandigarh, Bangalore, Bhopal, Ranchi, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Jalandhar, Lucknow, Faizabad, Calcutta, Simla, Amritsar, Vadodara, Varanasi, Patna

12 August 1993

Ham Sab Ayodhya exhibition vandalized by the Bajrang Dal in Faizabad

13 August 1993

Muktanaad: Mushaira in Faizabad

15 August 1993

Muktanaad in Ayodhya. A unique, night-long performance of music and dance on the banks of the Sarayu, at the 'Ram ki Pairs' *ghats*. The participants and audience consisted of

around 700 artists, cultural activists, academics and media persons from all over the country – from Delhi, Chandigarh, Simla, Calcutta, Patna, Trivandrum, Bangalore. By the very fact of its being held, *Muktanaad* posed a challenge to the forces of communalism who had sought to present Ayodhya, and the traditions associated with it, as their special preserve, and their seige of Ayodhya was broken. Street theatre groups from Patna and Lucknow performed all along the way to Ayodhya; they even managed a popular and well-received performance in Faizabad despite prohibitory orders.

Participants (individuals and groups) included: Sitara Devi, Girish Karnad, Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, Madhavi Mudgal, Rajan & Sajan Mishra, Swami Pagaldas, Mandolin Srinivas, Kartik, Devdas Baul, Girija Devi, Damini Pola, Palakkad K.V. Narayanaswami and Padma Narayanaswami, P. Sunderarajen, Prabir Guha, Umayalpuram Sivaraman, Shaji Karun, Bhisham Sahni, Rajendra Yadav, Manu Bhandari, G.K. Govind Rao, Ramchandra Sharma, K. Marul Sidappa, Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan, K. Satchidanandan, Amitabh Dasgupta, Dr. Urfi, Adam Gondavi, Akhilesh, Leela Dhar Jaguri, Rajesh Sharma, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Siddhalingaiah, Sudip Banerjee, Pritam Bali, Gurcharan Bhullar, Rajinder Kaur, Manmohan Bawa, Bijon Chowdhury, Prakash Karmakar, R.S. Bisht, Vivan Sundaram, Shamshad, Rummana Husain, Siddharth Ghosh, Amitava Bhowmick, S.G. Vasudev, Mukesh Shah, Ajay Jaitley, K.N. Panikkar, K.M. Shrimali, Lakshmi Sehgal, Mihir Bhattacharya, Malini Bhattacharya, Prabhat Patnaik, Geeta Kapur, Sushil Srivastava, Rooprekha Verma, Ramesh Dixit, Madhu Prasad, Lima Kanungo, Anuradha Marwah Roy, Javed Mulick, Partho Dutta, Babli Nagpal, Nina Rao, Vidya Das Arora, P.K. Shukla, Shabi Ahmed, Dinesh Abrol, Janaki Abraham, Prakash Upadhyaya, H.C. Satyarthi, Maya Satyarthi, S.C. Mishra, Akshaya Bakaya, Neelanjana Mukhia, Ravindran Gopinath, Kalpana Sahni, Sudha Sachdev, Mehr Afsan Farooqui, A. Khan, Pixie Lemaç, Mohammad Aslam, Mohd. Farid Kazmi, Madangopal Singh, Joyati Gupta, Kalpana Prasad, Romi Khosla, Ponnappa, Sethu, Manjira Datta, Sheetla Singh, Pablo Bartholomew, Neena Vyas, Sadanand

Menon, Parthiv Shah, Alpana Khare, Ram Rahman, Kristine Michael, Indira Chandrasekhar, Vijay Singh Jodha, Farida Mehta, Sabina Sehgal, S. Kalidas, Ruchira Gupta, Manini Chatterjee, Chitra Padmanabhan, Radhika Ramaseshan, Suman Gupta, Yubaraj Ghimire, Sajeda Rashid, Jugnu Sharde, Nanak Ganguly, Baharuddin, S.K. Pande, Aditi Chowdhury, Meenakshi Ganguli, Ratan Singh, Mahua Raichandani, Rajendra Sharma, Sohail Hashmi, Hisamul Islam Siddiqui, Imran Ahmad, Kalam Natya Manch, Sewa, Naya Theatre, Jana Natya Manch, Prayog, IPTA, Prerna, Vishal Natya Manch, Rashtriya Ekta Kala Manch, Ensemble, Puppet Theatre IPTA Patna, Alternative Living Theatre, Naya Theatre, Habib Tanvir, students and teachers of Patna Art College

21 August 1993

'Ram-Katha' panel of *Hum Sab Ayodhya* exhibition confiscated from Teenmurti House, New Delhi; case filed by Sahmat to revoke confiscation order

8 November 1993

Art exhibition in aid of Latur earthquake victims, Husain ki Sarai. *Contributing artists:* A. Ramachandran, Arpana Caur, Amitava Das, Ajay Desai, Anupam Sud, Altaf, Bhupen Khakhar, Bijon Chowdhury, Bulbul Sharma, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Haku Shah, Jatin Das, Krishen Khanna, Laxma Goud, Madhavi Parekh, Manu Parekh, M.F. Husain, Nalini Malani, Navjot, Paritosh Sen, Prakash Karmakar, Ram Kumar, Rekha Rodwittiya, Rummana Husain, Shamshad, Shyam Sunder, Vasudevan Akkitham, Vivan Sundaram, Vasundhara Tiwari

6 December 1993

'Be Vigilant' poster released, and pasted on walls all over Delhi

December 1993–February 1994

US tour of *Hum Sab Ayodhya*

6 December 1993

Columbia University, USA. *Participants included:* Indian Progressive Study Group; literary figures like Amitava Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor; Meena Alexander; Bangladeshi journalists and writers Farida Majid, Hasan Ferdous, Jyoti Prakash Datta, Randhir Singh; Indrani Rahman
Punjabi Mushaira

30 December 1993

Book releases: *Yeh Samay, Aaj ka Path* (edited by Vishnu Nagar, Asad Zaidi), released by Krishna Sobti Film screening: *Ayodhya* by Virendra Saini

31 December 1993

Symposium: 'Social Change and Writer's Vocation'

1994

1 January 1994

In Defence of Our Secular Tradition, Delhi
Participating artists included: Gundecha Brothers, Shubha Mudgal, Prahlad Singh Tepania, Jaffar Husain Khan, Baldeep Singh, Praful Dave, Maya Rao

30 January 1994

Punchline: Cartoonists against Communalism
Punchline exhibition at Gandhi Smriti, Delhi
Punchline seminar. *Speakers:* Abu Abraham, R.K. Laxman, Sudhir Dhar, Sudhir Tailang, Irfan, Ponnappa, Maya Kamath, Roopam, Sadanand Menon, Santo Dutta, Unni, Darryl D'Monte
Book release: *Punchline* (edited by Madhukar Upadhyay)

January 1994

Solidarity with Nikhil Wagle (with People's Movement for Secularism)

12 April 1994

National Street Theatre Day. Poster released

13 April 1994

Commemoration of 75th Anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, New Delhi. Poster released by Capt. Laxmi Sehgal. Readings by Zohra Sehgal, Saeed Mirza, Ramgopal Bajaj, Malini Bhattacharya
Play: *Baghe Jallian* by M.K. Raina

8 July 1994

Protest against fundamentalists' attack on Taslima Nasreen

19–20 November 1994

Workshop at Gandhi Darshan Samiti, New Delhi
Participants: B.N. Pandey, Ravinder Kumar, K.N. Panikkar, Haku Shah, Madhavi Parekh, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Geeta Kapur, Ram Rahman, Vivan Sundaram

22 November 1994

Painting by children at Gandhi Darshan Samiti, New Delhi

6–11 December 1994

Hum Sab Ayodhya exhibition at JNU City Centre, New Delhi

30 December 1994

Lecture: 'Gandhi and the National Movement' by Irfan Habib

1995

1 January 1995

Manasbana: A Tribute to Mahatma Gandhi *Participating artists:* Vasundhara Komkali, Umayalpuram Sivaraman, N. Rajam, Shujat Hussain, Aruna Sairam, Aditi Mangaldas, Sangeeta Shankar, Ronu Mazumdar, Gundecha Brothers, Shubha Mudgal, Zakir Husain, Vikku Vinayakram, Selvam Ganesh, Bhawani Prasad
Release of a Poster

22–27 January 1995

Tribute to Gandhi, Oxford Bookstore Gallery, Kolkata

Lecture: 'Gandhi and the National Movement' by
Irfan Habib

Book releases: *Bapu* (written by Umashankar Joshi,
illustrated by Madhvi Parekh); *Champa* (written and
illustrated by Haku Shah); *Bapu ka Aitihāsik Mukadma*
(written by Mulk Raj Anand, illustrated by Shamshad)

Release of Posters, Painting on Umbrellas

Exhibitions: *Hum Sab Ayodhya*, *Punchline*

31 March–1 April 1995

Symposium on 'Globalisation: Culture and Society'

12 April 1995

National Street Theatre Day. Poster released

18 April 1995

Book release: *Panchwan Chirag* by Q.A. Hashmi, released by
Shabana Azmi

Songs: Shubha Mudgal, Parcham

2 October 1995

Postcards for Gandhi: a set of 100 postcards made by 100
artists. *Participating artists*: Nagji Patel, Navjot, Gopi
Gajwani, M.J. Enas, Sanjiv Sinha, Bulbul Sharma, Robin
Mandal, Vasudevan Akkitham, Shakuntala Kulkarni, Jogen
Chowdhury, Vasudha Thozur, Sheila Makhijani, R.
Varadarajan, Jagdish Chander, Parthiv Shah, A.
Ramachandran, Shukla Sawant, Yusuf, Jeram Patel,
Gulammohammad Sheikh, Tara Sabharwal, Nilima Sheikh,
Badri Narayan, Ajaykumar, Shuvaprasanna, Subha De, Prem
Singh, Abul Kalam Azad, V.M. Shinde, Veer Munshi, Walter
D'Souza, Madhavi Parekh, Deepak Shinde, Sunil Das, Vilas
Shinde, Rummana Husain, Chitrabanu Majumdar, Haku
Shah, Bharati Kher, Shamshad, Roy Thomas, Kanchan
Chander, Jyoti Bhatt, Prakash, Amitava Das, K.
Prabhakaran, Bijon Chowdhury, Shambhavi, Rajeev Lochan,
Shibu N., Pushpamala N., Sudhir Patwardhan, Alex Mathew,
Nand Katyal, R.B. Bhaskaran, Babu Xavier, Arpana Caur,
Ram Kumar, Surjeet Kaur, K.M. Adimoolam, Umesh Verma,
Jehangir Sabavala, Amit Ambalal, Surendran Nair,

Indrapramit Roy, Mona Rai, Abhimanue V.G., P. Gopinath, Atul Dodiya, Nalini Malani, R.M. Palaniappan, Rekha Rodwittiya, Siddhartha Ghosh, Ravi Agarwal, K.G. Subramanyan, N.N. Rimzon, Vivan Sundaram, Ram Rahman, Barry Chan, Manu Parekh, Suhas Roy, Vijay Kumar, Anupam Sud, Shami Mehndiratta, P.T. Reddy, Judy Blum Reddy, Tapan Bhattacharyya, N.S. Harsha, Vijay Bagodi, Jayanti Rabadia, Jaidev Thakore, Yunus Khimani, Bhupen Khakhar, B.V. Suresh, Sashidharan Nair, Krishen Khanna, Viswanathan, Jatin Das, Orijit Sen, Amlan Paliwal
 Exhibition of postcards in six cities: Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, Calcutta and Ahmedabad
 Book release: *Postcards for Gandhi*
Postcards for Gandhi book presented to President Shankar Dayal Sharma

16 December 1995

Protest meeting against ban on Salman Rushdie's *Moor's Last Sigh*. Readings of excerpts from the book by: Mulk Raj Anand, Krishen Khanna, Alok Rai, Roshan Seth, Dilip Padgaonkar, Rajeev Dhavan, Habib Tanvir, Veena Das, Malini Bhattacharya, Geeta Kapur

1996

1 January 1996

Parwaaz. Participating artists: Habib Tanvir's Naya Theatre, Dadi Pudumjee's Ishara Puppet Theatre, Janam, Safdar Rang Manch, Astad Deboo, Ranjabati Sirkar, Zohra Sehgal, Gundecha Brothers, Shubha Mudgal, Vidya Shah, Parcham
 Book release: *Resources against Communalisation and Religious Fundamentalism* (edited by Harsh Kapoor)
 Audio-cassette release: *Zikr-e-yaar*, in Safdar's voice

21–22 February 1996

Hum Sab Ayodhya, Punchline exhibitions at Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy, Mussoorie

12–14 April 1996

National Street Theatre Day. Film screenings: *Naseem*,

Galige, Mammo; discussion with film-makers Saeed Mirza, M.S. Sathyu

10–11 October 1996

Seminar on 'Art and Fascism' (in association with Max Mueller Bhawan, Delhi). *Speakers included*: Claudia Lenssen (Berlin), Sukumar Muralidharan, Geeta Kapur, Prabhat Patnaik

10–12 October 1996

Film festival: 'The Servile Muse' (in association with Max Mueller Bhawan, Delhi). Films screened: *Age of the Gods* (Arno Breker), *You Kissed the Devil's Rear* (Norbert Schultze), *The Wonderful and Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*

18 October 1996

March in support of M.F. Husain, from National Gallery of Modern Art to Rabindra Bhawan, New Delhi

1997

1 January 1997

In Defence of Our Secular Tradition

Participating artists: Indian Ocean, Susmit Bose, Shubha Mudgal, Shivamani, Prasanna, Astad Deboo

Book release: *Fifth Flame* (translation in English of Q.A. Hashmi's *Panchwan Chirag*, released by Zohra Sehgal)

11–14 April 1997

Safdar Samaroh, Thiruvananthapuram: a four day-long people's festival in association with Purogamana Kala Sahitya Sangham. *Participants included*: K.N. Panikkar, O.N.V. Kurup, N.A. Kurian, M.R. Raghava Warriar, Abu Abraham, N.M. Madhavankutty, Saeed Mirza, Kumar Shahani, Madangopal Singh, Sashi Kumar, Shaji N. Karun, Vivan Sundaram, Ram Rahman, Parthiv Shah, Ajay Kumar, Abul Kalam Azad, N.N. Rimzon, Kankana Banerjee, Ronu Majumdar, Neela Bhagwat, Anuradha Paul, Yesudas, Sharon Lowen, K. Omanakutty, Pallavi Krishnan, artists of Kerala Kalamandalam

Posters by artists: Alex Mathew, N.N. Rimzon, Abul Kalam Azad, Vasudevan Akkitham, Surendran Nair, Ajay Kumar

12 April

National Street Theatre Day: street theatre performances all over Thiruvananthapuram

13 April

Workshop with participation of academics, artists, art historians and critics, to explore the possibility of creating easily accessible volumes on Indian culture in all its forms and genres

14 April

Performances in different genres and styles in an interactive programme at Sanghumugham Beach, Thiruvananthapuram

11 May 1997

Commemoration of 140th Anniversary of First War of Independence (1857), Red Fort, Delhi

Participating artists (individuals and groups) included: Zohra Sehgal, Shubha Mudgal, Indian Ocean, Vidya Shah, Harsh Deep, Ragini singers from Haryana, Air Force Band
Exhibition on 1857 ,

Publication: *Red the Earth*, Poster

12–20 September 1997

Exhibition on 1857 shown in different localities and educational institutions of Delhi: Rohini, Patparganj, Vithalbhai Patel House (Rafi Marg), Nangloi, Maharani Bagh, Blue Bells School, Manav Sthali School, Spastic Society School, Zakir Hussain College, Lady Shri Ram College, Mandi House, Sarojini Nagar Market, Slum Colony, Sector 15-A Club in Noida

11–20 September 1997

Gift for India: an exhibition of 200 gift boxes (5 x 5 x 5 inches) made by artists, photographers and designers from India and abroad. *Participating artists from India:* Molly

Abhimanue, V.G. Abhimanue, Ayisha Abraham, Vasudevan Akkitham, Amit Ambalal, Abul Kalam Azad, Eleena Banik, Arup Kumar Barua, Hemi Bawa, Pooja Broota, Shobha Broota, Arpana Caur, Jagdish Chander, Kanchan Chander, Sukumar Chatterjee, Bhagwan S. Chavan, Vidya Chitre, Suneela Bindra Chopra, Gautam Das, Samir Das, Meera Devidayal, Subha De, Manisha Doshi, Nicola Duruvasula, Pramod Ganpatye, Sumati Gangopadhyay, Manisha Gera, Subodh Gupta, Suman Gupta, Archana Hande, Rummana Husain, Shamshad, Shridhar Iyer, Kavita Jaiswal, Jehangir Jani, Joejo, Hem Jyotika, Durga Kainthola, Bharati Kapadia, Vijayan Kanampilly, Naina Kanodia, Ratnabali Kant, Sachin Karne, Nand Katyayal, Rajnish Kaur, Bhupen Khakhar, Yunus Khimani, Shakuntala Kulkarni, Sushil Kumar, S. Kundu, Lalitha Lajmi, Shantanu Lodh, Sheila Makhijani, Nalini Malani, Madan Mahatta, Pavan Mahatta, Anita Malhotra, Alex Mathew, Mekhala, Neeta Mohindra, Robin Mandal, Prashant Mukherjee, Kaushik Mukhopadhyay, Veer Munshi, S. Lakshmana Murthy, Surendran Nair, Anuradha Nalapat, Babu Namboodri K., P.K. Nandakumar, Madhavi Parekh, Manisha Parekh, Manu Parekh, Nagji Patel, Virendra Patel, K.S. Radhakrishnan, Mimi Radhakrishnan, Ram Rahman, Gargi Raina, M.K. Rajan, Chameli Ramachandran, N.N. Rimzon, Rekha Rodwittiya, Indrapramit Roy, Samir Roy, Sharmila Sawant, Shambhavi, Haku Shah, Kavita Shah, Neehal Shah, Parthiv Shah, B.O. Shailesh, Bulbul Sharma, Natraj Sharma, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Nilima Sheikh, Jin Sook Shinde, Vilas Shinde, Shrilekha Sikander, Anjum Singh, Sanjeev Sinha, Praneet Soi, P. Srinivasan, K.G. Subramanyan, Vivan Sundaram, Shyam Sunder, B.V. Suresh, Roy Thomas, Vasundhara Tiwari, R. Varadarajan, Darshan Vora, Yusuf, M.J. Enas, Ravi Kumar Kashi, Peter Nagy, Sanjay Roy, Amitabh Sengupta, Jitendra Baoni, Arunanshu Chowdhury, Ajan Fuleri, Shilpa Gupta, Tushar Joag, Yunus Khimani, Vijay Saraf Meenagi, Neeta Mohindra, Shruti Nelson, T.M. Azis, Nita Thakore, Manoj Vyloor

Participating artists from outside India:

Australia: Lyndell Brown, Charles Green, Janis Somerville, Pip Cozens, Neil Degney, Edwin Easydorchik, Bonita Ely,

Noelene Lucas, Rodney Spooner, Robin Stieger, Judith Wright
Brazil: Dora Longo Bahia, Angele Freiberger, Jeanette Musatt
Chile: Carlos Altamirano, Ian Szydowski
Canada: Henry Tsang, Debora, Gwen Curry, Su Schnee, Daniel Dion, Mansaram, Eric Metcalfe, Michael Morris, Bryan Mulvihill, Vincent Trasov, Richard Turner
Costa Rica: Cecilia Paredes, Kaisu Koivisto
France: Philippe Bouriette, Rajendre Dhawan, John Felton, Agathe de Filippi, Chantal Georgens, Anne Rochette, Sarkis, Wade Saunders, Christopher Taylor, Viswanadhan
Germany: Johannes Brus, Inge Mann, Peter Nagel, Julia Neuenhausen, Siegfried Neuenhausen
Hongkong: Choi Yan-Chi
Finland: Ilona Lovas
Indonesia: Nindityo Adipurnomo
Hungary: Heri Dono, Mella Jaarsma, Agus Suwage
Israel: Simcha Shirman, Judith Guetta
Kenya: Archana Hebbar
Japan: Andrew Wamae
Macao: Konstantin Bessmertny
Mexico: Vida Yovanovich
Netherlands: Kate Bowes
New Caledonia: Luc Haring, Shibu Natesan, Bernd Strik, Rene Boutin
Pakistan: Iftikhar Dadi, Elizabeth Dadi
Peru: Anamaria McCarthy, Juan Enrique Bedoya
Philippines: Imelda Cajipe Endaya
Puerto Rico: Rosa Irigoyan
Thailand: Pinaree Sanpitak, Vasan Sitthiket, Kamin Lertchaiprasert
USA: Ray Barrie, Lynda Benglis, Eric Bowen, Zarina R. Hashmi, Abraham David Christian, Linda Cross, John Cross, Alfredo Jaar, Mary Kelly, Marta Violette Kot, Azyz Sharafy, Paul Smith, Richard Turner
UK: Rasheed Areen, Mark Cazalet, Ranjana Appoo, Stephen Cox, Alison Harper, Timothy Hyman, Carl Jaycock, Richard Lannoy, Alnoor Mitha, Prafulla Mohanti, Ranjana Thapalyal
Vietnam: Vu Dan Tan

Over 80 artists used the format of a stamp to construct images of independent India. Release of a calendar and stickers

22 June 1997

140th Anniversary of First War of Independence (1857), Aligarh: exhibition, street play by Safdar Rangmanch, Sahmat film *1857*, umbrella painting by children, music by Altaf Husain Sarahang

24–30 November 1997

Gift for India Exhibition and auction, Mumbai

1998

1 January 1998

In Defence of Our Secular Tradition

Participating artists: Susmit Bose, Shankar Chandra, Maya Rao, theatre group Prayog, Kajal Ghosh's music group
Statements in defence of secularism by political leaders:
Sitaram Yechury, Ramvilas Paswan, I.K. Gujral, Ramoowalia

January–February 1998

Secularism Alert: about 30 articles on the fundamentalist threat supplied to over 300 newspapers and journals, prior to the general elections

23 February 1998

Attack on artist Jatin Das and others by VHP activists, following their demand to remove an M.F. Husain painting from an exhibition at the Academy of Fine Arts and Literature, New Delhi

24 February 1998

Press conference against the attack at Academy of Fine Arts and Literature

12 April 1998

National Street Theatre Day celebrated as Brecht Centenary
Poster release. Recitation of poems: Ramgopal Bajaj,

Madhu Prasad, Monsoon Bissel
Music: Madangopal Singh, Anjali Raina
Film screening: Gauhar Raza's *Zulmaton ke Daur Mein*

April 1998

Mention in Parliament of *Secularism Alert* by Laloo Prasad Yadav

4 May 1998

Press conference to condemn attack (2 May) on M.F. Husain's Mumbai residence, addressed by Manu Parekh, Anjolie Ela Menon, Vivan Sundaram, Manjit Bawa

20 May 1998

Delegation of artists and gallerists meets the President of India to submit a memorandum on the issue of the attacks on M.F. Husain; press conference

12 December 1998

Candlelight protest against the attack on actor Dilip Kumar's Mumbai residence, at Home Minister L.K. Advani's house in New Delhi

27 December 1998–1 January 1999

Dastak: four-day international convention on Secular Cultural Action, with participation from Pakistan, Bangladesh, USA. *Topics discussed*: 'Current Conjuncture', 'Perspectives on Cultural Pluralism', 'Creative Arts, Media and Literature', 'Perspectives on the Indian Diaspora and South Asia', 'Communalism and History and Politics of Exclusion'. *Speakers*: Shyam Benegal, Bhisham Sahni, Vivan Sundaram, K.N. Panikkar, Eqbal Ahmed, Amrita Basu, Habib Tanvir, John Dayal, Geeta Kapur, Madangopal Singh, Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Anand Patwardhan, Shamim Akhtar, Pushpamala N., Kishwar Naheed, Shabana Azmi, Ram Rahman, Sashi Kumar, Siddharth Varadarajan, Aziz Mazhar, Githa Hariharan, Alok Rai, N. Ram, T. Jayaraman, Zia Mia, Ramdas, Praful Bidwai, Prabhat Patnaik, Khushi Kabeer, Lawrence Surendra, Beena Sarwar, R.S. Sharma, Sumit Sarkar, Mushirul Hasan, Sukumar Muralidharan,

Anil Nauria, Anil Choudhury, Harsh Kapoor, S.P. Udaykumar, Anisuzzaman
Play: *Jis Lahore Nahin Wekhya*, directed by Habib Tanvir
Film screenings: *Ram ke Naam* by Anand Patwardhan,
Zulmaton ke Daur Mein by Gauhar Raza

31 December 1998

Statement and march to Rashtrapati Bhawan against
fundamentalist forces

1999

1 January 1999

Safdar Memorial: *Dastak*. Participating artists: Madangopal Singh, Zohra Sehgal, Prasanna, G.S. Rajen, Navtej Jauhar, Kishwar Naheed, Susmit Bose, Vidya Shah, Madhup Mudgal, Dagar Brothers, Naya Theatre, Dadi Pudumjee and Ishara Puppet Theatre Group, Astad Deboo, Indian Ocean, Kiran Sehgal and group, Bhisham Sahni
Film screening: *Safdar* by Sashi Kumar

5–8 January 1999

Exhibition of photographs: focus on Pakistan, by Azhar Jafri, Rahat Dar

12 April 1999

National Street Theatre Day
'Resist' poster released

16–23 August 1999

Harvest of Hatred, Delhi: 38-panel poster exhibition documenting the attacks on civil society, minorities and cultural freedom by communal forces. Inaugurated by political leaders Sunil Dutt, Manmohan Singh and Sitaram Yechury

August–September 1999

Harvest of Hatred and *Teen Terah ka Chakkar* at Nagpur, Jhansi, Bhopal, Kanpur, Delhi, Sihore

24 September–1 October 1999

Hunger strike by Shabnam Hashmi at Gandhi Maidan, Lucknow, to protest the BJP attack on Sahmat Rangmanch

26 September 1999

Dharna at Uttar Pradesh Niwas in Delhi, in support of hunger strike in Lucknow

27 December 1999

Lecture: 'Freedom Movement in Punjab with Reference to Udham Singh', by Mohinder Singh. *Udham Singh* poster released

2000

1 January 2000

Safdar Memorial. *Participating artists*: Katharsis (childrens' band), Hyder Bux Qawwal, Maya Rao, Sharon Lowen, Shubha Mudgal, Susmit Bose, Madangopal Singh, Gadar
Tribute to Udham Singh
Paintings by Shamshad, Subroto Kundu

12 April 2000

National Street Theatre Day. Poster released

13 April 2000

Meeting to discuss strategies to resist the saffronization of our polity, and educational and cultural institutions
Speakers: Irfan Habib, Neera Chandhoke, Rajiv Dhavan, Anil Nauria, Anil Choudhury, K.N. Panikkar

23 June–4 September 2000

Dust on the Road: Canadian artists in dialogue with Sahmat, exhibition organised by Hoopoe Curatorial. The exhibition showcased an overview of Sahmat's projects and publications, and a group exhibition of works by Canadian artists. After the exhibition had finished its Toronto leg of the five-city cross-Canada tour, the Indian High Commissioner in Canada called for withdrawal of support from the sponsoring institute: the Indo-Canadian Shastri Institute.

This raised a controversy in both Canada and India, with Indian parliamentarians demanding the recall of the Indian High Commissioner.

2001

1 January 2001

Safdar Memorial. *Participating artists*: Mrigya, Maya Rao, Pratiksha Sharma, Rahul Ram, Manu Kohli, Madangopal Singh, Navtej Jauhar, Vidya Shah, Vishala Venkatachalam
Book release: *Communal Politics* by Ram Puniyani, released by Arundhati Roy

5 March 2001

Protest against destruction of 5th-century statue of Bamiyan Buddha by the Taliban in Afghanistan

March–April 2001

Art on the Move, Delhi: a mobile outdoor exhibition of paintings, sculptures and installations by 25 artists from all over India, shown in different parts of the city
Participating artists included: Veer Munshi, Jehangir Jani, Reene Saini Kalat, Bharati Kher, L.N. Tellur, Prashant Mukherjee, M. Sovan Kumar, Arun Kumar H.G., Subba Ghosh, Nicola Duruvasula, M.J. Enas, Manjunath Kamath, Kaushik Mukhopadhyaya, Tushar Joag, Mahua Ray, Eleena Banik, Sonia Khurana

11–17 March

Workshop at Aya Nagar

18 March

Inauguration of exhibition at Sahmat

19 March

Discussion: 'Art in Public Space', at Max Mueller Bhavan, New Delhi

19March-12 April

Art on the Move at Vithalbhai Patel House, Rafi Marg, Jamia

Millia Islamia, Riverside Sports and Recreation Club, Mayur Vihar, Apeejay Media Gallery, Springdales School

12 April 2001

National Street Theatre Day. Poster released

17 July 2001

Delhi High Court judgement lifting ban on the 'Ram Katha' panel in the *Hum Sab Ayodhya* exhibition

18 July 2001

Programme to celebrate Delhi High Court judgement lifting the ban on *Hum Sab Ayodhya*; Shubha Mudgal sings

1 August 2001

Press conference to protest communalisation of education, addressed by Prabhat Patnaik, Arjun Dev, Satish Chandra

4–6 August 2001

Convention on Communalisation of Education: attended by over 600 delegates including Education Ministers from several states, educationists, vice-chancellors, scientists, economists, historians, representatives of teachers' associations, former chairpersons of ICHR and UGC, artists, cultural activists. *Participants included:* Satish Chandra, Irfan Habib, K.N. Panikkar, Romila Thapar, K.M. Shrimali, D.N. Jha, Suraj Bhan, C.T. Kurien, Vasanthi Devi, Ram Puniyani, Teesta Setalvad, Obaid Siddiqui, Pushpa M. Bhargava, T. Jayaraman, Prabhat Patnaik, Vivan Sundaram, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Geeta Kapur, Gyanendra Pati

24 August 2001

Protest against Murli Manohar Joshi's statement in Parliament

19 September 2001

Teleconference with scientists from different cities
Participants included: T. Jayaraman, Yashpal, Rahul Roy

8 October 2001

Press conference on NCERT history textbook amendments

20 October 2001

Say No to War: cultural protest against US invasion of Afghanistan. Poetry reading and songs: Sharmila Tagore, Gitanjali Shree, Shabana Azmi, Springdales School, Sushmit Bose, Vidya Shah, Manu Kohli, Megha, Gunjan, Mona
Statements: Prabhat Patnaik, Zoya Hasan, Praful Bidwai
Anti-war posters released

6 November 2001

Convention on 'Communalisation of History'. *Speakers included*: Amiya Bagchi, Irfan Habib, Sumit Sarkar, Arjun Dev, Satish Chandra, K.N. Panikkar, Bipan Chandra
Book release: *Assault on History*

1 December 2001

Press conference addressed by R.S. Sharma, Romila Thapar, Satish Chandra, Arjun Dev, to protest against NCERT's amendments of history textbooks authored by them without consultation

2002

1 January 2002

Safdar Memorial: *Jung Jungon ke Falsafe ke Khilaf*. Anti-war readings, statements and songs: Prabhat Patnaik, Vishnu Nagar, Gauhar Raza, Praful Bidwai, Githa Hariharan, Achin Vanaik, Maya Rao, Sushmit Bose, Shubha Mudgal, Sumanto, Deepak and Ruchika Castelino, Rahul Ram, Dhananjaya Kaul

Peace poster released

31 January 2002

Press conference on saffronization of NCERT syllabi/books, addressed by Arjun Dev, Suraj Bhan, Irfan Habib

6 February 2002

Press conference addressed by K.N. Panikkar, Sumit Sarkar, regarding non-publication of 'Towards Freedom' volumes

19 February 2002

Attempt to evict Sahmat from 8 Vithalbai Patel House, Rafi Marg, New Delhi

3 March 2002

Press conference on communal holocaust in Gujarat, addressed by Prabhat Patnaik, Teesta Setalvad, Parthiv Shah

5 March 2002

Letter sent out to artists to donate paintings for relief of victims of Gujarat carnage

10–11 March 2002

Sahmat Fact-Finding Team goes to Gujarat
Members of the team: Vishnu Nagar, Kamal Mitra Chenoy, Prasenjit Bose, Vijoo Krishnan

19 March 2002

Release of preliminary report of Gujarat Fact-Finding Team:
Ethnic Cleansing in Gujarat

20–22 March 2002

Display and sale of artworks at Arpana Caur's Gallery for Gujarat relief

23 March 2002

Gujarat Relief. Shubha Mudgal sings
Film screening: *Hey Ram* by Gopal Menon
Exhibition on the Gujarat carnage

12 April 2002

National Street Theatre Day. Poster released
Press conference protesting the destruction of Urdu poet Wali Gujarati's tomb in Ahmedabad and Ustad Faiyaz Khan's tomb in Vadodara, addressed by Shubha Mudgal, Wasifuddin Dagar, Bisham Sahni, Sudhir Chandra

26–27 April 2002

Listen to the Survivors: Genocide in Gujarat 2002

Exhibition of photographs from Gujarat by Sahir Raza

Punish the Guilty: Testimony of Survivors (with

Communalism Combat): about 40 survivors, including women and children, came from the relief camps in Gujarat.

Apart from artists and concerned citizens, the following

political leaders attended: Raj Babbar, H.D. Deve Gowda,

Madhu Dandavate, Mani Shankar Aiyar, Ramgopal Yadav,

V.P. Singh, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, Arif Mohammad, Sheila

Dixit, Nilotpal Basu, Surendra Mohan

28 April 2002

A delegation including Gujarat victims meets the President of India

6 May 2002

Screening of documentary on Gujarat genocide: *Evil Stalks the Land* by Gauhar Raza

14 July 2002

Convention on the present situation in Gujarat. *Participants*

included: Ilyas, Latifa Jani, Amrish Patel, K. Stalin, Mukul

Sinha, M.H. Jowhar, Wilfred D'Costa, Harsha Hegde,

Bhavana Ramrakhiyani, Cedric Prakash, Iftikar Khan,

Mahesh Bhatt, Trupti Shah, Achyut Yagnik, Sheila

Ramaswamy

July 2002

Letter sent out to Friends of Sahmat for fund collection for children in Gujarat

23 July 2002

Press conference on survey conducted by Sahmat and

Prashant in Panchmahal and Dahod, Gujarat; report released

by Sharmila Tagore, Zoya Hasan, Gauhar Raza

14 September 2002

Press conference on Gujarat by Sadbhawana Mission (an NRI group)

4 October 2002

Press conference on new NCERT textbooks, addressed by Arjun Dev, V.M. Jha, Jyoti Bose, Amita Wattal, Suchi Bajaj

December 2002–January 2003

Ways of Resistance: a month-long programme to mark 10 years of the demolition of Babri Masjid

4 December

Plays: *Khade Hain Lathi Taane, Main Sachha Deshbhakt Nahin*, by The Players, Kirori Mal College, Delhi University

5 December

Book release: *Saffronised and Substandard: A Critique of the New NCERT Textbooks*

Symposium on 'The Hinduta Onslaught'

Speakers: Irfan Habib, K.N. Panikkar, Ela Gandhi, Javed Akhtar, Ashok Vajpayee, Ram Rahman

12 December

Symposium at Ramjas College, Delhi University

Speakers: Romila Thapar, Prabhat Patnaik, Sudhir Chandra, T. Jayaraman

16 December

Film screening: *Fiza*, directed by Khalid Mohammad

19 December

Film screening: *Zakham*, directed by Mahesh Bhatt; followed by discussion

21 December 2002

Film screening: *Naseem*, directed by Saeed Mirza

23 December–4 January 2003

Ways of Resistance exhibition at Rabindra Bhavan.

Participating artists: Rummana Husain, Nalini Malani, N.N. Rimzon, Inder Salim, Pablo Bartholomew, Navjot Altaf, Sheba Chhachhi, Jehangir Jani, Pushpamala N., Walter D'Souza, Probir Gupta, Enas M.J., Veer Munshi, Tejal Shah,

Vivan Sundaram, Akbar Padamsee, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Nilima Sheikh, Surendran Nair, Atul Dodiya, Arpana Caur, Altaf, Sudhir Patwardhan, Suranjan Basu, Jitish Kallat, Nataraj Sharma, Gargi Raina, Savi Savarkar, Riyas Komu, Prashant Panjiar, Ram Rahman, Parthiv Shah, Open Circle (Mumbai), Voices against Violence (Baroda), Vistaar (Bangalore). Video documentaries by Madhushree Dutta, Shohini Ghosh, Gopal Menon, Anand Patwardhan, Gauhar Raza, Saba Dewan, Rahul Roy

26 December

Play: *Chokkas Ahin Nagar Vasatun Hatun* (Gujarati), directed by Saumya Joshi

27 December

Play: *Tum Sa'adat Hasan Manto Ho*, directed by M.K. Raina

28 December

Book release: *Das Baras*, a collection of poems, edited by Asad Zaidi. Book release: *Drawing the Battle Lines*, edited by Madhukar Upadhyaya

30 December

Book release: *Communalism, Civil Society and the State*, edited by K.N. Panikkar and Sukumar Muralidharan

31 December

Book release: *Looking Back: 6 December 1992*, edited by Anand Sahai

2003

1 January 2003

Safdar Memorial: *Ways of Resistance*
Participating artists: Usha Uthup, Shubha Mudgal, Ghulam Husnain Khan, Wasifuddin Dagar, Vidya Shah, Maya Rao

4 January 2003

Play: *Antigone*, directed by Anuradha Kapur with videowork by Ein Lal (with Max Mueller Bhawan)

9 January 2003

Film screening: Kamalahasan's *Anbe Shivam*, at Siri Fort Auditorium

30 January 2003

Public meeting in Jamia Millia Islamia

26 February 2003

Press conference to protest unveiling of portrait of V.D. Savarkar in Parliament, addressed by Anil Nauria, Bipan Chandra, Vishwanath Mathur

8 March 2003

Press conference to discuss orders given by Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court for excavation at the Babri Masjid site, Ayodhya, addressed by Irfan Habib, Suraj Bhan, K.M. Shrimali, Rajeev Dhavan

12 April 2003

National Street Theatre Day. Poster released.
Dharti ko Aman Chahiye: Anti-Iraq war programme
Artworks, street play by Janam, anti-war readings, songs, poetry and performances by Susmit Bose, Navtej Jauhar, Dhruv Sangari, Madangopal Singh; thousands of leaflets distributed

17 April 2003

Press conference on destruction of Baghdad Museum, Iraq, addressed by M.C. Joshi, Kapila Vatsyayan, D.N. Jha, Vivan Sundaram

27 April 2003

Press conference on 'Gujarat: A State under Siege' (with Communalism Combat), addressed by Teesta Setalvad, Kamal Mitra Chenoy, Prashant Bhushan, Ram Rahman

17 June 2003

Press conference on ASI excavation of Babri Masjid site, addressed by Irfan Habib, Suraj Bhan, Supriya Verma, Jaya Menon, K.M. Shrimali, Prabhat Patnaik, Nadeem Rizvi

12 July 2003

Press conference on Ayodhya, addressed by Rajeev Dhavan, Seema Mustafa, Prabhat Patnaik

16 July 2003

Condolence meeting: Remembering Bhisham-ji. *Speakers included:* Rajendra Yadav, Kamleshwar, Kapila Vatsyayan

29 August 2003

Press conference on ASI report, addressed by Irfan Habib, Suraj Bhan, Rajeev Dhavan

1 September 2003

Protest meeting against attacks on Habib Tanvir and Naya Theatre, on the occasion of Habib Tanvir's 80th birthday

9 October

Protest meeting against attacks on Habib Tanvir (with Janam and Act One)

2 November 2003

The Making of India, Chennai (with Asian College of Journalism and Swaralaya)

Exhibition

Seminar. *Speakers:* Aijaz Ahmad, N. Ram, R.

Champakalakshmi, Sitaram Yechury

An evening of Sufi-Bhakti music and dance. *Participating*

artists: Madangopal Singh, Rekha Raj, Ustad Mehmood

Dholpuri, Mithilesh Jha, Deepak Castelino, Ashok Punjabi,

Manganiars, Ustad Anwar Khan, Ghazi Khan Barana,

Ghevar Khan, Firoz Khan, Barkat Khan, Navtej Jauhar,

Umayalpuram Sivaraman

December 2003

Judgement in Safdar murder case: accused found guilty

29 December 2003

Seminar on 'The Making of India'. *Speakers:* Kapila Vatsyayan, Aijaz Ahmad, D.N. Jha

2004

1 January 2004

Safdar Memorial: *The Making of India*.

Participating artists: Act One, Shubha Mudgal, Madangopal Singh, The Malabarians, Sushmit Bose, Nirmalya De, Ruchika Castelino, Maya Rao, Navtej Jauhar, Manganiars of Rajasthan, Madan Tiwari, Janam

Film screening: *Safdar* by Sashi Kumar

Video: *Unity in Diversity* by Nalini Malani

6–12 January 2004

The Making of India exhibition

Participating artists: Bharati Kapadia, Eleena Banik, Samir Chakraborty, Ashim Purkayastha, Vinayak Bhattacharya, Nilima Sheikh, Pushpamala N., Ajay Sharma, Hem Jyotika, Merlyn, Shobha Broota, Abhimanue V.G., Kanchan Chander, Rakhi De, Vidya Chitre, Jyoti M.Bhatt, Piyali Sadhukaan, Mithu Sen, Samit Das, Ankita Yadav, Nand Katyayal, Nawal Kishore, Prem Singh, Roy Thomas, M.S.C. Satya Sai, Gigi Scaria, Hema Guha, Neeta Mohindra, N.N. Rimzon, Jitish Kallat, Sabrina Moutishi Banerjee, Krishen Khanna, Reeni Saini Kallat, Vasudevan Akkitham, Shantanu Lodh, Manmeet, Premalya Singh, Naresh Kapuria, Ravi Agarwal, Veer Munshi, Ram Rahman, Pablo Bartholomew, Manu Parekh, Sheila Makhijani, Parthiv Shah, Subodh Gupta, Manisha Gera Baswani, Gopi Gajwani, Devendra, Veena Bhargava, Raja Jaikrishen, M. Sovan Kumar, Sachin Karne, Pooja Irrana, Babu Namboodiri K., Deepak Tandon, S. Prasanna Kumar, M.J. Enas, Dewang M.Angley, Harshvardhan S., Umesh Verma, Ratnabali Kant, George Martin, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Kriti Arora, Nupur Kundu, Subrata Kundu, Yusuf Arakkal, Shamshad, Jehangir Jani, Ajay Desai, Saba Hasan, Rotabrata Joarder, Arunkumar H.G., Vivan Sundaram, Navjot, Altaf, Prasanta Mukherjee, Inder Salim, Sukanya Rahman, Viswanadhan, Abul Kalam Azad, Arpana Caur, Madhavi Parekh, Manisha Parekh, Anjum Singh, Paramjit Singh, Arpita Singh, Haku Shah, Tara Sabharwal, Riyas Komu, Jogen Chowdhury, Ranbir Kaleka, Anshuman Sen

14–22 January 2004

The Making of India exhibition at Vadehra Gallery

24 January–10 February 2004

The Making of India exhibition at School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU

31 January 2004

Protest meeting against destruction by VHP and Bajrang Dal of paintings by M.F. Husain and Chitrabanu Majumdar in Golden Art Gallery of Art and Textiles, Surat

21 February 2004

Protest meeting against attacks on culture (with Janvadi Lekhak Sangh). *Speakers*: Namwar Singh, Ashok Mitra, Githa Hariharan, Sudhir Chandra, Prabhat Patnaik
Poster and book release: *Barbarians at the Gate*

10–12 April 2004

National Street Theatre Day: Safdar's 50th birthday
Poster released
Lecture: 'Republic of Hunger' by Utsa Patnaik
Book release: *Republic of Hunger*
Street plays by Naya Theatre, Janam

20 May 2004

Press conference on education and culture, addressed by Prabhat Patnaik, M.K. Raina, Arjun Dev, D.N. Jha

11 June 2004

Convention demanding withdrawal of saffronised NCERT textbooks. *Speakers*: Irfan Habib, D.N. Jha, Prabhat Patnaik, Arjun Dev, Aditya Mukherjee

5 July 2004

Symposium on 'India: An Economic Agenda for 2004' (with *Social Scientist*). *Speakers*: Ashok Mitra, Sukhdeo Thorat, Amiya Bagchi, C.P. Chandrasekhar, Jayati Ghosh, Utsa Patnaik, Madhura Swaminathan, Ashok Rao, Dinesh Abrol, Prabhat Patnaik

17 July 2004

Film screening: *Kayataran* by Sashi Kumar, at Siri Fort Auditorium

19 October 2004

Convention to deliberate issues arising from the proposed draft for the Employment Guarantee Act

13 November 2004

Symposium on 'Justice in Gujarat'. *Speakers:* Shanti Bhushan, Sitaram Yechury, Teesta Setalvad, Viswajit Prithvijit Singh

2005

1 January 2005

Safdar Memorial: 125th Birth Anniversary of Munshi Premchand

Plays: by The Players, Kirori Mal College, Delhi University, and Janam (Premchand's *Bade Bhai Saheb*)

Readings from Premchand: by Ramgopal Bajaj, Anees Azmi
Music and dance

Participating artists: Prince Eyango (from Cameroon), Jasbir Jassi, Ratnabali Kant, Vishala Venkatachalam, Navtej Jauhar, Shubha Mudgal

Exhibition. *Participating artists:* Gulammohammed Sheikh, Arpana Caur, Haku Shah, Veer Munshi, Eleena Banik, Shamshad, Avani Kant, Ratnabali Kant, Nand Katyal, Gopi Gajwani, Hem Jyotika, Sanjay Sharma, Saba Hasan, Ram Rahman, Parthiv Shah, Rajinder Arora, Kanishka Prasad, Shruti Singhi

Release of a set of 25 postcards and a calendar reproducing the artworks in the exhibition

Book release: *Idgah*, illustrated by Jehangir Jani

30 January 2005

Two posters on Gandhi's assassination

10–27 February 2005

Exhibition and symposium on Premchand at Jamia Millia
Islamia

12 March 2005

75th Anniversary of Dandi March

Exhibition

Symposium

Speakers: Bipan Chandra, Prabhat Patnaik, Mushirul Hasan

Book release: *Dhundhle Padchinh* by Madhukar Upadhyaya

Dandi March poster

Song: *Vaishnava janato* by Vidya Shah

14–17 April 2005

Convention in support of Gujarat victims: *Flashback–2002–
Gujarat Genocide* (with *Communalism Combat*)

Speakers: Fr Cedric Prakash, Brinda Karat, Rahul Bose,

Shanti Bhushan, Sitaram Yechury, Mihir Desai, Kamini

Jaiswal, Anand Sharma, Anu Aga

25 May 2005

Convention on undoing the anti-secular legacy of the BJP
regime: *The Unfinished Agenda in Education and Culture*

Speakers: Irfan Habib, Zoya Hasan, Barun De, Rajat Ray,

Prabhat Patnaik, Arjun Dev

4 June 2005

Remembering Monica Mishra Tanvir

25 July 2005

Book release: *Sahmat Muktnaad on Premchand*, by Sudip

Banerjee. *Speakers:* Rajendra Yadav, Murli Manohar Prasad

Singh

6 August 2005

Convention: *Debating Education*, on school education and
demanding rewriting of the National Curricular Framework

Speakers: Bipan Chandra, Irfan Habib, Prabhat Patnaik,

Rooprekha Verma, Arjun Dev, Anil Sadgopal

Publication of papers

24 September 2005

Convention: *Debating Education II*, on Problems of Higher Education. *Speakers*: Prabhat Patnaik, Sukhdeo Thorat, Kamal Mitra Chenoy, Dinesh Abrol, Ashok Agarwal, Vijendra Sharma, C.P. Chandrasekhar

2006

1 January 2006

Safdar Memorial: 75th anniversary of Dandi March
Participating artists: Astad Deboo, Aditi Mangaldas, Mandakini Banerjee, Ikram Khawar, Gundecha Brothers, Vidya Shah, Sunanda Sharma, Ruchika Castelino, Jasbir Jassi, Nauman Shauk, Act One
Exhibition
Release of calendar

21 March 2006

Release of *Bhagat Singh* poster

12 April 2006

National Street Theatre Day. Poster released

2 May 2006

Protest meeting to condemn the action of the Vadodara police in shooting at and killing protestors agitating against the demolition of an old *dargah* in the city

8 May 2006

Delegation of artists meets Home Minister in support of M.F. Husain

19 May 2006

Convention: *Debating Education III*, on the issue of reservations in educational institutions. *Speakers*: P.S. Krishnan, B. Mungekar, Jayati Ghosh, Abusaleh Shariff, R. Arun Kumar, Anil Sadgopal, C.T. Kurien, Thomas Joseph, Satish Deshpande, Yogendra Yadav, Archana Prasad, Madhu Prasad

5 September 2006

Symposium on 'Rewriting Art History', in support of M.F. Husain. *Speakers:* Rajeev Dhavan, Sudhir Chandra, Geeta Kapur, Tapati Guha Thakurta, Parul Dave Mukherjee, Naman Ahuja, Akhil Sibal, Geetanjali Shree, Mihir Bhattacharya
Book release: *Iconography Now*

2007

1 January 2007

Safdar Memorial: 150th anniversary of 1857 Revolt
Participating artists: Anu Priya, Astad Deboo, Rabbi, Navtej Jauhar, Rekha Raj, Deepak Castelino, Anees Azmi, Mita Pandit, Sunanda Sharma, Bahroop, HGVS, Act One
Red the Earth exhibition on 1857 remounted, and book of the same title reprinted
Planner released for the year 2007, with reproductions of lithographs of the 1857 Revolt
'Che Guevara' calendar released

30 January–5 February 2007

Making History Our Own exhibition: a confluence of creative histories and national histories. *Participating artists:* Eleena Banik, Tanmoy Samanta, Samit Das, Sonia Khurana, Gauri Gill, Sukanya Rahman, Shamshad, Vivan Sundaram, Abul Kalam Azad, Shakuntala Kulkarni, Nilima Sheikh, Peter Nagy, Kavita Sukhani, Arpita Singh, Paramjit Singh, Hem Jyotika, Shobha Broota, Gargi Raina, Kahini Arte-Merchant, Arpana Caur, Lalitha Lajmi, Kriti Arora, Meera Devidayal, Anjum Singh, Gulamohammed Sheikh, Kiyomi Talaular, Pooja Iranna, Deepak Tandon, M.J. Enas, Nitin Mukul, Ram Rahman, Pablo Bartholomew, Mahula Ghosh, Pushpamala N., Mithu Sen, Inder Salim, Manjunath Kamath, Anita Dube, Ashim Purkayastha, Tamal Krishna, Anuradha Pathak, Aditi Singh Reddy, Jehangir Jani, Abhimanue V.G., Sunil Gupta, Tapan Bhattacharya, Biswajit Saha, Bulbul Sharma, Yusuf Arakkal, Vinayak Bhattacharya, Arunkumar H.G., Veer Munshi, Gigi Scaria, Zarina
Calendar released

12–14 February 2007

Red the Earth exhibition at Khalsa College, Delhi University

22–24 February 2007

Seminar on 'India Independent: Economics, Politics and Culture' (with *Social Scientist*). *Speakers*: Aijaz Ahmad, Mridula Mukherjee, Zoya Hasan, Amiya Bagchi, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Irfan Habib, Jayati Ghosh, Abhijit Sen, B. Mungekar, Utsa Patnaik, Sheila Bhalla, CP Chandrasekhar, Kumkum Sangari, Sashi Kumar, Sadanand Menon, Prasanna, Geeta Kapur, M.K.Raina

12 April 2007

National Street Theatre Day. Poster released

12–19 April 2007

Making History Our Own exhibition at Women's Press Club of India (IWPC)

9 May 2007

Press conference in support of M.F. Husain

10–17 May 2007

Red the Earth exhibition at Press Club of India

10 May 2007

Exhibition on 1857 Revolt (in Hindi) at Khooni Darwaza, Delhi Gate

14 May 2007

Protest meeting at Rabindra Bhawan lawns against the attack on Shivaji Panikkar and others at Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University, Vadodara

30 May 2007

Press conference in support of freedom of expression and against the attack on Shivaji Panikkar and others in the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University, Vadodara

18 June 2007

Book release: *Sitara Gir Padega*, a book on 1857, written by Madhukar Upadhyaya and illustrated by Sanjay Sharma, released by Sudip Banerjee

1 July-30 December 2007

Exhibition *Red the Earth* at Gandhi Smriti, Delhi, Blue Bells School, Delhi, Gargi College, Delhi University, Assam, Lucknow, Arts Faculty, Delhi University, Rohtak, Jhansi

2-8 August 2007

Exhibition on 1857 Revolt at Blue Bells School

10-16 August 2007

Exhibition on 1857 Revolt at Gargi College, Delhi University

25 August 2007

Symposium: 'Justice Now', on the Sri Krishna Report (with *Communalism Combat*). *Speakers*: Zoya Hasan, Rajeev Dhavan, Teesta Setalwad, Yusuf Muchchala
Book release: *Justice Now*

2 October 2007

M.F. Husain's 92nd birthday celebration

2008

1 January 2008

Safdar Memorial: *Jashn-e-Dauran, Envisioning the Modern Participating artists*: Astad Deboo, Wasifuddin Dagar, Judith Martinez, Christophe Paes, Manzil, Vidya Shah (release of music CD), Tanveer and Imran Ahmed Khan, Baba Gulam Mohd. Chand, Sumangala Damodaran (IPTA songs), HGVS, Act One
Presentations on M.F. Husain (by K. Bikram Singh), Sunil Janah (by Ram Rahman), Chittoprasad (by Sanjay Mullick)

1 January 2008

Exhibition *Red the Earth* at Sahibabad

6 January 2008

Exhibition *Red the earth* at Gadar Mela

8 May–August 2008

Exhibition *Red the earth* at Mata Sundari College, Delhi University, Different cities in UP and Haryana

12 April 2008

20th National Street Theatre Day. Poster released
Street plays at Mandi House circle . March from Mandi House circle to Vithalbhair Patel House
City Lights: exhibition of photographs by around 70 artists (with Janam)

Participating artists included: Ayodh Kamath, Chandni Arora, Gigi Scaria, Gopalakrishnan Nair, Inder Saleem, Janam, Kanishka Prasad, Mathew Kurien, Parthiv Shah, Rajinder Arora, Ram Rahman, Sanjay Sharma, Sarita, Shruti Singhi, Sudhanva Deshpande, Veer Munshi, Vivan Sundaram, Act One, Anant Raina, Jenson Anto, Priyanka Sachar, Sanjay Shrivastava, Vatsal Kank, Dharmesh, Jyoti Mehra, Vibha Galhotra, Abhimanue V.G., Mahula Ghosh, Dinesh Khanna
Book releases: *Mote Ram ka Satyagraha*, *Phir Phootegi Bhor*

19 May 2008

Meeting on Husain judgment by Delhi High Court
Speakers: Akhil Sibal, Rajeev Dhavan, K. Bikram Singh, Geeta Kapur
Book release: *Maqbool Fida Husain ... Petitioner*

22–25 August 2008

Exhibition of reproductions of M.F. Husain's works, and photographs of Husain by Parthiv Shah, Madan Mahatta, in protest against his absence at the India Art Summit, at Vithalbhair Patel House lawns; the exhibition is vandalised on 24 August and is extended after a protest meeting

26 August–2 September 2008

Husain exhibition at Jamia Millia Islamia

1 September 2008

Of Resonance and Resistance: 20 Years of Sahmat,
inaugurated with Habib Tanvir's 85th birthday celebration
Discussion: Habib Tanvir, Ali Javed, Zohra Sehgal, Javed
Mullick, M.K. Raina, Malini Bhattacharya
Songs by Naya Theatre

2–3 September 2008

Husain exhibition at Delhi University (Spic Macay programme)

11 October 2008

Of Resonance and Resistance: 20 Years of Sahmat. Sufi–
Bhakti music by Madangopal Singh, Dhruv Sangari, Rekha
Raj, Deepak Castelino, Pritam Ghoshal, Sunanda Sharma

22 November 2008

Of Resonance and Resistance: 20 Years of Sahmat. Shubha
Mudgal sings for Sahmat

2009

1 January 2009

20th Safdar Hashmi Memorial

9 January 1989

Protest against the murder of Safdar Hashmi

With the murder of Safdar Hashmi, freedom of expression in the year 1989 has begun on an ominous note. The barbaric murder of our fellow activist and writer has come as a stunning blow to artists and intellectuals all over the country. It has come as a tragic and grim reminder of the extreme dangers to which we are exposed, in living by our vocation and beliefs. Incidents of assaults on artists have occurred in the past too but their frequency has now increased alarmingly. With the tragic death of Safdar Hashmi, the time has come for us to organize ourselves against these near-fascist forces of disruption so that we are no longer brittle, vulnerable and alone.

Signed by artists and writers

12 January 1989

Protesting the murder of Safdar Hashmi

While performing a street play in Sahibabad township only 15 kilometres from Delhi on 1 January 1989, Safdar Hashmi, a member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and a well known cultural activist, was murdered in broad daylight by the followers of a Congress (I)-supported election candidate.

Apart from working in theatre, Safdar also contributed to the cinema as a critic, actor and commentator. We filmmakers and film lovers wish to register our protest against a system that, on the one hand, claims to promote creativity, and on the other, connives in the murder of cultural activists.

Protest statement read out by Shabana Azmi at the National Film Festival Awards

24 January 1990

Bid to prevent telecast of TV serial *Tipu Sultan*

The bid to prevent the telecast of the serial on Tipu Sultan is yet another attempt to arouse communal passions by appealing to history. Tipu was one of the few 18th-century Indian rulers who understood the imperial designs of the British and tried to rally other Indian rulers to thwart the political ambitions of the East India Company. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he had realized the importance of science and technology, as evident from the nature of the mission he sent to France for consolidating his power and preserving the independence of his state. Ignoring these dimensions and characterizing him as a religious fanatic, despite the several grants he had made to Hindu temples, is to overlook his significance in the political and social context of the time.

Tipu Sultan's invasion of Malabar, to which a reference has been made by those opposing the TV serial, was not a religious undertaking but a political act, and those who were affected by it were not Hindus alone. Resistance to his political power and administrative measures in Malabar came from Muslims as well; a Muslim chieftain, Achan Gurukkal, had in fact led a revolt against him. At any rate, what he did in Malabar was in no way harsher than what the Marathas did in Rajputana.

A decision on whether or not the serial should be telecast should be taken purely on the basis of its quality. A communal view of our past should not be permitted to influence it.

Signed by

K. N. Panikkar, Sumit Sarkar, Mushirul Hasan, S. Bhattacharya,
A. J. Sayed

14 May 1991

Police attack street theatre

Ambikapur, Sarguja, Madhya Pradesh: IPTA, JLS, AISE, RDIEU and Children's Pioneers were observing Safdar's death anniversary with performances of Asghar Wajahat's play against communalism, *Farkh Kahan Hai?* The second performance at Mahamaya Chowk had begun at 6.30 in the evening when a police van with ten policemen including two sub-inspectors arrived. They disrupted the play, threatening the audience with *lathis* and manhandling the actors. In spontaneous protest, the actors and members of the audience sat in a *dharna* at the Chowk demanding an apology from the police, and particularly from an extremely aggressive constable. During the *dharna* the play was performed thrice, and slogans of '*Safdar Hashmi ka Paigam, Jari rakhna hai sangram*' and '*Abhivyakti ki swatantrata hamara adhikar hai*' were raised. Finally, at about 9 pm, the DSP and the offending constable tendered apologies in person.

Sahmat protested to the Chief Minister condemning the action as 'a gross violation of the right to freedom of expression', and demanded an investigation to ensure that such incidents were not repeated. Earlier, we had received information of a police *lathi* charge on actors of the Perna group while they were performing at Masauthi in Patna district. Sahmat joined Perna in demanding punishment of the guilty and return of the properties confiscated from the group.

13 July 1992

Madhya Pradesh government scuttles documentary on Chattisgarhi theatre

We are dismayed to learn that the Madhya Pradesh government has scuttled the filming of a documentary on traditional Chattisgarhi theatre, commissioned by the Ministry of External Affairs and to be anchored by well-known stage personality Habib Tanvir. From press reports, we learn that the shooting of the film was to have begun in the first week of June, but despite repeated requests from the Ministry of External Affairs, the Madhya Pradesh government has refused permission to shoot the film on the specious plea of Naxalite activity in the area. The feeling that Naxalite activity is merely an excuse is strengthened by the fact that two filmmakers of Calcutta were allowed to film in the region till very recently. Several cultural organizations, activists and intellectuals of the region have also protested against the state government's decision. The state government's refusal to grant permission not only deprives the people of Bastar from being represented in the film but also denies the right to free expression to creative artists.

We urge the government of Madhya Pradesh not to throttle freedom of expression by denying Habib Tanvir and other artists the permission to make a film on the region of Bastar.

Signed, among others, by:

Bhisham Sahni, Vijayan, Moloyashree Hashmi, Parthiv Shah, Manjira Dutta, Madangopal Singh, H.K. Dhanda, Gautam Navlakha

25 July 1992

Sharjah sentence against Malayalam play

We strongly condemn the sentence passed in Sharjah, against those involved in the production and performance of the Malayalam play *Shavamtheenikal* (*Corpse-eating Ants*). Freedom of expression is a fundamental right of every individual and any attempt to suppress it must be resisted. We appeal to all to join us in protest against this outrageous judgement.

We wish to clarify that the said play was not authored by Safdar Hashmi, nor is it based on any of his writings.

7 December 1992

Letter to the President of India after the demolition of Babri Masjid

Dear Sir,

We are approaching you to express our deep shock and anguish over the demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6th December by *Kar Sevaks* organized by the BJP-VHP combine, and to seek your immediate intervention to restore the faith of our country. The participation of some Members of Parliament, either directly or indirectly, in the proceedings leading to the demolition is an extremely alarming development. We are also dismayed that the Government, despite several statements to the contrary, was unable to take adequate steps to protect the Mosque.

In the light of the possible implications of this catastrophic incident, we demand that the Government be directed:

1. To arrest those involved in the proceedings leading to the demolition of the Mosque, particularly Ashok Singhal, leader of the VHP, Swami Vamadev, Chairman of the Margdarshak Mandal, L.K. Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, leaders of the BJP.
2. To stop the construction already started by the VHP and then to reconstruct the Mosque.
3. To declare the Mosque as a National Protected Monument.
4. To take over the entire area.
5. To take steps to remove the idols lodged in the Mosque.
6. To take steps to expel those Members of Parliament who

were party to the incidents at Ayodhya on 6th December for violating their constitutional obligations.

We once again seek your immediate action.

Signed by:

K.N. Panikkar, A. Aziz, A. Ramachandran, A. Vasudevan, A. Rahman, Abhijeet Chatterjee, Abhik Sarkar, Abhilasha Kumari, Adil Jussawala, Agneya, Aijaz Ahmad, Ajanta Dev, Ajay Tyagi, Ajit Caur, Ajit Choudhury, Ajit Kumar, Ali Sardar Jafri, Alok Dhanwa, Alok K. Jha, Alpna Khare, Amit Barua, Amita Dhanda, Amitabh, Amitava Das, Amiya Bagchi, Amjad Ali Khan, Amol Palekar, Amaresh Ganguli, Anamika, Anand Patwardhan, Anil Chandra, Anil Gangal, Anil Kumar Singh, Anita Sood, Anita Verma, Ania Loomba, Anjana Mehra, Anjolie Ela Menon, Anjum Mukherjee, Anjum Singh, Ankita Shukla, Anuradha Chenoy, Anuradha Kapur, Anup Sethi, Anuradha Marwah Roy, Apala Panda, Arpana Caur, Arpita Singh, Arun Aditya, Arun Kamal, Asad Zaidi, Asghar Ali Engineer, Ashish Deb, Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Ashok Bose, Ashok Jain, Ashok Majumdar, Ashok Mitra, Ashok Vajpayee, Ashutosh Dube, Atul Aneja, Atul Tiwari, B.M. Mahapatra, B.P. Sharma, B.T. Kaul, Badrinarayan, Baren Roy, Basudev Chatterjee, Bhagat Singh Soni, Bhagatsingh Soni, Bhagwat Rawat, Bhanwar Gopal, Bharati Jagannathan, Bhisham Sahni, Bhushan Kumar, Bindia Thapar, Benoy Sarkar, Bishakha De Sarkar, Bodhisatva, Brij Srivastava, Brijesh Sharma, Bulbul Sharma, C. Rajamohan, C.P. Bhambri, Champa Vaid, Chandan Singh, Chandrabhushan, Chandrakant Devtale, Chandralekha, Charu Gupta, Chitra Palekar, D.L.N. Reddy, Dadi Pudumjee, Dadiba Pundole, Debashish Chatterjee, Deepa Nair, Deepak Shinde, Deviprasad Mishra, Dharmendra Kumar, Dhruv Gosh, Dhruv Raina, Dinesh Abrol, Dinesh Khanna, Dinu Kashyap, Dunu Roy, Ekant Shrivastava, Fahimuddin Dagar, Farah Yasmin Abdullah, Farida Khan, Fayaz Khan, G. Aravindan, G.P. Deshpande, G.R. Santosh, G.S. Bhalla, Gautam Ghosh, Gautam Navlakha, Geeta Kapur, Geeti Sen, Gitanjali Shree, Govind Nihalani, Gorinder Kaul, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Gurcharan Singh Jasuja, Gyan Pandey, Habib Kidwai, Habib Tanvir, Haku Shah, Harbhajan Singh, Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Hasan Suroor, Himangshu Dhandha, Hiren Mukherjee, Ila Patel, Imrana Qadeer, I. Lalitha, Lima Kanungo, Lalita Ramdas, Lalit Mohan, Lalith

Rao, Lovleen Mishra, Ibbar Rabbi, Iftikhar Ahmad, Indira Chandrasekhar, Indrani Rahman, Irfan Habib, J.S. Bandukwala, Jagdish Lakhwani, Jagdish Shah, Jagdish Singh, Jai Ratan, Jamal Kidwai, Jaishree Choudhury, Jasodhara Bagchi, Javed Akhtar, Javed Mullick, Javeed Alam, Jehangir Sabawala, Joyati Gupta, K. Ashok Rao, K. Gopalakrishnan, K.N. Panikkar, K.S. Duggal, Kajal Ghosh, Kalpana Khosla, Kamal Mitra Chenoy, Kartik Kumar, Khalid Alvi, Kersi Sabawala, Kitty Menon, Ketan Mehta, Kiran Sehgal, Krishen Khanna, Kulwant, Kumaresh Chakravarty, Kumar Shahani, Kumi Chandra, Kumkum Sangari, Kusam Kumar, Lakshmi Krishnamurthi, M.F. Husain, M.K. Raina, M. Mukundan, M.P. Prakash, M.S. Sathyu, M. Shashidharan, Madan Kashyap, Madan Mahatta, Madangopal Singh, Madhav Gadgil, Madhu Prasad, Madhavi Parekh, Madhumita Sarang, Magan Desai, Madan Desai, Malini Ghosh, Mahip Singh, Manjira Dutta, Manjit Bawa, Manjit Caur, Mani Kaul, Manisha Pryan, Manmohan Bawa, Manohar Khushalani, Manoj Das, Manoj K. Joshi, Manu Parekh, Maya Rao, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Mihir Bhattacharya, Mira Shiva, Mohan Rao, Mona Rai, Monica Chopra, Monisha Dhawan, Molyashree Hashmi, Mrinalini Mukherjee, N. Harikumar, N. Mohan, N. Ram, Navin Sinha, Nalini Malani, Nand Katyal, Nandan Oberoi, Narendra Pani, Narendra Sharma, Neeladri Bhattacharya, Neera Chandhoke, Nilima Sheikh, Nilopher Soomar, Nina Vyas, Niraj Mullick, Nina Rao, Nirmal Chandra, Nivedita Menon, O.N.V. Kurup, O.V. Vijayan, Om Puri, P.Bhaskaran, P.S. Ray, P.S. Sehrai, P.V.S. Kumar, P. Vijay Kumar, Pavitra Sarkar, Padma Kashalkar, Pankaj Shah, Paramjit Singh, Parthiv Shah, Paul Zacharia, Pawan Mehta, Poonam Arora, Prabha Jagannathan, Prabhat Patnaik, Pradip Kumar Dutta, Prema Vishwanathan, Praminder Menon, Prabir Purkayastha, Prabhu Pande, Pushpamala N., R. Champakalakshmi, R. Gopinath, Rajendra Prasad, Rajinder Arora, Rajni Bakshi, Rajkumar Hans, Rajeev Bhargava, Rajiv Dhavan, Ram Narayan, Ram Rahman, Randhir Khare, Ramesh Upadhyaya, Ranjit Contractor, Ranjit Singh, Rashmi Doraiswami, Rashmi Govind, Rati Bartholomew, Ravinder Kumar, Ravi Prasad, Rekha Menon, Rekha Rodwittiya, Rita Manchanda, Ritu Priya, Rita Sinha, Romesh Chander, Romi Khosla, Ruma Ghosh, Rummana Husain, Runu Chakraborty, S. Balwant, S. Kalidas, S. Kumar, S.S. Noor, S. Prabhakar, S.A.A.Tirmizi, Sabina Gadhiok, Sabina Kidwai, Sabina Sehgal, Sadanand Menon, Sadhna Saxena, Sagari Chhabra, Sahba Husain, Saeed Mirza, Sai Paranjape, Saba M. Khan, Sanjay Acharya,

Sanjiv Verma, Sanjiv Kakkar, Sanjai Roy, Santosh Rana, Saphal Saxena, Saraswati Haider, Sashi Kumar, Satchidanandan, Savita Sharma, Shabana Azmi, Shahana, Shama Zaidi, Shamshad, Shanko Chowdhury, Shashi Singh, Sheila Bhalla, Shiraz Sidhva, Shiv Singh, Shubha Mudgal, Seema Mustafa, Sitara Devi, Shabnam Hashmi, Sohail Hashmi, Shohini Ghosh, Shoma Wadhwa, Sohaila, Sonal Mansingh, Sudhanva Deshpande, Sudhir Chandra, Sudhir Patwardhan, Sukumar Azhikode, Sukumar Muralidharan, Sumit Sarkar, Suneet Chopra, Sunil Sethi, Surendran, Suroopa Mukherjee, Surya Prakash, Syeda Hamid, T.P. Sengupta, T.S. Kanwar, Tani Bhargava, Tanika Sarkar, Tapan Basu, Tapas Majumdar, Thomas Paul, Tripurari Sharma, Tyeb Mehta, Ulhas Kashalkar, Upendra Trivedi, Umesh Bisht, Umesh Verma, Unnikrishnan, Urvashi Butalia, Usha Menon, Utpal Dutt, V.K. Madhavan Kutty, Vanaja Ramprasad, Vandana Joshi, Vandana Shiva, Veena Majumdar, Vishnu Prabhakar, Vikas Satwalekar, Vivan Sundaram, Vivek Monteiro, Zohra Sehgal

21 August 1993

Controversy over Sahmat's *Hum Sab Ayodhya* exhibition

The controversy concerning the exhibition *Hum Sab Ayodhya* raised in Parliament has caused us great pain. The exhibition is sensitively conceived and aesthetically designed, and has been researched by reputed historians and mounted by well known artists, designers and art historians. It is a tribute to the history, culture and civilization of Ayodhya and its people.

Among the 83 exhibition panels in the display is a 4-page text (NOT A POSTER) titled '*Ram Katha*' which depicts the Rama legend as the common heritage of several religious and secular traditions. The manner in which one particular sentence from here has been pulled out of context and indecently interpreted has dismayed and hurt the sentiments of all sensitive citizens.

We invite you to visit the exhibition *Hum Sab Ayodhya* at Teenmurti House on 21 August from 6 pm onwards. Eminent historians, art historians and designers will be present on the occasion.

7 December 1993

Construction of temple at disputed site in Ayodhya

We the undersigned note with grave concern the emergence of a cataclysmic situation in our country, forced upon all of us by the reckless and invidious actions of the VHP, the Bajrang Dal and the BJP. The commencement of construction of a temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya in defiance of the Allahabad High Court order is a gross violation not only of the judicial process, but also of the fundamental premises of our democratic constitution. It upsets not only the basic principles of a pluralist order, but also the minimal norms of mutual respect, without which no civilized nation can survive. What is worse, it is a shocking travesty of the deep spiritual values of care and compassion that underlie all great religions, including Hinduism. The eruption of communal riots in some parts of the country leaves us with no doubt that unless the government acts decisively now, it may be too late to repair the severe damage that has already been inflicted on our national unity. We therefore urge the government to take immediate action to implement the Allahabad High Court order and to take over the entire disputed area so that all structures built within it are protected.

Signed by:

M.S. Sathya, Utpal Dutt, Sai Paranjape, K.N. Panikkar, Om Puri, O.V. Vijayan, Pt. Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Sitara Devi, Amol Palekar, Mani Kaul, Vivan Sundaram, N. Harikumar, Bhisham Sahni, Amiya Bagchi, Ketan Mehta, Ashok Jain, Ram Narayan, Anita Sood, Kartik Kumar, Habib Tanvir, A. Ramachandran, M.K. Raina, Govind Nihalani, Ulhas Kashalkar, Padma Kashalkar, Kumar Shahani, Rajiv

Bhargava, Vikas Satwalekar, N. Ram, Zohra Sehgal, Praful Bidwai, Geeta Kapur, Gautam Ghosh, G.P. Deshpande, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Pabitra Sarkar, Madan Gopal Singh, Manjit Bawa, Vishnu Prabhakar, Shamshad, Lalith Rao, Rajeev Dhavan, Sadanand Menon, Sukumar Azhikode, O.N.V. Kurup, Satchidanandan, M. Mukundan, Arpita Singh, Paramjit Singh, Kiran Sehgal, Manmohan Bawa, A. Rahman, Sashi Kumar, Rummana Husain, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Ashish Rajyadhyaksha, Dadi Pudumjee, Tripurari Sharma, Saeed Mirza, Shama Zaidi, Shabana Azmi, Javed Akhtar, Jasodhara Bagchi, Nirmal Chandra, Nand Katyay, Ashok Bose, Ali Sardar Jafri, Chitra Palekar, Nalini Malani, Anand Patwardhan, Sudhir Patwardhan, Jehangir Sabavala, Tyeb Mehta, Pushpamalan N., Amita Dhandha, Kusum Kumar, Thomas Paul, B.T. Kaul, Monisha Dhawan, Rashmi Doraiswami, Bulbul Sharma, Sabina Sehgal, Probir Purkayastha, Dinesh Abrol, Kalpana Khosla, Manjira Dutta, S. Kalidas, Anand, Parthiv Shah, K. Ashok Rao, Habib Kidwai, Abhilasha Kumari, Usha Menon, Shiraz Sidhwa, Madhu Prasad, Tani Bhargava, Nina Rao, Gautam Navlakha, Randhir Khare, Alpina Khare, Anil Chandra, Kumi Chandra, Bindia Thapar, Himangshu Dhandha, Anuradha Kapur, Prema Vishwanathan, Vandana Shiva, Unnikrishnan, Ania Loomba, Rati Bartholomew, Sabina Kidwai, Upendra Trivedi, Dhruv Raina, Madhvi Parekh, Manu Parekh, Irfan Habib, P.V.S. Kumar, Sanjeev Kakkar, Jaishree Choudhury, Ashish Deb, Manoj Das, Sashi Singh, M.P. Sharma, Manjit Kaur, Ramesh Upadhyaya, Santosh Rana, Nandan Oberoi, Urvashi Butalia, Mira Shiva, Lalita Ramdas, Pankaj Shah, Haku Shah, V.K. Madhvan Kutty, K. Gopalakrishnan, Ashish Ghosh, Ruma Ghosh, Anjum Singh, Ashok Majumdar, Paul Zacharia, J.S. Bandukwala, Ravinder Kumar, Rajkumar Hans, Kersi Sabavala, Jagdish Shah, M. Shashidharan, S. Hasan Mahmood, Surya Prakash, Iftikhar Ahmed, A. Vasudevan, Purabi Pandey, Vanaja Ramprasad, D.L.N. Reddy, Prabha Sadamnathan, Ravi Prasad, Monica Chopra, Soma Wadhwa, Rekha Menon, Bishakha De Sarkar, Rita Manchanda, Vijay Anand, Alok K. Jha, Lalit Nehru, Sanjay Verma, I. Laliitha, Debashish Chatterjee, Nabin Sinha, Shubha Mudgal, Madan Mahatta, Nilima Sheikh, Krishen Khanna, S. Kumar, Pawan Mahatta, Bhushan Kumar, Binoy Sarkar, Lima Kanungo, S.A.A. Tirmizi, Kumaresh Chakravarty, Amaresh Ganguli, Pt. Narendra Sharma, Amitava Das, Mona Rai, Anuradha Chenoy, Kamal Mitra Chenoy, N. Mohan, P. Bhaskaran, Moloyashree Hashmi, Ranjit Singh, Atul Tiwari, Jayoti Gupta, Indira Chandrasekhar, Vivek Monteiro, Suneet

Chopra, Rajendra Prasad, Sohail Hashmi, Manoj K. Joshi, Sukumar Muralidharan, Amit Barua, Hasan Saroor, C. Rajamohan, Neena Vyas, Atul Aneja, Madhav Gadgil, T.P. Sengupta, M.P. Prakash, Narendra Pani, G.R. Santosh, Arpana Caur, Umesh Verma, Geeti Sen, Gyan Pande, Gitanjali Shree, Basudev Chatterjee, Manohar Khushalani, Dinesh Khanna, Laxmi Krishnamurthi, Amit Kumar Gupta, Barun De, Syeeda Hamid, Kumkum Sangari, Neera Chandhoke, Saraswati Haider, S. Prabhakaran, Nisha, Bhanwar Gopal, Shiv Singh, Savita Sharma, Zarina, Nandita, M.S. Salmani, Yawar Qaiyum, Tauqeer Ahmad, Vandana, Kulwant, Jasmita, Uma, Poonam Arora, Harbhajan Singh, Mahip Singh, P.S. Sehrai, Sudhir Chandra, Rekha Rodwittiya, Surendran, Ranjit Contractor, Magan Desai, Bhupesh Shah, Tapas Majumdar, C.P. Bambri, G.S. Bhalla, R. Champakalakshmi, Sheela Bhalla, Prabhat Patnaik, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Deepa Nair, Anjum Mukherjee, Ajit Kaur, Rajinder Arora, Sudesh Vaid, Neeraj Mulick, Javed Mulick, Vandana Joshi, Umesh Bisht, Shanko Chowdhury, Dadiba Pundole, S.S. Noor, T.S. Kanwar, Jagdish Singh, S. Balwant, Gurcharan Singh Jasuja, K.S. Duggal, Javeed Alam, Ramesh Gaur, Mihir Bhattacharya, Veena Majumdar, Sunil Sethi, Sanjay Acharya, Sanjoy Roy, Jagdish Lekhwani

19 June 1994

Bajrang Dal targets Sahmat's *Punchline* exhibition in Pune

We strongly disapprove of the strong-arm tactics sought to be employed by the Bajrang Dal workers in Pune on June 19 against the cartoons exhibition *Punch Line*.

The exhibition of cartoons, published between November 1992 to January 1993 in all the major newspapers of the country, through the use of satire, humour and irony, makes a pithy comment on the state of affairs in the country. Characteristically, it spares no one.

The Bajrang Dal activists, sporting saffron *dupattas*, demanded removal of the cartoons lampooning Advani. They threatened use of force, but had to retract in the face of determined opposition.

The incident once again demonstrates the intolerance of a section that seeks to impose a narrow view on all creative endeavour in India. The very genre of cartooning will lose all meaning if it is to be dictated to by hoodlums.

It may be recalled that the exhibition was inaugurated in Delhi at Gandhi Smriti on January 30 this year, and has since travelled to Kerala, Karnataka and Tamilnadu. It has evoked a positive response in all these places.

Signed, among others, by:

Abu Abraham (cartoonist), Rajinder Puri (cartoonist, Statesman), Unny (cartoonist, Economic Times), Ravi Shankar (cartoonist, India Today), Sudhir Tailang (cartoonist, Hindustan Times), Irfan (cartoonist, Navbharat Times), Paresh (cartoonist, National Herald), Irfan Husain (cartoonist, Pioneer), Madhukar Upadhyaya (BBC correspondent and editor, Punchline), S.P. Singh ((Editor, Telegraph), Sadanand Menon (Economic Times), Praful Bidwai (Senior Columnist), Manglesh Dabral (Senior Columnist)

8 July 1994

Memorandum submitted to Bangladesh High Commission in support of Taslina Nasreen

The memorandum submitted at the High Commission said:
'We protest the issuance of such death threats as an intolerable act contrary to civilised behaviour and the rule of law. We oppose the Bangladesh government's action banning *Lajja*, and then, following the generation of fundamentalist hysteria, issuing a warrant for Taslima's arrest.'

26 August 1994

The Idgah Maidan controversy in Karnataka

Citizens for Democracy, Karnataka (CFD-K), has just published a Report titled *The Controversy regarding the Raising of National Flag in the Idgah Maidan*. The Report is written by Dr Sanjeev Kulkarni but is a collaborative effort of citizens from all walks of life, such as S.R. Hiremath, a scientist-turned-social worker, John Bellary, a teacher, Basava Prabhu Hoskeri, a lawyer, R.A. Nagamule, an engineer, Dr A.M. Jamadar, a doctor, and several others. It is written in Kannada and an English version is being prepared.

I, as a citizen of Hubli–Dharwad, am concerned that their findings are placed before the national press in view of the extensive coverage that the event has received this year as well of the escalating violence that has been accompanying it. But the responsibility for the phrasing of the following text as well as for the tone of rendering is entirely mine. Remarks within brackets are also mine.

Introduction

There are two separate facets to the Idgah Maidan controversy. The first relates to the question of the ownership of the Maidan, the second to the issue of hoisting the national flag on the Maidan. The two issues have to be understood separately if the whole sorry episode is to make sense.

The Issue of Ownership

The Idgah Maidan is an open plot of land of about 991 sq. yds (CTS No. 174 in Ward no. 3) near the main bus stop in Hubli.

The Muslim community of Hubli claims that the Idgah Maidan has been in their exclusive possession for over two hundred years and that the prayer halls there are at least that old. This claim has been contested by other parties.

The basic facts of the case are as follows:

The Hubli Municipality was formed in 1920. On 5 August 1921, the Municipality passed a resolution granting the Maidan on lease for 999 years to the Anjuman-e-Islam organization, for an annual rent of Rupee one. (Among other provisions, it permitted the Anjuman to build a compound wall around the property, which in fact was never built.) This grant was approved by the government of Bombay on 11 January 1922, and the lease deed was signed in May 1930.

In 1960, when the Municipal borough was under suppression, the Anjuman sought the permission of the government administrator to build a building on the Maidan, the ground floor of which would be used for commercial purposes and the upper floors for an educational institution. This plan was approved by the Divisional Commissioner in Belgaum as well as by the then Mysore government. This is when the trouble started. The approval by the government of the plan proposed by the Anjuman was challenged by some citizens in the court of law.

I shall skip the tedious details. The decision delivered by the Court of the Munsiff in Hubli on 7 December 1972 went against the Anjuman-e-Islam. On appeal, the Additional Civil Judge upheld a part of the verdict of the Munsiff Court. On further appeal, the High Court of Karnataka, on 8 June 1992, upheld the judgment of the Additional Civil Judge. The judgment of the High Court may be summarized as follows:

The Idgah Maidan is not the exclusive property of the Anjuman-e-Islam but belongs to what was by then the Hubli-Dharwad Municipal Corporation.

The Maidan was licensed to the Anjuman for purely

religious purposes, that is, to offer prayers on two days in the years, the Bakrid and the Ramzaan.

The Anjuman may not use the property for any educational or commercial purpose.

The permanent structures already erected by the Anjuman may be demolished within 45 days.

The public (inclusive of the Muslim community) has no customary rights of the user on the property.

Following this judgment, the Anjuman made a Special Leave Petition to the Supreme Court to appeal against the above judgment and sought a stay order against the demolition of the permanent structures. The stay was granted.

Members of the Sangh Parivar also appealed to the Supreme Court seeking restoration of customary rights to the public. After condonation of delay, petition was allowed by the Supreme Court on 19 April 1993. (This part is generally not known.)

What the Anjuman underlines is that from the beginning (in 1920), it has sought and received sanction from the requisite legal authority for every one of its actions. It has been scrupulous in remaining on the right side of the law.

The National Flag Issue

According to the statement made by the Rashtradhvaja Gowrava Samrakshana Samiti (The Committee for Protecting the Honour of the National Flag) to the Citizens for Democracy, Karnataka, when Dr Murli Manohar Joshi declared that he would hoist the national flag in the Lal Chowk of Srinagar on 26 January 1992 as a part of the 'Save Kashmir' campaign, it was decided to hold similar functions all over India. In Hubli, neither the Nehru Maidan nor the Murusavira Matha Maidan was available. So the Samiti decided to hoist the flag on the 'Chennamma Maidan' of the Corporation (the Sangh Parivar's special name for the Idgah Maidan). When they approached the police, the latter tried to dissuade them.

But a group of about fifty volunteers decided to go ahead with their plan, regardless. According to them, as they were raising the flag the police rushed in and pulled the flag down in an insulting manner, which wounded their patriotic sentiments. Since, in independent India, a citizen has the right to fly the national flag at any place, they vowed to persist until they had succeeded in flying the flag in the Maidan. They wrote to all the political parties seeking support but only the BJP responded.

Two main points need to be noted here:

The incident took place on 26 January 1992, when the case was still being considered by the High Court, and was therefore *sub judice*. The RGSS could not have been unaware of this fact. Secondly, as is clear from the above description, the dispute is between the RGSS and the police and therefore does not involve the Anjuman-e-Islam.

Since then, on every 15 August and 26 January, the RGSS in association with the RSS and the BJP has attempted to fly the flag on the Idgah Maidan. This year the BJP gave the event full support and treated it as an event of national importance by sending its leaders, like Uma Bharati, Sikander Bakht and Abbas Ali Bohra, to participate in the event.

How lawful are these subsequent attempts?

Apart from the fact that the High Court has quite explicitly not conceded the customary rights of the user to the public and this has been challenged in the Supreme Court by the Sangh Parivar itself, before every 15 August and 26 January, a certain Devendra Naik has been approaching the Munsiff Court in Hubli for permission to hoist the flag and has been refused permission.

In August 1993, several members of the RGSS approached the High Court of Karnataka for permission to fly the flag and the High Court left the decision to the government.

Neither the RGSS, nor the RSS or the BJP, is party to any of the lawsuits, preferring to fight them through individuals. (This enables them to claim victory when the verdict is in their favour and pretend ignorance when it is not.)

The Anjuman-e-Islam has refused to comment (or act) on the flag issue and has remained absolutely silent. The controversy thus involves only the RGSS and the state government and not the Anjuman.

(I must here point out that the impression created in the press that the Muslim community is refusing to raise the flag on the Idgah Maidan because it does not want the national flag to fly on their prayer ground is totally baseless. It is another instance of the deliberate disinformation that surrounds the issue. No question of flying the national flag on the Idgah Maidan had arisen until the problem was manufactured by the Sangh Parivar. The Muslim community sees no reasons to be pressurized into doing so now by parties obviously out to embarrass or harass them. The communal intent of the Sangh Parivar's endeavour is clear in their insistence on calling the place 'Chennamma Maidan' after the statue of Queen Kittur Chennamma installed recently in the traffic circle nearby, rather than by its official name, 'Idgah Maidan', although the latter is used by them, inevitably, in all court documents.)

The Future

The absolute refusal of the Muslim community to comment on the flag has foiled the hopes of the Sangh Parivar of communalizing the issue. That the debate is now only between the Sangh Parivar and the state government is not of any obvious advantage to the former. So they have now started saying that they do not care who flies the flag as long as it is flown.

(What political advantage the Parivar will try to gain from the unfortunate police firing on 15 August, in which six bystanders were killed, remains to be seen. It is significant

that the ABVP leaders were demanding that the six bodies be cremated on the Idgah Maidan itself.)

The Karnataka state elections are scheduled for November 1994. The BJP is perfectly aware that, if elected to power, its government will not be able to fly the flag on the Idgah Maidan without being guilty of contempt of court. They have therefore been declaring that the attempt on 15 August 1994 would be the last such attempt.

The Solution

The RGSS and its allies have always been claiming that their wish is to see the national flag fly on the Idgah Maidan properly just once.

On the morning of 15 August 1994, the Sangh Parivar claimed that they had succeeded in hoisting the flag on the Idgah Maidan, unseen by the police; whatever the veracity of this claim, now that they have done so to their own satisfaction, it is to be hoped there will be no further repetition of this unfortunate event, which has turned the two national days into sheer nightmares for the citizens of Hubli-Dharwad.

Additional Points by Girish Karnad

The Anjuman-e-Islam is an educational institution founded in 1905. It runs several schools, colleges and educational institutions. Only a third of its students are Muslim, the rest being mainly from the backward classes. It has a college named after Nehru. On every 15 August and 26 January, the national flag is flown and the national anthem sung at all Anjuman institutions (which is more than can be said about the RSS!).

Will the solution of the flag issue make life easier for the Muslims of Hubli-Dharwad?

Since 1984, the Muslim community has stopped celebrating Mohurram as it invariably led to trouble. (In my childhood, Hindus also participated in the Mohurram celebration.)

Several times in the past, and again this year, the massive procession on the day of the Id-Milad has been cancelled for fear of disturbances. Playing of music and bursting of crackers at weddings have been stopped by the Muslim community.

Next to the Idgah Maidan is the Dargah of a Sufi saint, Raja Bagh Sawar, which used to attract both Hindu and Muslim devotees. This Muslim shrine, which traditionally has had Hindu priests, has now been converted into a Hindu shrine. The saffron flag flies on it. The Urs of the saint is now referred to as the Jatra of Changed Maharaja. When the Muslims registered a complaint with the police, they were asked to remain calm; the issue, they were told, would be sorted out by the authorities. Of course nothing has been done so far. On the contrary, the converted shrine was quoted to bolster the case against the Anjuman in court documents.

The Muslim community allowed a highway to be built through their graveyard. But when, in order to protect their graves, they began to build a compound wall, a stay order was brought against the construction of the wall, thus preventing them from enclosing their own exclusive property.

The flag-hoisting issue is only one example of the harassment and baiting to which the Muslim community in Karnataka has been continually subjected during the last two decades.

Statement by Girish Karnad

1 April 1995

Statement issued after workshop on India's Economy, 31 March–1 April 1995

1. We are frequently informed these days that we live in an era of 'globalization', that opposition to 'globalization' betrays archaic or reactionary thinking, and that embarking on a process of 'globalization' is the proper course for India. 'Globalization', however, is synonymous with the hegemony of the advanced capitalist world over the economic, political and cultural life of countries such as ours, and would stifle our development. Resistance to the 'globalization' which is being imposed upon the people of the third world is an essential condition for their progress towards freedom.

2. In the sphere of the economy, 'globalization' would unleash stagnation and retrogression, widen economic disparities in society, worsen the plight of the overwhelming majority of the population, and transfer control over the nation's productive assets and natural resources to a handful of multinational corporations and banks, as has happened over large tracts of Africa and Latin America. In the political sphere, it would shift crucial decision-making powers, relating both to external and to internal matters, away from the nation-state and into the hands of the advanced capitalist countries. In the sphere of culture, it would destroy the vibrancy of the cultural traditions of the nation by imposing upon it mind-numbing products exported from the west, eliminate the diversity of cultural forms by establishing the monopoly of the homogenous western commodity, and use cultural imperialism as an instrument for buttressing overall imperialist dominance. Above all, it would seriously undermine the unity

and viability of the nation by institutionalizing a social dualism within it, encouraging a 'secession of the mind' among the elite even as, as a reflex, religious and ethnic identities are strengthened, and creating the conditions for the growth of communal-fascist, secessionist and fundamentalist movements. In short, 'globalization', which is portrayed in the media, increasingly controlled from the advanced capitalist countries, as a step towards the fulfilment of the dreams of the national movement, represents in fact a betrayal of those dreams.

3. Why then, it may be asked, is the government leading the country into the vortex of 'globalization'? There can be little doubt that, whatever the fate of the nation, the dominant social classes see for themselves a better future in a 'globalized' regime than otherwise. This however is not all. This very fact is related to another set of phenomena. There has been a strengthening of metropolitan capitalism, notwithstanding its current economic travails, which has been both a cause and a consequence of the collapse of socialism over Eastern Europe and the erstwhile Soviet Union; the advanced capitalist world today displays a high degree of unity vis-a-vis the third world; and, together with the prising open of third-world markets for products from the advanced capitalist countries, there has been a significant increase in the international mobility of finance which has put pressure upon the third world for 'rolling back' the state. In short, government capitulation has occurred in an environment that has turned increasingly hostile.

4. This does not however mean that the project of emancipation of our people, the attempt to build our nation through our own efforts, cannot be nurtured and carried forward in the current environment. It requires, of course, an awareness of the difficulties. It requires above all an enormous assertion of will, which can come about only through a mobilization of the people, the victims of the 'globalization' project, around an alternative programme for their economic, social, political and cultural advance. The national revival

depends upon the activation of the hitherto largely untapped potential of the Indian people.

5. Towards the achievement of this goal, each of us can contribute her/his mite by devising programmes of intervention which are designed to explain the perils faced by the nation to the people at large, to combat the invasion of metropolitan capitalism and its fall-out in our own respective spheres, and to fight the communal-fascist forces which objectively facilitate metropolitan hegemony.

Signed by:

C.T. Kurien, Mulk Raj Anand, Shabana Azmi, Kumar Shahani, Vivan Sundaram, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Romila Thapar, Amiya Bagchi, S. Gopal, N. Ram, Umayalpuram K. Sivaraman, Shubha Mudgal, Irfan Habib, Arun Ghosh, Ashok Mitra, Geeta Kapur, R.N. Basu, Subodh Some, Rajiv Dhavan, I.S. Gulati, Praful Bidwai, Saeed Mirza, Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan, O.N.V. Kurup, Madhvi Parekh, Manu Parekh, Rajni Kumar, P. Sainath, Prayag Shukla, S.P. Singh, Sushanta Ghosh, Haku Shah, Anil Biswas, Bharati Ray, Ram Rahman, Parthiv Shah, Virendra Saini, Utsa Patnaik, K. Nagaraj, Ashish Roy, Romi Khosla, Sumit Sarkar, Shamshad, Malini Bhattacharya, Nalini Malani, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Rummana Husain, Thomas Isaac, Ashish Rajyadhyaksha, Madan Gopal Singh, C.P. Chandrasekhar, Anjan Mukherjee, Roshan Shahani, Rajiv Bhargava, Achin Vanaik, Ruchira Gupta, Javeed Alam, Sukumar Muralidharan, Manglesh Dabral, Sadanand Menon, Kitty Menon, P. Govinda Pillai, K. Ashok Rao, Jasodhara Bagchi, Suvira Jaiswal, Mihir Bhattacharya, K.M. Shrimali, P.N. Roy, M.G. Some, S.M. Chatterjee, Pavitra Sarkar, Deepak Nayyar, Anil Bhatti, G.P. Deshpande, M.K. Raina, K.N. Panikkar, Prabhat Patnaik

15 December 1995

Rumours of ban on *The Moor's Last Sigh* by Salman Rushdie

The Indian State is beset by terrorism in its various incarnations. Indeed its critics argue persuasively that in sector after sector, the State and its actions have come increasingly to resemble those of its terrorist adversaries. However, there is a particular variant of this bewildering reciprocity that is the subject of today's concern.

In some ways, the Indian political scene is characterized by a dangerous degree of freedom. Thus, people are free to call for vengeance against whole communities for 'injuries' that, the revenge-seekers admit, happened centuries ago. Certain others, whose call for vengeance resulted in the violence of 1984, are still unshriven, still unrequited – indeed they are themselves part of the State today and enjoy its protection, at public expense. Still others are free to crow over the criminal and hurtful destruction of the Babri Masjid. All kinds of things can be said – at streetcorners, in formal and informal assemblies, in printed words and even in the cartoons that once absorbed Bal Thackeray's energies.

The banning of highly wrought, high-literary works in such an apparently permissive environment is deeply puzzling. To put it bluntly: are there things that mustn't be said, ever; and ways in which nothing must be said?

Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* was banned because it was anticipated that it would offend the religious sentiments of devout Muslims. That anticipated outrage culminated in an extreme form of censorship – Khomeini's *fatwa*. We would like to be able to argue that the right to challenge established

orthodoxies, whether of state or religion, is a basic democratic right. Indeed, in certain contexts, it is almost a moral duty.

The case of Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* is in any case quite straight-forward. For one, Mr Thackeray and his outfit are a political party, and must be subjected to the processes of critique and evaluation whereby a society regulates its political processes. And in so far as it is more than a mere political party, the Shiv Sena is a quasi-criminal grouping which is believed, on the strength of its record, to command a potential of considerable violence. But it is important, precisely for that reason, to ask just what is at issue here?

It started with rumours. First one heard that, in an act of voluntary cravenness, the book's importers had decided not to send the book to Bombay. Then there were rumours that the Customs Department, well known for its literary sensitivities, had banned the import of the book. Now it is said that the Home Ministry has banned *The Moor's Last Sigh*. What the hell is going on?

It has been argued before now that creative writers must be accorded special privileges. Thus we are told that the creative imagination, like certain wild animals, will not breed in captivity. But the case for the unrestricted publication of *The Moor's Last Sigh* does not rest on any special privileges, but only on the exercise of those freedoms that many others who are neither as humane nor as gifted as he is are free to exercise, to the great detriment of the public sphere.

There are several things at issue here: there is the question of the moral legitimacy of the State, which must not act (and must not be seen to be acting) in a craven and cowardly manner, for reasons which it is too embarrassed to acknowledge; there is the more general question of the right of political dissent, and of the duty of the State to provide an environment in which that right might be exercised, without either actual violence or the self-censorship that results from the fear of such violence; last but not least, there is the right and, in any

civilized society, the need to enable the imaginative exploration of the complex worlds in which we live, to create hypothetical universes in which the bewilderments of historical processes might be probed and contemplated.

On all these counts, the business with *The Moor's Last Sigh* has made the Indian State look distinctly unedifying. A guilty and shame-faced State, acting covertly through rumour and innuendo, has turned its back on its own vaunted historical legacy – not only on the 'Nehruvian' values of secularism and liberal tolerance, but also on its claims to sophistication and high culture. After all, Bal Thackeray's reported recognition of himself in Rushdie's gangsterish Raman Fielding is not more damning than the failure of Indian officialdom to read Rushdie's wonderful Jawaharlal. After all, anyone with even a modicum of English could have seen the anguish that inspired the ironic portrait of that much-loved dog. The final image of Jawaharlal, now stuffed and increasingly battered and shabby, dragged along on its rickety wheels but not quite cared for, not quite abandoned, is both poignant and acute. But perhaps, for a State that is actively – and, one must believe, consciously – engaged in betraying the Nehruvian vision, whether in the field of culture or the economy, it is, finally, the truth that hurts.

1 January 1996

Pledge to resist intolerance

Safdar Hashmi was fatally attacked while his street theatre group, Jana Natya Manch, was performing a play at Sahibabad on January 1, 1989. The attackers, criminals with political patronage, despite being clearly identified, have not yet been punished.

We condemn the unchecked rise in the criminalisation of our social-political life, in which artists and art-practices are being increasingly targeted. We stand against all forces inimical to secular and plural values.

That artists, intellectuals and others have come together in protest against such forces, is the source of our strength. We assert that we will continue to resist intolerance towards creative cultural and intellectual endeavour.

Signed by artists, scholars and concerned citizens

18 October 1996

Artists' protest statement in support of M.F. Husain

We are by now past the first sense of shock and distress against the assault on our renowned artist-colleague, M.F. Husain. The criminal complaint against Husain in Bombay by its cultural affairs minister and the destruction of his artworks in his Ahmedabad Gallery by Bajrang Dal vandals signal a sordid regression in our collective cultural conscience.

This signal appears ironically in the fiftieth year of Indian independence, and needs analysis and resistance from the entire artist community, from the intelligentsia, and from the media. And above all, from the great majority of the Indian people who believe in the fundamental values of democracy and cultural creativity. Inheritors of a syncretic civilization, this majority, drawn from every class and caste and religion, has proved its will time and again. Despite all efforts to mislead and distort the nation's vision through a vicious communal ideology, the people have opted for individual honour, for a composite society, for a secular India.

At this stage the artists have to sustain the effort to both celebrate and critique our cultural heritage. M.F. Husain has always been a celebrative artist, affirming this country's polyphonic culture and elaborating its myths and iconography into the contemporary arena. Today, after an amazingly productive fifty-year career, he is being targeted because he is a Muslim. This is likely to be followed by an attack on modernity and on all those who critically intervene in the ongoing social processes. The support for artists' freedom is a support for a complex representation of our history and our selves by imaginative contemporaries.

This involves a long view on the future of the arts in modern India. On an immediate level we seek your support in demanding:

1. Action against the arsonists who burnt M.F. Husain's artworks in Ahmedabad.
2. Withdrawal of criminal charges/communal litigation against M.F. Husain.
3. Condemnation by the highest representatives of the State and by the people at large of the ideology that fuelled the fire of the arsonists.
4. Adequate State protection for M.F. Husain, his family, his artworks.
5. Adequate State protection for galleries and institutions that exhibit art.

1 January 1998

Pledge to fight communalism

The first major assault on the secular fabric of independent India was made 50 years ago when religious bigots assaulted Mahatma Gandhi, the mightiest symbol of the pluralism of our national culture.

The demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on December 1992 by these very forces was the further attack, an open declaration of war even, on the essential unity of India and the pluralistic character of Indian society.

Any advance of the communal forces will divide the Indian people, weaken national unity and fracture our cultural heritage along religious lines. As against this, any constructive vision regarding the future of our country entails defending the heritage of our national movement and the secular, composite character of our culture.

Let us, then, who believe in such a future for India, make a pledge to fight unitedly and with all our strength, the divisive forces of communalism.

Signed by artists, scholars and concerned citizens

23 February 1998

VHP attacks exhibition at the Academy of Fine Arts and Literature, Delhi

In yet another display of their intimidatory tactics, a group of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) members, led by B.L. Sharma 'Prem' and Raghu Vyas, raised abusive slogans, indulged in physical assault and threatened vandalism at the Academy of Fine Arts and Literature, Siri Fort area, this afternoon (23rd February 1998). This was in continuation of a hysterical campaign whipped up against a lithograph by M.F. Husain, dating back at least 20 years, which was included as part of an exhibition (including works by Gaganendranath Tagore, Chittoprasad, Shamshad, Vivian Sundaram, former Prime Minister V.P. Singh, Arpana Caur, Sunil Das) that had been on display in the Gallery of the Academy over the last ten days. A statement issued by the VHP, which appeared in the press today, had warned that 'if the painting is not removed from the exhibition by 3 p.m., Ram bhakts would set the entire exhibition ablaze'.

Well-known painter Jatin Das, who was present there along with other artists and intellectuals, was chased and physically manhandled by VHP activists when he pleaded with them not to indulge in obscene sloganeering.

It is alarming that in the heart of the capital, a gallery under seige is forced to dismount an exhibition. It is also reprehensible that the police force, which was present in large enough numbers, did nothing to restrain the marauding VHP hooligans while they attacked Jatin Das and a journalist from BITV, and forced their way into the gallery.

We, the undersigned, strongly condemn the series of

fascistic attacks that have been launched by the Sangh Parivar (of which the VHP is an integral constituent) against freedom of artistic expression, of which today's incident is the most recent. Further, we would like to use this instance to alert the democratic opinion in the country that this is merely a foretaste of things to come, if intolerant forces such as these are allowed to get anywhere near seats of political power.

Signed, among others, by:

Veer Munshi, Savi Sawarkar, Mona Rai, Nuzhat Kazmi, Anita Dube, Jasleen, Bose Krishnamachari, Madhavi Parekh, Ajay Desai, Satish Sharma, Ved Jamaluddin, Nishat Manzar, Ahmar Raza, Safia Akbar, Bharati Sharma, Deepak Kumar Ambuj, Trilok Pal, Jitendra Jain, Surbhi Nagpal, Hazra Khatoon, Mrinal Kulkarni, Anil Dayanand, Roy Thomas, Johnny M.L., Gigi Scaria, P.S. Joshi, Sumedh Rajendran, Jai Zharotia, Gopi Gajwani, Geeta Kapur

4 May 1998

Assault on M.F. Husain's house in Mumbai

We strongly condemn the vicious assault on the house of renowned painter M.F. Husain by Bajrang Dal activists in Mumbai last Friday. The increasing attacks on the arts and artists have alarmed us all, but this invasion of the private space of an eminent citizen shows the brazen confidence these forces have recently acquired.

Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray's statement, 'If Husain can enter Hindustan, why can't we enter his house', is absolutely shocking and deserves the strongest condemnation. To speak of fellow-citizens in such communal terms is inflammatory and unacceptable to us.

The people arrested for the assault have been let off with minor sureties of Rs. 1000 each. This is farcical. The miscreants need to be booked for criminal trespass, intimidation and destruction of property, in order to prevent such incidents recurring in the future. The government has to act immediately to restore an atmosphere in which the creative community can function without fear.

We express our continuing solidarity with Husain and his family, and share their anguish.

Signed, among others, by:

Bhisham Sahni, Prabhat Patnaik, Utsa Patnaik, K.N. Panikkar, Vivan Sundaram, Jatin Das, Shabana Azmi, Rajendra Yadav, Anup Jalota, Geeta Kapur, Romi Khosla, Dilip Padgaonkar, Ram Rahman, Manu Parekh, Arpana Caur

10 May 1998

Delhi BJP government takes cognizance of private complaint against M.F. Husain

We condemn the decision to take cognizance of a private criminal complaint against the noted artist M.F. Husain. Coming on the heels of the Delhi BJP government's plan to denotify churches as religious places, the initiation of a case against M.F. Husain is yet another instance of the unfolding of the communal agenda of the BJP. It is apparent that the permission to the Delhi Police can only be given by the concurrence of the Central Cabinet and the Home Minister L.K. Advani. This is surprising in view of the fact that several Cabinet Ministers, specifically Mr. Ramakrishna Hegde, have publicly announced their disapproval of the attacks on M.F. Husain by the Sangh Parivar.

By allowing criminal proceedings against an artist for a work which has been in the public domain for over two decades, the Sangh Parivar is sending a clear signal of its vengeful intentions of imposing retrospective censorship on creativity. This pernicious logic will eventually lead to the closure of our museums and the destruction of whatever is not to the liking of the Sangh Parivar in our culture. This witch-hunting is morally and socially repugnant and legally untenable.

The case against M.F. Husain is one of a piece with the ongoing pursuit of a disastrous communal agenda by the BJP government which includes packing of the ICHR with historians supporting the BJP and introduction of so-called moral education in the BJP-ruled states, which is divisive and obscurantist.

Sahmat appeals to all secular political parties to raise the issue in Parliament and other public forums along with cultural personalities and the secular citizenry.

We also wish to address a few queries to the self-proclaimed secular allies of the BJP government. Will Mr. Hegde still raise the issue in the Cabinet? Will Mr. Chandrababu Naidu discontinue his support to the government in view of the blatant communal agenda being pursued by the government? Are George Fernandes, Nitish Kumar and Navin Patnaik a party to this decision?

12 December 1998

Memorandum submitted to the Union Home Minister protesting attack on Dilip Kumar's house in Mumbai

More than 200 artists and intellectuals, and representatives from about 30 organizations and political parties staged a dharna with placards and candles at the Home Minister L.K. Advani's house, and submitted the following memorandum.

The attack on Dilip Kumar's residence in Mumbai is an affront to all civilized norms and a grievous blow to all creative freedoms. After having subverted the autonomy of the process of film certification, the Shiv Sena and its political allies have now assaulted an individual's right to seek judicial redress. That the individual concerned has been awarded the nation's highest honour for his contributions to film is now deemed unfit to intervene in a matter concerning the integrity of his craft makes it clear that the perpetrators have acted in deliberate malice. The Shiv Sena hooligans have also threatened to carry out similar intimidation through demonstrations at the residences of the co-petitioners Mahesh Bhatt and Javed Akhtar. Even the Supreme Court was denigrated through slogan-shouting. The guardians of the law have either repeatedly been in default of their fundamental duties, or connived in the assault on creative freedoms and civil liberties.

We condemn the attack on one of our most respected film personalities which comes as part of a cycle of violence unleashed by the new moral police. We demand that the authorities desist from encouraging them and investigate the violence in word and deed. The license for hooliganism that this regime has provided to its favoured few should be

immediately revoked, and cultural activity in all its dimensions should be given an assurance of the security that is its due.

Signed, among others by:

Arpita Singh, Shamshad, Vivan Sundaram, Jatin Das, Shabana Azmi, Paramjit Singh, Rajendra Yadav, M.K. Raina, Navtej Jauhar, Anil Sadgopal

Organizations: AIDWA, AIPSN, Aakar, Action India, Alarippu, Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha, Centre for Advocacy and Research, Dare, Delhi Science Forum, Forum against Oppression of Women (Bombay), HMS Women's Committee, Hind Mazdoor Sabha, Indian Social Institute, Irada, Jagori, Jan Sanskriti Manch, Janwadi Lekhak Sangh, Kala Jatha, Kali for Women, Magic Lantern, Media Storm Collective, Naz Foundation, Nirantar, People Tree, Rahi, Sabla Sangh, Saheli, Sahmat, Sakhi, Sangini, Shakti Shalini, Stree Sangam (Bombay), Tarshi

Political parties and leaders: Samajvadi Party: Daroga Prasad Saroj, Anurag Singh, Dr. Onkar Nath Tripathi, Ramgopal Yadav; CPI(M): Sitaram Yechury, Brothin Sengupta; CPI: Atul Kumar Anjan; Janata Dal: K. Balasubramaniam, Javed Raza

1 January 1999

Statement issued after ‘*Dastak*’ convention

Recent months have seen an intensification of the drive by the Hindutva forces to sharpen the communal divide in our society, to subvert the secular foundations of our polity, and to suppress all opposition to their insidious designs. They have used their new-found access to political power towards this end, both directly through the use of the State machinery to achieve their objectives, and indirectly through ensuring State passivity in the face of their direct actions. While the Muslims had hitherto constituted their primary target, they have now unleashed a campaign against the Christian community as well, burning copies of the Bible, destroying churches and physically attacking members of the clergy. Even the Kabir Panthis have not been spared by them. They have let loose rampaging mobs against the exhibition of artistic works which they consider ‘offensive’, and have even attacked the homes of artists. Their spokesmen have engaged in the public vilification of academics and intellectuals whose views are different from theirs. They have used the government to pack premier academic and research-funding bodies like the ICHR, ICSSR, ICPR and the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, with persons whose sole distinction is their loyalty to the Sangh Parivar. They have changed curricula in government-run schools and compulsorily introduced the religious idiom, in forms such as *Saraswati vandana/puja*. Their pursuit of cultural homogeneity threatens to stifle the diversity of the country and disrupt the harmony of civil society.

The thrust of these efforts is not just against minorities, it

is against democracy. In a world of Hindutva ascendancy the 'true Hindu' has to be defined. Such a world therefore is necessarily fascistic, where empowerment of the people is replaced by concentration of power within a tiny coterie. Militarism and nuclear jingoism are being used for effecting a transition to such a world, which represents the complete negation of the achievements of the freedom struggle. It facilitates the imposition of imperialist dictates on our economy: the Hindutva elements themselves act as instruments of imperialism while the scope for popular resistance is snuffed out through social divisiveness and political authoritarianism. The only possible way that our society can advance is through a strengthening of democracy and secularism; the Hindutva forces which seek to reverse this and bring forth communal responses from other sections have to be combated.

We pledge:

- To fight for the defence and further strengthening of the gains of our freedom struggle;
- To fight against all communal tendencies;
- To work for a world, and in particular a South Asia, that is free of the nuclear threat;
- To oppose the machinations of imperialism to re-subjugate us economically and politically;
- To stand by the people in their fight for freedom, empowerment and social justice.

Towards this end we propose to coordinate our activities with the democratic forces in South Asia and among the South Asian diaspora. This convention asks Sahmat and other like-minded organizations to initiate appropriate steps for giving effect to this endeavour.

1 January 1999

Statement issued ‘Secular Cultural Action’ convention, 28 December 1998 to 1 January 1999

The burning down of two churches in the Surat district of Gujarat on December 29 is yet another reprehensible episode in the Sangh Parivar’s campaign against the Christian minority. Such attacks violate all canons of civilized conduct; they also represent a blow against our secular Constitution. Yet, while the perpetrators of such attacks, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, openly announce their plans of persisting with them, the Gujarat government, far from carrying out its constitutional duty of bringing the culprits to book, continues blithely to maintain that the situation is ‘normal and peaceful’. The central government not only turns a blind eye to these attacks but even downplays their significance.

We condemn these attacks on the Christian minority in the strongest possible terms; we demand that the governments in Gujarat and at the Centre fulfil their constitutional duty of providing security to the Christian minority; we urge all democratic people to stand up and act against the insidious designs of the Hindu communalists who are out to subvert the secular foundations of our polity.

4 May 1999

Attack on theatre group 'Samudaya' near Bangalore

We, theatre persons, writers, poets, scholars and concerned citizens, strongly condemn the brutal attack on the street theatre group Samudaya on May 1, 1999 by BJP hoodlums, at Anekal, a taluka town near Bangalore.

Samudaya had been conducting a communal harmony campaign since April 18 by taking out a Kala Jatha all over Karnataka. As a part of this programme a performance was scheduled at Anekal which has a BJP councillor, and falls in the assembly and parliamentary constituency, both of which are held by the BJP. At 11.30 am Mr. Nagaraj, the local BJP councillor, led a group of 30 hoodlums and brutally attacked the Samudaya group with iron rods, stones and razor blades. Three persons have been seriously injured. Samudaya vice president C. Gundanna, who is also a member of the Karnataka Sangeet Natak Akademi, was hit with a iron rod on the head and was seriously injured. The hoodlums also tried to rip open his abdomen with a razor blade but the thick khadi shirt he was wearing saved him.

Attacks on creative persons and creative activity are nothing new for the Sangh Parivar. The present instance is one of a piece with the earlier attacks on artists like M.F. Husain, Jatin Das, cartoonist Irfan Husain, the film *Fire*, and threats held out to the Academy of Fine Arts & Literature in the heart of the capital.

We condemn the attack on Samudaya and appeal to all to resist the perpetration of such acts.

13 July 1999

In Support of Dilip Kumar

In the afternoon of 13 July a small number of Shiv Sainiks and their cohorts held a demonstration in front of the hotel Le Meridien and publicly burnt the effigy of Dilip Kumar, the most revered of India's living actors. They did so after publicly announcing their intention well in advance of the action, and performed their ritual of fire in the presence of a large number of policemen, in front of one of the city's most prestigious hotels. As a cultural organization committed to struggle against communal intimidation of India's artists, writers and intellectuals, Sahmat condemns this heinous action in the strongest possible terms. We find it impossible to believe that this could have been done without the collusion of the highest authorities in Delhi, who knew of it in advance and could have stopped it from happening. Dilip Kumar has commanded the love of millions of Indians and has been a great symbol of our composite cultural traditions. This attack on him is part of the terror campaign that has been unleashed against some of our greatest artists and these attacks on artists are part of the campaign of terror that has been going on in India against all liberal, progressive, anti-communal people. Whether or not Dilip Kumar shall retain any or all of the awards he has received in the course of his distinguished career is entirely up to him, and no one in this country can be granted the right to hound and terrorize him in the garb of patriotism.

27 August 1999

Malicious election campaign of the BJP and allies

We register our strong protest against the series of malicious, slanderous and sexist statements being resorted to by the leaders of the Atal Behari Vajpayee-led alliance during their election campaign. The *Indian Express* of Sunday, August 29, 1999 reports George Fernandes as having said the following at a speech in Bellary: ‘What is her (Sonia’s) contribution to the nation? Yes, there is one contribution—the two children she gave birth to. She has contributed two people to the population of our country. Is there anything else?’ The report adds that he referred to ‘Congressmen as eunuchs’.

This statement by Fernandes was being made even as his ministerial colleague Pramod Mahajan was tendering an apology for his remarks comparing the President of the Indian National Congress with Monica Lewinsky.

We see a perverted and cowardly pattern in these low-level tactics of electioneering. We appeal to journalists covering the elections to boycott their meetings.

We appeal to the Election Commission to debar Pramod Mahajan and George Fernandes from campaigning, as an exemplary act, to ensure that the election campaign may be conducted with dignity and fairness.

Signed, among others, by:

Subhadra Joshi, Githa Hariharan, Indira Chandrasekhar, Rati Bartholomew, Jayati Ghosh, Nalini Taneja, Zoya Hasan, Suvira Jaiswal, Utsa Patnaik, Nilima Sheikh, Geeta Kapur, Kumkum Sangari, Shakti Kak, Radhika Menon, Madhu Prasad, Mannika Chopra, Imrana Qadeer, Lima Kanungo, Estelle Desai, Ambika Nair, Bishakha De Sarkar

24 September 1999

Memorandum submitted to the President regarding the attack on Sahmat Rangmanch in Lucknow

Sahmat would like to apprise the Honourable President of India of a serious attack on its theatre group, Sahmat Rangmanch, on the evening of September 22 at Lucknow.

The group was returning after cancellation of a scheduled performance of the play *Teen Terah ka Chakkar*, since the Chief Minister was scheduled to have a meeting at the same venue. The vehicles in which the group was travelling were intercepted at Bans Mandi Chowk in the city by goons led by a BJP MLC, Ajit Singh. Members of the group were abused, dragged out and beaten, including by the policemen accompanying the MLC.

These performances are part of a series of Sahmat programmes organized in a number of cities in the country, which include, besides the play, an exhibition of posters, 'Harvest of Hatred', depicting the serious social schisms that have emerged in the country over the last 18 months of the BJP-led coalition's rule. There has never been the slightest threat of breach of the peace or social order on any of these occasions. Yet permission was denied for the programme at Agra, and at Faizabad the local administration shut down the venue after the exhibition had been put up.

The attack in Lucknow is the most serious in this cycle of events which represent an affront to the constitutional right to freedom of expression. An FIR has been filed under sections 147, 323, 504 IPC. With the exception of the BJP, all political parties, cultural and social organizations and eminent

individuals in Lucknow have expressed serious concern at this incident of violence, and demanded immediate arrest and prosecution of the perpetrators. Yet the administration in the constituency represented by the Prime Minister is conspicuous by its inactivity. The miscreants are yet to be arrested and continue to threaten the protesting artists.

Sahmat has always upheld the right to freedom of expression and unfailingly protested any attack on this fundamental right, including through representations to the Honourable President. We do so again with deep anguish and concern. We appeal to the Honourable President to exert his authority to ensure that such incidents do not recur and that the rule of law is upheld.

1 January 2000

Attack on M.F. Husain's works in Ahmedabad

In brazen violation of the rule of law, the Sangh Parivar has once again mounted an attack on the noted painter M.F. Husain's works in Ahmedabad. On December 27, a group of hooligans belonging to the VHP and the Bajrang Dal attacked the multiplex which was to screen Husain's *Gajagamini* and defaced some of his works, forcing indefinite postponement of the premiere of the film. The spokesmen of the Parivar are reported to have said that the Parivar had decided more than two years ago not to allow the conduct of Husain's programmes in Ahmedabad or any other part of the state.

We strongly condemn the Parivar's fascist attack on the freedom of expression, as well as the BJP government of Gujarat which is allowing the Parivar goons to violate all democratic norms with impunity. We call upon artists, scholars and citizens of Ahmedabad to resist and rebuff all such attempts.

8 February 2000

Dharna against attack on the film unit of *Water* in Varanasi

The events in Varanasi over the last fortnight confirm our worst fears that the administration under the BJP government has become an instrument in the hands of the fascist hordes. This is a consequence of the green signal given by the U.P. and Gujarat governments, supported by the Prime Minister and the Home Minister giving a clean chit to the RSS.

The abject surrender of the BJP government of Uttar Pradesh in the face of the threat issued by the RSS organizations to the unit of the film *Water*, its actors and director, is an unacceptable demonstration of the government's capitulation in the face of the lawlessness unleashed by the Kashi Sanskrit Raksha Sangharsh Samiti (KSRSS).

The statement of the U.P. Chief Minister asking victims of fundamentalist intolerance and violence to leave Varanasi poses a threat to the democratic and constitutional rights of all law-abiding citizens.

Through this dharna of artists, scholars and concerned citizens, we reiterate our resolve not to let it pass.

Signed, among others, by:

Ahmad Patel, Alok Dhanwa, Anjolie Ela Menon, Anuradha Chenoy, Arpana Caur, Arpita Singh, Chanchal Chauhan, D. Raja, Dinesh Abrol, Gauhar Raza, Gautam Navlakha, Geeta Kapur, Humra Quraishi, Ian Lal, Indira Chandrasekhar, Javed Naqvi, Kamal Mitra Chenoy, Kamna Prasad, Madhu Prasad, M.K. Raina, N.K. Sharma, Pankaj Butalia, Parthiv Shah, Prabhat Patnaik, Prabir Purkayastha, Praful Bidwai, Rajendra Prasad, Ram Rahman, Romi Chopra, Shabnam Hashmi, Shamshad, Sharan Apparao, Sheba Chhachhi, Sitaram Yechury, Sohail Hashmi, Suneet Chopra, Tani Bhargava, Vivan Sundaram, Zoya Hasan

16 February 2000

Withdrawal of two volumes of the 'Towards Freedom' project

The 'Towards Freedom' project of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) aimed at bringing together documents which shed light on the various aspects of the National Movement during the ten years preceding freedom. It took much time for the collection to be made from various archival and private sources. Finally, historians, led by Professor S. Gopal as General Editor, began the work of final editing, as a result of which the printing of the volumes began. Three of the volumes, covering the years 1943-44, edited by the late Professor Parthasarathy Gupta, and three volumes covering the year 1938 edited by Basudev Chatterjee, have already been published by Oxford University Press. All students of the National Movement have been naturally looking forward to the rich additions the volumes would make to our knowledge of such a crucial period of our history.

It is therefore extremely disturbing to read in the press that the ICHR, which was duly 'saffronized' in 1998, has decided to withdraw the two further volumes (edited by Professors Sumit Sarkar and K.N. Panikkar) that are already with the publishers, ostensibly for a 'review'. It is strange that while gentlemen of the Sangh Parivar, along with the MHRD Minister Shri Murli Manohar Joshi himself, have been crying hoarse over the delay in the project, they are now rushing to stop its completion through their nominees in the ICHR.

It is clear that the withdrawal of these volumes is part of the plan to spread a distorted and fictitious history of the National Movement, in which those, like the RSS luminaries,

who had never participated in it, are to be given the pride of place. The action also amounts to the grossest form of censorship, even if one forgets the presumption involved in anyone coming forward to screen the work of such eminent historians as those who are editing the 'Towards Freedom' volumes. The Sangh Parivar has not of course thought that by this action of censorship they are destroying the entire credibility of this project.

Both as historians and citizens, we strongly deplore this action and call upon all concerned, including the Parliament, to join in the endeavour to save the 'Towards Freedom' project and ensure the publication of all the volumes expeditiously and without any censorship.

Signed by:

Prof. Ravinder Kumar (former Chairman, ICHR), Prof. R.S. Sharma (former Chairman, ICHR), Prof. Irfan Habib (former Chairman, ICHR), Prof. K.M. Shrimali, Prof. D.N. Jha, Prof. Suvira Jaiswal, Prof. Shireen Moosvi, Prof. Aniruddha Ray, Prof. Rama Krishna Chatterji, Prof. Iqtidar A. Khan, Prof. Venkatasubramanian, Prof. A.P. Sharma, Prof. R.L. Shukla, Prof. H.C. Verma, Prof. S.R. Singh, Prof. H.C. Satyarthi, Prof. V.Ramakrishna, Prof. C.P.N.Sinha, P.S. Madan, R.P. Singh, V. Krishna Anant, Suchitra Gupta, Suresh Srivastava, D.N. Gupta, Najaf Haider, Inayat Zaidi, Sunila Zaidi, Amar Farooqui, V.M. Jha, Pradeep Kant, K.L. Tuteja, R.C. Thakaran, V.K. Jain, J.N. Sinha, S.C. Mishra, Biswamoy Pati, B.P. Sahu, Rajendra Prasad, G.P. Sharma

19 February 2000

Intellectuals protest ICHR's order suspending publication of 'Towards Freedom' volumes

The latest order from the ICHR directing Oxford University Press to stop midway the publication of two volumes on the freedom struggle by two of India's leading historians, Professor Sumit Sarkar and Professor K.N. Panikkar, has shocked the academic community in the capital. Professor Sumit Sarkar of the University of Delhi and Professor K.N. Panikkar of JNU had been commissioned to write a volume each for the Indian Council of Historical Research's multi-volume series on the Freedom Movement in India, under the 'Towards Freedom' project. They had completed their work and the typescripts were in the press when Oxford University Press received the letter directing it to suspend production of the two volumes and return them to the ICHR for review. This was done without informing the respective authors, and without the knowledge of the General Editor of the series, who alone is authorised to approve the manuscripts. The authors were informed by Oxford University Press. Moreover, as per reports in the press, it appears that the letter was written bypassing even the ICHR, and at the behest of the HRD Ministry.

We see this entire move, first and foremost, as a blatant attempt to stifle secular historical scholarship by imposing censorship on the work of two of India's leading social historians. We also see it in the context and logic of the increasing attacks on minorities and on artists, film-makers and intellectuals who have remained committed to the vision

of a secular and democratic India, a vision that was inscribed into the Constitution and a vision without which this country could not have won freedom from colonial rule.

We strongly protest this despicable attack on freedom of scholarship and urge you to direct the ICHR to immediately retract its order to stop publication of these two volumes.

Signed by academicians, scientists, doctors, engineers, journalists, cultural artists, writers, from universities and institutions in India, Pakistan, USA, Britain, France, Italy

17 July 2000

The ASI and Indian archaeology today

Archaeology, the science of reconstructing man's past through a study of physical remains, especially man's own artifacts, has come to develop an increasingly humane face, a concept of comprehensiveness of man's culture, that it explores with tools that are daily getting more and more sophisticated and sensitive, derived from advances in different branches of science.

It is time to think where, in this context, archaeology in India stands today. It has certainly a distinguished past and many achievements behind it. While the formation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 gave impulse to antiquarian interests, it was with the officially recognized archaeological 'surveys' of Alexander Cunningham, beginning in 1861, that exploration became systematic, and immediately reported upon, through his classic *Archaeological Surveys*. In 1904 came the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, re-legislated as the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958. This provided the legal means to preserve monuments, a task which was increasingly seen to be a responsibility of the state. Under the stewardship of John Marshall and Mortimer Wheeler, improved techniques of excavations and scientific reporting were established.

After independence the Archaeological Survey, as a department of the Government of India, was greatly expanded, and under A. Ghosh as Director General, it obtained repute throughout the scholarly world for its rigorous techniques in excavations, care in preservation of monuments, punctual reporting of results, and regularity of issue of its publications. Under H.D. Sankalia, the Deccan College became the

torchbearer of application of scientific techniques, and much work began to be done by the State Departments of Archaeology.

What is most regrettable is that during the last decade and more, the Archaeological Survey has so badly fallen behind in most of the ordinary technical respects. Reports on excavated sites do not appear for decades, and when they appear, their quality often leaves much to be desired. As has been proved by the case of B.B. Lal's Ayodhya excavations carried out in the 1970s, new claims began to be made well over ten years after the excavations were completed: there is legitimate suspicion of afterthought here. Surely, if findings are fully and promptly published, there would be no room for such suspicion. While reports of many sites on which large funds were spent are yet to appear, even the annual survey reports of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) are many years in arrears, and so too the *Epigraphica Indica* and its Arabic and Persian supplements, the major source for new inscriptions discovered. *Ancient India*, the highly respected journal issued by ASI in the late 1940s and the 1960s, is long defunct. The Advisory Board of Archaeology has not met for nearly twelve years, so that there is no formal body to which the ASI is even ritually answerable. The internationally accepted norms that archaeological finds should be available for inspection to *bonafide* researchers, and transparency maintained about methods adopted in excavations and technical studies of finds, is being largely ignored by the ASI. Preservation of monuments is also increasingly neglected. It is often that the courts of law have had to direct the ASI to take certain measures to prevent pollution. While in British times lists of historical monuments with reasons for giving or withholding protection were printed for various provinces, the ASI no longer publishes such lists. Let alone such protection, very recently Akbar's famous palace complex at Fatehpur Sikri was wilfully damaged to dig up Anup Talao,

under an impulse for which no rationale has yet been provided.

As if this was not enough, the ASI has increasingly begun to adopt a narrow and parochial approach to archaeology. The beginning of this approach was signalled by the publication in 1955 of B.B. Lal's report on Hastinapur, which aimed explicitly at providing an archaeological proof for the *Mahabharata* tradition. This drew upon him the reproof of the then Director General A. Ghosh, who printed the ASI's official disavowal of his conclusions in the preface to his report. Later on, M.C. Joshi also contested B.B. Lal's thesis of *Ramayana* archaeology centred on Ayodhya. But now, as the 'saffron' forces have come into power, a complete shift is noticeable in official archaeology. *Puratattva*, a journal funded by the ASI, is intent on proving that the Harappan or Indus culture was really based on the Sarasvati, and was Aryan and not Dravidian in its ethnic basis. Several official publications of the recent past have also adopted this new-fangled designation, which incidentally puts Gujarat with its great site of Dholavira outside the zone of the Harappan culture. The new nomenclature 'SindhuSarasvati culture' is on its way to being given official recognition, to replace the more neutral 'Harappan' or 'Indus' culture (Sarasvati being also a river of the Indus system). Such chauvinistic attempts are drawing ridicule from archaeologists in other parts of the world.

While historical archaeology, that is, exploration and excavation of settlements in times covered by written record, has often been given a secondary place in ASI, even here there has come to be an increased emphasis on excavations of religious sites and relics, often with divisive overtones. In 1994 the World Archaeology Congress was compelled to derecognize its Congress at Delhi hosted by the ASI, because of the host's refusal to let it consider a resolution condemning the destruction of monuments on sectarian grounds. Recently, the Fatehpur Sikri excavations were so announced to the press as to invite speculations that Muslim rulers, such as Akbar or

Aurangzeb, were responsible for the destruction of the Jain images. Legitimate concern in this matter is far from being set at rest by the intemperate remarks of the excavator, an ASI official, about the 'lies' of 'Delhi historians' who have protested against such misuse of publicity. Similarly, the saffronized ASI's concern with proving the 'Aryan' origins of everything Indian does not only have the potential of provoking a 'Dravidian' backlash, but has put Indian archaeology to world ridicule, as may be seen in Possehl's recently published, monumental *Indus Age*, Vol. I.

In such a situation, it is hardly to be expected that the ASI can pay attention to what is now generally held to be the core object of archaeology: the study of human culture in all its dimensions, from everyday life to art, transcending ethnic, linguistic and religious boundaries, to be undertaken with total scientific rigour. If Indian archaeology is to regain its repute, Parliament and the people of India must wake up and take the necessary steps to restructure ASI and give it a proper direction and orientation.

Some of these steps have already been suggested by the Indian History Congress in its resolutions passed in the last decade or more, and by ASHA in its 1997 conference. These have unfortunately not received the attention they deserve.

The primary need is to isolate the ASI from direct subordination to the government of the day. From a Department of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, it should become an autonomous organization, directly reporting to Parliament. It should be headed by a person of impeccable academic credentials; and what is now the Advisory Board should have greater powers of supervision and guidance and should meet regularly, under a fresh constitution prescribed by an Act of Parliament.

The ASI should have separate preservation and excavation branches under separate Directors reporting only to the Director General, on the analogy of the present Epigraphy

Branch. It is also to be considered whether preservation of monuments may be entirely taken out of the purview of ASI and put under a separate national trust formed for the preservation of our architectural and art heritage. Until such a trust is created, the creation of a separate Preservation Branch is essential. All over the world preservation of monuments is a discipline by itself, and it requires recognition as a separate profession in India as well. Moreover, had the two branches been separated, it is hard to imagine how any excavator could have been allowed to mutilate such a World Heritage site as Akbar's palace at Fatehpur Sikri. The Preservation Branch, as also the Excavation Branch, should, of course, have adequate trained staff and funds at their disposal.

The licence to excavate should be carefully granted only after a fully justified proposal is submitted. An enquiry should also be held to find out why excavation reports have not been published and responsibility fixed in each case, so that such delays do not occur. The site notebooks and antiquities should always be made available to scholars.

There is also need to strengthen the Epigraphy Branch, which, despite the importance of inscriptions for ancient and early medieval history, has been suffering from so much neglect for so long: it was noted by the Indian History Congress in 1993 that it is woefully understaffed.

All efforts to improve archaeological education need to be supported. The syllabi have to be constantly upgraded in the universities, from where most of the officials of the ASI come, even if the ASI sets up a large institute for training archaeologists, which, according to press reports, it plans to do. But no archaeology education will be successful if its products are not liberated from parochial and chauvinistic biases: such biases are bound to negate the very basis of archaeology. This is the reason why the RSS's take-over of Indian archaeology must be opposed.

Irfan Habib, K.M. Shrimali, D.N. Jha

22 July 2000

Letter to the UN Human Rights Commissioner on the VHP seeking recognition by the Economic and Social Council of the UN

It has been reported in the Indian press that the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) has applied for consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. We wish to draw the Council's attention to the real character of this sinister organization, which has been in the forefront of attacks on minorities and creative expression in India. The VHP is a part of the wider constellation of BJP allies known as Sangh Parivar, which believes in majoritarian rule in India.

The VHP's aims, objectives and practice are in direct contravention of the UN charter and it does not deserve the recognition that it has sought from the Council. Even a cursory glance at the activities of the VHP as reported in the press in India is sufficient to convince any one of the unsuitability of the VHP to acquire the NGO status.

22 July 2000, The Hindustan Times: VHP Men Thrash Christian Leader

Ahmedabad, July 21: Samson Christian, an executive member of the All India Christian Council, was severely beaten up by two VHP activists here this afternoon. He is in hospital, nursing head injuries that needed two stitches.

8 May 2000, Asian Age: VHP Men Burn Copies of Bible
Ahmedabad May 7: Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu

Parishad activists assaulted Christians and burnt copies of the Bible at the Vivekanand Nagar in Kanabha near Ahmedabad, on Friday afternoon. ... The Bajrang Dal and VHP activists could be found roaming the area and the police attitude towards them was anything but stern.

17 May 2000, *The Hindustan Times: VHP Making Forays into New Arena*

Gandhinagar, May 16: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad unit Gujarat will celebrate Buddha Poonnima on Thursday, continuing their intense campaign saying that all the indigenous religions are basically branches of greater Hinduism.

27 April 2000, *The Hindustan Times: Amnesty Blames VHP, Bajrang Dal*

New Delhi, April 26: Amnesty International, in its latest report on India, has come out strongly against the RSS, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal for inciting individuals to violence against Christian organizations and missionaries. 'The rhetoric of national security of the present government which has been overtly linked to loyalty to the Hindu religion by such groups has led to the increased labelling of non-Hindu human rights activity as anti-national', says the London-based human rights organization.

21 April 2000, *Asian Age: VHP Members Surrender in Riot Case*

Ahmedabad, April 20: All the 10 people accused of triggering the Bakr-Id eve communal riots in Ahmedabad 'surrender' to the police on April 13. All of them belong to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal. The riots sparked off on March 16 after a group of people stopped trucks carrying cattle and beat up the driver and attendants in two separate incidents at Nana Chiloda and Naroda Octroi post.

2 February 2000, *Asian Age: VHP Not to Allow Mehta to Shoot Water in MP*

Ahmedabad, Feb. 11: Senior Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader Acharya Dharmendra Maharaj on Friday said Deepa Mehta's controversial film *Water* will not be allowed to be shot in Madhya Pradesh.

Addressing a press conference here, the Acharya flayed Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijay Singh for permitting shooting of the film in his state after the movie's unit was driven out of Varanasi recently, and said, 'It seems that Digvijay has lost his sense of proportion.'

He said, 'VHP will do everything to stall the shooting, except throwing its director Deepa Mehta and actress Shabana Azmi in Narmada river, if shooting is resumed against the backdrop of sentiments of the people offended by the script which denigrates Hinduism and womanhood.'

12 November 1999, *Indian Express: Send Back Missionaries: VHP*

New Delhi, Nov.11: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad today urged the Union Government to send back foreign missionaries working in India.

30 October 1999, *Asian Age: Pope is a Dacoit: Giriraj Kishore*

Patna, Oct.29 : The Vishwa Hindu Parishad Vice-President , Acharya Giriraj Kishore, on Friday termed Pope John Paul II as a 'big dacoit' as 'he is changing the demography of India through illegal conversions'.

24 October 1999, *Asian Age: VHP Criticises Teresa, Calls Pope Dictator*

Jalandhar, Oct. 23: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad on Saturday said that the Missionaries of Charity homes founded

by Nobel laureate Mother Teresa were ‘nothing but conversion centres, where Hindu children were converted to Christianity and sent abroad’, and also termed the institution of the Pope as ‘undemocratic and dictatorial’.

‘The Pope, during his next month’s visit to India, must tell us where did all the children (that were) cared for at Mother Teresa’s home vanish. We know that they were converted and sent to foreign countries as priests and nuns’, VHP central committee member Mohan Joshi said, addressing a meeting of the VHP and Bajrang dal at the local Devi Talab *mandir*.

16 October 1999, *Hindustan Times: RSS, VHP Kick Uproar over Papal Visit*

New Delhi, Oct.15: Pope John Paul’s visit to India may become controversial as the Sangh Parivar proposes to corner the Vajpayee Government on treating him as a state guest. Danger signals are coming from the Sangh Parivar as it plans to hold protest rallies during his visit and ask him awkward questions.

The press coverage reported above, though not exhaustive, is sufficient to point out the terror they have unleashed on the minorities. Their activities are posing a serious threat to Indian democracy and to the unity of the country.

We appeal to the Council to reject the VHP request for recognition.

August 2000

Indian High Commissioner in Canada pressurises Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute to withdraw support to exhibition in Toronto

In a move characteristic of the present government's drive to control all educational/cultural institutions, and to interfere in cultural affairs to curb freedom of expression, the Indian High Commissioner in Canada, Mr. Rajanikant Verma, has put undue and unwarranted pressure on the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute to withdraw its support to the exhibition *Dust on the Road*, organised by Hoopoe Curatorial, which is currently on display at Harbourfront Centre's York Quay Gallery in Toronto (June 23-September 4, 2000)

In the last couple of years, the BJP-led government has, through its own actions as also by way of encouragement to Sangh Parivar activists, vitiated the liberal ambience in which artists and scholars could work freely. The attacks on the film *Fire* and its film-maker Deepa Mehta, actor Dilip Kumar, and artist M.F. Husain; the take-over of the ICHR by pro-saffron historians; the take-over of the IGNCA by appointing a BJP MP as its chairman; the withdrawal from publication of two volumes of the 'Towards Freedom' project, edited by Prof. K.N. Panikkar and Prof. Sumit Sarkar – these are some of the instances of intolerance that the BJP has encouraged in our society.

In addition to artworks from Sahmat, *Dust on the Road* features works by Canadian artists Stephen Andrews, Shelly Bahl, Michael Belmore, Carole Conde, Karl Beveridge, Millie

Chen, Stan Denniston, Richard Fung, Amelia Jimenez and Arthur Renwick, which address similar themes of human rights and freedom of expression. The exhibition, also supported by *Raj Palta: Toronto's South Asian Youth Magazine*, the A-Space Community Arts Biennial 2000 and the London Community Foundation, plans to tour to Montreal, Vancouver and London, incorporating contributions from artists in each community in which it is shown, before travelling to India. To date, over 8000 people have visited the Toronto exhibition. The guest book is filled with positive comments.

On July 23, the Indian High Commissioner came to Toronto to visit the exhibition. According to the gallery staff, he was accompanied by the Consul General. *India Abroad* (August 4, 2000), a community newspaper, quoted his response: 'Indian High Commissioner Rajanikant Verma told *India Abroad* that the exhibition was devoid of artistic, literary or cultural merit. He calls it a work of fiction rooted in jaundiced imagination.'

In the following days, Mr. Verma brought pressure to bear on the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute. On July 27, Prof. Hugh Johnston, President of the Institute, wrote to the University of Western Ontario, through whom the grant for the exhibit had been given to Hoopoe Curatorial: 'Through a direct communication to the Shastri Institute from Mr. Rajanikanta Verma, High Commissioner of India, the Government of India has objected to this exhibition and to the association of the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute with it. In response to the objection on the part of the Government of India, the Shastri Indo-Canadian is requesting you to ensure that its name be disassociated from this exhibition. Please ensure that no funds provided to the University of Western Ontario for the Seed Grant for India Studies are used in connection with this exhibition.'

Please also ensure that the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute's

name is not noted as a supporter in connection with any future showings of this exhibition. Please advise the organizers of the “Dust on the Road-Sahmat” exhibition of the same.’

On August 10, the McIntosh Gallery and the Visual Arts Department at the University of Western Ontario made a decision to forego the grant rather than accede to the demands of the Indian government. ‘In my view the request is a violation of two fundamental tenets that are central to any university and all public art galleries including the University of Western Ontario and the McIntosh Gallery: . . . the principles of academic freedom and the arms-length relationship’, said Arlene Kennedy, Director of the McIntosh Gallery and the Visual Arts Department.

Artists and scholars in India fully support their counterparts in Toronto in resisting the interference of the Indian Government in the affairs of institutions and artistic activity. They reiterate their resolve to defend the right to freedom of expression and autonomy of institutions which is being so grossly violated in the present instance.

17 November 2000

Communalisation of education and culture by BJP-led government

The BJP has been actively pursuing the RSS agenda on education and culture. In doing so, it has undermined the credibility of our academic and cultural institutions, suppressed the freedom of expression, trampled on the democratic and fundamental rights of the minorities and secular-minded people, and transformed in a big way the content of school education in the BJP-ruled states.

Thanks to the school texts introduced by them, lakhs of school children are growing up with prejudice and hatred towards the minorities, and in total ignorance of our rich pluralistic and composite heritage. Enormous government funds are being pumped into implementing the Hindutva agenda; priorities of academic and cultural institutions are being changed with the same purpose; and there is no accountability of any kind to the Constitution, and to the purpose for which or the people for whom these institutions were designed in the first place.

Undermining of educational and cultural institutions

The important research, educational and cultural institutions and committees whose complexion has been transformed by filling them with people associated with the Hindutva agenda and linked with the Sangh Parivar are:

- Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR): Chairman, Prof. B.R. Grover, who defended and argued on behalf of the RSS on the Ram temple. The Council includes B.B. Lal, B.P. Sinha and K.S. Lal, with similar credentials.

- Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR): headed by M.L. Sondhi, a former Jan Sangh MP.
- Indian Institute of Advanced Studies (IIAS) in Simla: headed by G.C. Pande, a known sympathiser of the BJP and the Anand Marg.
- University Grants Commission (UGC): Dr. Hari Gautam, whose RSS convictions are well known, was appointed Chairman.
- Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA): L.M. Singhvi, made president for ten years, is a sitting BJP MP, and the Member Secretary Mr. N.R. Shetty is close to Mr. Ananth Kumar, RSS member and the Minister of Culture.
- National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT): Dr. J.S. Rajput, who has been advocating the RSS's emphasis on 'Indianisation, spiritualisation, nationalisation' of school syllabuses and 'Value' education, appointed Director.
- Indian Council of Philosophical Research: Dr. Kireet Joshi, President of Dharam Hinduja International Centre, appointed Chairman.
- National Film Development Corporation (NFDC): headed by Hema Malini, who actively campaigned for the BJP during the last elections.

Committees for Review of Elementary and Primary Education, Committee for Review of the prescribed NCERT syllabi for CBSE, selection committees for appointments in NCERT and NIEPA, the Advisory Committee on Education in Haryana, the specially constituted National Elementary Education Mission (NEEM), the Councils in ICHR and ICSSR and grants-in-aid committees for adult education, have been similarly constituted.

Government funds for Hindutva and changed priorities

Government funds for the Hindutva agenda in education

have been managed in many ways. Priorities of research have changed with the takeover of research bodies and academic institutions.

In the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), the 'Towards Freedom' volumes have been effectively shelved, along with *The Economic History of India*, *On Railway Construction*, and *Inscriptions of India*. The new projects in the pipeline are: three projects on the 'Indus Saraswati Civilization' and one on 'Archaeology and Tradition'. A meeting was held on 29-30 October to sanction grants for the new projects. Projects and grants are being awarded with the aim of establishing the Hindutva view of history.

The Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Documentation Centre, established in honour of their hero within the ICSSR, has been given huge funds. Even the entire campus of the JNU City Centre has been renamed as 'Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Gateway of Social Sciences'.

The Archaeological Survey of India is similarly preoccupied with funding excavations and publications to prove that the Aryans were the original inhabitants of India and that Indian civilisation is essentially 'Aryan' civilisation.

The ICSSR that only funds research is now utilising huge funds for a Shyama Prasad Mukherjee international conference with a view to presenting and generating new data relevant to the shaping of their national and global agenda. The ICSSR has also established a new Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Centre for Social Welfare, whose one major activity was the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Memorial Lecture delivered by the BJP President, Bangaru Laxman.

The Open School texts which were already written, approved and paid for, have been shelved and have not been published because of the association of secular historians in framing the syllabi for them.

Government funds have also been made available to thousands of RSS schools and the VHP-run Ekal schools under

the government scheme of one teacher schools, and to non-formal centres and Continuing Education Programmes being run by sympathisers. RSS-type books are being pushed into the literacy centres and rural libraries established in the last decade under the National Literacy Mission-directed adult education programme. All the old publications have been withdrawn and the old grants-in-aid committees dismantled summarily without notice, with the decisions taken by them not being implemented. Through a directive that makes all schools running for ten years automatically entitled for affiliation and recognition, the BJP has ensured large transfers of funds to RSS schools in the BJP-ruled states.

Since the BJP's take over, value education, moral science, patriotism and nationalism have become synonymous with Hindutva in the government vocabulary. The NCERT and the UGC, now filled with their people, have followed suit. The NCERT has seriously taken up the task of introducing a course on value education in schools on the model of the 'moral science' taught in the RSS-linked Vidya Bharati and Shishu Mandir schools. Enormous funds have been given for a resource library at the NCERT to 'help towards devising the course', and although there will be token representation of other religions, the Hindutva line will be inculcated through giving voice to every festival, fast, *yatra*, writings of so-called *sants* and *sadhus*, and so on.

Funds have already been sanctioned for courses on Vedic rituals and astrology in a number of universities and institutions of higher education.

It has been decided to introduce compulsory courses on patriotism in the state universities and science and professional colleges. While its content has not been worked out, it is obvious, given what the BJP has introduced by way of history in the school texts, that this particular course will be Hindutva politics in another bottle.

In the school texts in Uttar Pradesh and in the

examinations, Hindutva has so prevailed the system that one can hardly have a simple maths problem in a question without reference to the Sangh propaganda.

Attacks on cultural expression

Cultural festivals are funded by the Department of Culture and ministers are openly associated with promoting the identity of Indian culture with brahmanical myths. The birth centenaries of Ashfaqullah Khan and Udham Singh were totally ignored.

The new Harappan Civilisation Gallery at the National Museum in Delhi seeks to project the Hindutva reinterpretation of this culture as Vedic/Sanskritic, against accepted archaeological evidence and scholarship.

The Lalit Kala Akademi has funded and put up an exhibition on Vajpayee's visit to the US, which by no stretch of imagination can be justified as relevant to the aims and objectives of the Akademi.

The Sangeet Natak Akademi organised a show to laud the government's efforts on Kargil, and, more recently, a programme to celebrate 50 years of the founding of the Republic. The Akademis are thus being made the cultural PR agencies of the government.

- January 2000: Attack on Deepa Mehta's film *Water*.
- January 2000: Take-over of IGNCA to change the complexion and basic priorities of the institution.
- February 2000: ABVP threatened young people, attacked shops and restaurants selling Valentine Day cards in Kanpur.
- March 2000: Self-appointed culture cops of the ABVP tried to forcibly enforce a dress code for girls in Kanpur.
- April 2000: Communal campaign against the students of Jamia Millia and Aligarh Muslim University, branded as breeding-ground for ISI agents by the VHP and Bajrang Dal during the course of this one year.

- June 2000: Attempt to inject communalism into the film industry by a public campaign against 'Muslim' heroes. Articles to this effect published in the RSS journal *Panchajanya*.
- June 2000: Courses on Vedic rituals and astrology sanctioned in universities.
- July 2000: National Commission for Women brought out a document on the status of women which contained strong communal overtones in representing the ancient period as a 'golden age' when women's condition was good, and blaming 'Muslim' rule for deterioration in the condition of women.
- August 2000: Attack on Sahmat's exhibition in Toronto; the government forced a withdrawal of grants to the Shashtri Indo-Canadian Institute and other organisations which were funding the effort.
- August 2000: Disruption of presentations by secular Indian historians at the Conference of African and Asian historians held in Montreal.
- August 2000: The Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute pressurised to withdraw grant to Waterloo University (Canada) for the conference 'Accommodating Diversity'.
- September 2000: National Gallery of Modern Art forced to withdraw from an exhibition, artist Surendran Nair's painting *Icarus*.
- September 2000: ASI and ICHR officials linked to the Sangh Parivar tried to distort the archaeological findings of excavations at Fatehpur Sikri.
- November 2000: Attack on a journalist of *Nai Duniya* in Indore by RSS men.

Some examples of communal historiography from school texts

Communal historiography may be quite old in India but the new additions reflect greater contemporary use in dividing society along communal lines. A communal bias is woven into

school textbooks with preposterous ‘facts’ in a way that can only have dangerous consequences for the educational standards of this country.

We give some examples of the kind of things that are strewn all over these texts. These examples reflect not merely what books prescribed in the more than 20,000 RSS-linked Shishu Mandirs and Vidya Bharati schools contain. This is what the RSS is trying to force into the entire educational system. The introduction of such texts in the state-funded regular stream of schooling and the rewriting of social science texts in BJP-ruled states have massively increased the number of children who are being made victims of this second-rate and poisonous ‘knowledge’.

- Our land has always been seen with greedy eyes. . . . This story of invasion and resistance is our 3000-year-long Gaurav Gatha. When this proud tradition began is difficult to say because no books were written at that time . . . but we believe that the first man was born in this land. (*Gaurav Gatha* [GG] for Class 4, Shishu Mandirs, p. 8)
- To our ancestors these marauders were like mosquitoes and flies who were crushed. (GG, p. 9)
- Lakhs of foreigners came during these thousands of years but they all suffered humiliating defeat. . . . Mughals, Pathans and Christians are today some of these people. (*Itihaas Gaa Raha Hai*, I for Class 5, Shishu Mandirs)
- The words that have their roots in Arabic, Persian, English, Urdu and other foreign languages are known as foreign words, for example table, school, bazaar, train, kalam, laaltein, kameez, dava, ameer, copy, zahar, etc. (*Sachitra Hindi Vyakaran Aivam Rachna*, p. 11)
- *Nutan Gadya Padya Sangrah* for Class 9 has articles by Rajju Bhaiya, Tarun Vijay, K.C. Sudarshan and Jalam Singh Revlot of the Swadeshi Jagran Manch. Among the claims made in this book are that the truth that the

earth is round and revolves around the sun was given to the world by Indian scientists thousands of years ago.

- India is described as a Vedic nation on the basis of Vedic texts. (*Madhyamik Gadya Padya Sanchayan* for Class 10, ch. 4).

Some gems from the ‘Sanskrit Gyan’ and ‘Sanskar Saurabh’ texts

Sanskrit Gyan texts are taught in Vidya Bharati schools and Shishu Mandirs. The RSS-sponsored agenda paper on education that the Central Government tried to present before the Conference of the State Education Ministers in October 1998 suggested that these and similar texts be made compulsory for all schools.

The students are tested on dubious ‘facts’ such as:

- Ram Janmabhoomi is the birthplace of Ram.
- Iran was first settled by Indians (Aryans).
- Homer adapted Valmiki’s *Ramayana* into an epic called *Iliad*.
- Greek philosophers like Herodotus and Aristophanes were influenced by the Vedas.
- The Egyptian faith was based on Indian traditions according to Plato and Pythagoras.
- The language of the Native American Indians evolved from ancient Indian languages.
- The cow is the mother of us all, in whose body Gods are believed to reside.
- Ayurveda is the finest medical system of the world, and it naturally evolved in India.
- Jesus Christ roamed the Himalayas and drew his ideas from Hinduism.

In the *Sanskar Saurabh* series:

- God Jagdeeshwar, father of this world, give me this quality, I may be born worthy to serve the Hindu, die in

the cause of the Hindu. If I fail to give my life for the Hindu let me burn in hell. (Lines from a poem, *Sanskar Saurabh* [SS], Part 2, for Class 4, p. 48)

- On witnessing Guru Teg Bahadur's staunch defence of his faith the Emperor (Aurangzeb) grew red with anger. This was the same Aurangzeb who had Matidas cut through with a saw, Bhai Dayaldas thrown into a vessel of boiling hot oil, and Satidas wrapped in cotton and burnt alive. . . . Even in the last moments of his supreme sacrifice his pride in being a Hindu shone clearly on his face. (In the context of the story of Guru Teg Bahadur's martyrdom, SS, Part 2, pp. 49-50)
- The stories 'Vir Balak Badal', 'Balidan Mein Jeet Kiski', 'Vir Balak Chatrasal' promote hatred and strengthen all the prejudices against Muslims. They liberally contain sentences such as, 'If you accept Islam your life may be spared' or 'The Muslim leader said we have come here to destroy temples'. (SS, Part 2, pp. 57-61)
- The student is asked to draw the picture of Akhand Bharat. (SS, Part 2, p. 11)
- Sati is presented as a Rajput tradition that we should be proud of. (SS, Book 3, for Class 5, chapter 28)
- On Guru Arjun Dev's refusal to accept Islam, Jahangir had a furnace constructed next to the river Ravi, and a vessel filled with sand placed on it, after which he ordered a fire to be lit. Guru Arjun Dev was then called and asked to sit on the hot vessel. (SS, Book 3, p. 72)
- Bharat exists, has culture, learning, civilisation, religion, good deeds as long as this Hindu *jati* survives, remains dominant . . . (Lines from a poem, SS, Book 3, p. 77)
- We are one, our culture is one, our tradition is one, our life-current is one, and we have but one history. We have to gain self-knowledge, and on the basis of self-confidence, manliness and daring, create for society a monumental national man through the medium of

traditional ideology of Indian culture. This view of Golwalkar, opposing the pluralistic character of Indian culture and tradition, is strongly put forward. (SS, Book 4, for Class 6, p. 7)

- It is because we are the children of Manu that we are known as *manushya* or *manav* (human). This is claimed in a table of blind faith and superstition. (SS, Book 4, chapter 3: 'Manu Aur Manav')
- The Muslim butchers are the killers of cows. . . . The Hindus who killed them are to be venerated, their only fault being that they did it while they were asleep. (SS, Book 4, p. 57)
- There is a description of Hedgewar unfurling the saffron flag on a British building and it is said that the organised strength of the Hindus that we witness today is the result of his sacrifice and strong commitment. (SS, Book 4, p. 64)
- The Muslim children abused Durga Bhavani. They also falsely accused Haqeeqat Raj, and a *maulvi* forced him to accept Islam. He (Haqeeqat Raj) said that one has to die just once and what better cause to die for than one's religion. For this his head was severed from his body, and he became a martyr on the altar of religion and gained immortality. (SS, Book 4, pp. 69-70)
- November 2, 1990 (the day of the assault on the Babri Masjid) is a moment of history the remembrance of which brings tears to every eye . . . on which the bugle of victory sounded . . . (SS, Book 4, pp. 70-71)
- Aurangzeb said to Sambhaji, 'Accept Islam and your life will be spared and your kingdom returned to you.' To which Sambhaji replied, 'Religion is dearer than life or kingdom. I am born a Hindu; I will die a Hindu. Aurangzeb ordered, 'with a pair of burning tongs tear open every piece of flesh from this kafir' (SS, Book 4, p. 25). Such graphic sentences abound in a chapter on this

piece of 'history' from which a moral is to be derived, and such chapters abound throughout the book, and in fact the entire series.

- Afghanistan, Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh are shown as parts of India once, and the student is urged to pray to a picture of this Akhand Bharat and to pledge that he will once again achieve the same shape for our country (SS, Book 4, pp. 31-32). There is a poem with the same sentiments in the book.
- Scientists consider plants as inanimate while the Hindus consider them as animate and to have life. (SS, Book 4, p. 45)
- The worldview, thought, values and behaviour of the Hindus is most superior in this world. (SS, Book 4, chapter 21)
- In our lives we should accept only the Swadeshi religion, Swadeshi culture and Swadeshi goods, celebrate our birthdays according to the Indian tradition . . . yet for the defence of the country it would not be a crime to buy Russian MIGs. (SS, Book 4, p. 52)
- Bharat is the most ancient nation in the world. Our original ancestors Manu and Shatrughan gave life to this earth. The Indian Ocean is referred to as Hindu Mahasagar (*Akhil Bharatiya Sanskriti-Gyan Pariksha Pradhnotri* [ABSGPP], Vidya Bharati for Class 8, p. 1)
- The real name of Lucknow is Laxmanpuri and it was made into a habitation by Laxman. (ABSGPP, p. 7)
- On refusing to accept Islam, Banda Bairagi had the heart of his son thrust down his throat. (ABSGPP, p. 9)
- The Aryan civilisation is the oldest in the world. (ABSGPP, p. 11)
- Shikha, Mekhla, Tilak, Mala, Dand, Saffron clothes are symbols of Indian attire. Educational reform, a cultural campaign, and doing away with the legal obstacles that

prevent its growth are very necessary today. (ABSGPP, p. 13)

- There are eight questions just on Ramjanmabhoomi in the context of which there are answers such as: there were 78 battles fought for the Ramjanmabhoomi, around three and a half lakh people were martyred in its cause. Specific references to the date when the locks to the place were opened, the date when *kar seva* began, the date of the assault, details of the Kothari brothers, etc., are provided, and students are asked to remember them as possible exam questions. (ABSGPP, p. 14)
- The Hindu belief is characterized as a Dharma (religion, way of life), while Sikhism, Christianity, Islam are described as sects. (ABSGPP, p. 16)
- Our ancestors established national unity on a permanent basis by building Shiv Mandirs and Shiv lingas (ABSGPP, p. 20)
- Our culture is one. It is also known as Hindu culture. Everybody's heritage, tradition, and belief are one. Everybody celebrates Holi, Diwali and Dussehra together. The same *mantras* are recited on marriages and other occasions. Our cultural symbols, identity marks are the same. The cow, Ganga, *Gayatri Mantra* and *Gita* are revered by all equally. All believe in rebirth and *karma*, and everyone equally pays respect to *sadhus* and *sanyasis* (*Sadachar ki Batein* [SKB] for Class 9, p. 11)
- Among the builders of Indian culture is included Shri Krishna (SKB, chapter 9)
- Urdu is not an independent language. It is Hindi written in a different (Arabic) script. (SKB, p. 65)
- Cultural symbols are identified as and confined to the lotus, *Gayatri Mantra*, Nataraj, Ganga, *Gita*, the sun, swastika, etc.
- It is almost nine lakh years since Ram stepped on this holy Arya land and even today his reign is remembered

as one of happiness, prosperity and peace. (*Dharma Shiksha* for Class 6, p. 29)

- Shri Krishna is referred to as a nationalist. (RI, p. 65)
- Man first took birth in Tibet, originally a part of Bharat. All beings were Arya beings. It is from there that they spread out into the fields. It is now 179 million crore, 19 lakh, 59 thousand, 84 years since man stepped on this earth. (RI, p. 67)
- Dayanand Saraswati would have recovered from his position had a Muslim doctor and then an Englishman not treated him first. (RI, p. 56)

The Harappan Civilization: an exhibition in the National Museum, New Delhi

An exhibition on the Harappan Civilisation has been recently organised by the National Museum and the Archaeological Survey of India in the National Museum of New Delhi. The display is governed by the traditional trait-list approach of culture. It includes display of Harappan artefacts such as tools, weapons and utensils of bronze, ornaments, seals and sealings, weights and measures, toys, gamesmen, pottery, human and animal clay figurines and stone subjects. The photographs show excavated features such as structures, tanks and fire-pits or hearths labelled as fire altars from the Lothal, Kalibangan and Banawali sites. An introductory note in English as well as in Hindi, and a brochure based on it for circulation, introduce laypersons and students visiting the exhibition to chauvinistic glory and a distorted picture of the Harappan Civilisation.

The display has clubbed together the non-Harappan pre-Harappan Chalcolithic cultures (c. 3500-2600 BC) with the Harappan civilisation (c. 2600-2000 BC), giving little idea about the process of cultural development. The exhibition has nothing to tell about the time-lag in the spread of the Harappan culture all over, its extent and its regional variations. It gives

only the urban view of the culture, having nothing to say about the conditions of life in its smaller settlements and villages. There is no attempt to put the civilisation in a historical context by distinguishing the Harappan urban tradition from the succeeding non-Harappan cultures called the Painted Grey Ware, the Black Slipped Ware and the Gandhara Grey Ware cultures, with hardly any indigenous origins. They were responsible for the introduction of iron and the horse, and the evolution of early historic urbanization c. 600 BC, owing little to the protohistoric Harappan civilization.

What is most disturbing is the distorted view the exhibition gives through its introductory notes, labels and brochures. The organizers have labelled the fire pits as 'fire altars', suggesting the prevalence of 'fire worship' (of Vedic type) in the Harappan civilization (c. 2600-2000 BC) at Lothal, Kalibangan and Banawali, without taking into account their structural form and without chemical analysis of the ash deposits found in the pits.

The display of the two fragments of terracotta horse-like figurines gives an impression that the domesticated horse was integral to the Harappan civilization all over its content in time and space. The lack of evidence for the domestication of the horse in the early Harappan levels and the recovery of a bullock-driven chariot of copper from Daimabad in late Harappan times precludes any possibility of domestication of the horse by the Harappans locally and its use on a big scale.

The nomenclature of the Indus-Saraswati Civilization used in the introductory note as well as in the brochure distributed has not been accepted by the archeologists. The Harappan civilisation extended far beyond the Indus as well as the Saraswati valleys. In fact, the dry bed of the Saraswati reveals an eastward expansion of the Chalcolithic cultures and the epicentre of the Harappan civilisation still remains the central Indus valley. The upper course of the Saraswati was occupied only in the late Harappan times, as the evidence goes.

The introductory note, as well as the brochure, further mention that the Harappan script was written from left to right, as the Mauryan Brahmi of the early historical era. In fact, B.B. Lal has proved beyond doubt, with the help of inscribed potsherds from Kalibangan and a seal from Harappa, that the Harappan script was written from right to left, unlike the Brahmi script which had an independent origin.

A centrally placed showcase labelled 'Religion and Rituals' includes stone objects, small objects, small terracotta spindle-like objects from Kalibangan and terracotta human figurines in different poses. The organisers have treated it without any basis as an evidence of Siva Lingas and Yoga practices in the Harappan civilization.

All these descriptions lack authenticity and at best represent the eccentric views of a few pseudo-archaeologists. The question then arises, why are such unestablished and distorted views being propagated as the official view of the National Museum and the Archaeological Survey of India?

The distortions undoubtedly aim at establishing that the Harappan civilisation was associated with the Rigvedic Aryans. Fire worship, use of the horse, Rudra worship and the Saraswati Nadi, all happen to be associated with the *Rigveda*. The identification of the Harappan civilisation with the Rigvedic Aryans will push back the antiquity of the *Rigveda* itself and glorify the simple Rigvedic culture as one of the most developed civilizations of the world. What is more important, it will establish the identity of the Aryans as an indigenous people and the Vedic, Pauranic, Sanatan culture as the real culture of India, as opposed to that of the Muslims and Christians. This is the basis of the *Hindu Rashtra* theory. It seems that the organization of the exhibition and dissemination of a distorted view of history as stated above will only help to further the ideological cause of the RSS or Hindutva at the cost of the national exchequer.

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

The IGNCA was set up as a fully autonomous body by the government in 1987.

The present government, despite issues pending in court, forcibly seized the IGNCA on January 10, 2000. In their unseemly haste to take over institutions, the government appointed a new group of Trustees, announced on January 8, 2000.

The government and the new Trustees seem to be unaware of the following:

- That the IGNCA is not a centre for performing arts, as the representatives of the government constituting the new Trust suggest.
- That the IGNCA is not an institution of patronage distributing annual or ad hoc grants to institutions or individuals.
- That for the first time in the country we have in the IGNCA a centre of fundamental research in the arts and the humanities, and with no ideological bias.

Built on an academic foundation, the IGNCA was visualized as a centre encompassing the study and experience of all the arts. The concept is reflected in the precise structuring of its divisional components. This is the only institution which has established a meaningful bridge amongst the domains of the fundamental sciences, technology, metaphysics, the social sciences and the arts. A cursory perusal of their catalogues and publications would reveal the range and depth of the vast body of work accomplished, as well as the nature of the institution of which the performing arts is but one integral part – until its take-over.

As a major repository of reference material, the IGNCA has created an outstanding reference library and cultural archives, with access to multimedia databases and information systems. It has acquired a rich and varied collection of books

and material of eminent scholars in the fields of the arts and related studies – apart from a large collection of primary material. It has many rare collections of illustrious scholars who have made path-breaking contributions in fields relating to the arts, and a pioneering attempt has been made to bring under one roof, primary sources of the Indian tradition lying scattered, fragmented, inaccessible, or worse, in danger of extinction. At present the library contains about ten million folios of unpublished Sanskrit, Pali, Persian and Arabic manuscripts. The visual library comprises a wide collection of slides of art objects, etc., in Indian and international collections.

The results of the diverse areas of research and activities are disseminated through publications, films, cassettes and CD Roms, along with multimedia exhibitions on universal themes, international seminars and so on. The performing arts so far built into the initial phase of the IGNCA's fundamental research programme would find its representation at a large stage as envisaged in the overall plan.

The IGNCA has actively collaborated and networked with academic and other institutions, apart from scholars and specialists in a wide cross-section of fields, both in India and abroad.

The IGNCA was, until its take-over, well into the process of fulfilling its objectives as originally envisaged and laid down in the Trust Deed.

The new Member Secretary, instantly upon taking office, had commented that he 'was somebody who can now put it back on the rails'. The IGNCA was never off the rails – and this disturbing statement, writing off in one sweep the entire scholastic content of the institution which comprises the contributions of some of the greatest scholars of our time, raises the basic question of academic freedom, and of the ethics of education and the understanding of culture that are now being demonstrated.

As the government and their representatives, the new Trustees, are unaware of the IGNCA as a research and resource institution of this dimension, internationally recognized as a major core institution, the fundamental questions now are:

1. Do the new Trustees, along with their mentors in the present government, singly or collectively, have the requisite scholastic background or the experience to continue the monumental work of research and dissemination, in keeping with the spirit and broad vision of the IGNCA as previously conceived and stated in the Trust Deed?
2. If not – and presumably having a background of the nature of the IGNCA before accepting Trusteeship – why the haste for a take-over, and what is the ‘new agenda’? What is the motivation of these eminent artists and other Trustees who have acted in this manner along with the present government?
3. What then is their commitment and responsibility to the institution, to a democratic society and to the country?
4. More than ten months have passed since the take-over. Apart from considering the IGNCA to be a centre for the publication of material on ‘religious tourism’ attached to the Ministry of Tourism, and closing down the invaluable documentation programme on the North Eastern states (among others), what else has the ‘newly constituted’ IGNCA accomplished so far in terms of its work programme?
5. There are eminent scientists and scholars on the Trust. Apart from largely Karnataka-based appointees who now comprise the Executive Committee, are there any recognized scientists or scholars on the Committee of the present IGNCA, as required?
6. The government and the new Trustees are clearly at sea, in fact floundering rather badly. The IGNCA was created with a vision; its objectives are clearly defined and its

activities flow through a specifically conceived, well-articulated structure. Having created the IGNC as a fully autonomous body which has proved its academic excellence, why is the government along with their Trustee appointees now destroying the character of the institution along with its remarkable and valuable work essential for the country? Why not create a separate institution?

This take-over is not only destroying the institution and making us look small in the eyes of the world, but is in direct contradiction with all the values our great democratic country has stood for.

26 February 2001

On removal of Romila Thapar and Rajendra Yadav from Prasar Bharati Board

The Government's removal of the eminent historian Professor Romila Thapar and the noted writer Rajendra Yadav from the Board of the Prasar Bharati is arbitrary and unethical, and bodes ill for the independent functioning of our statutory institutions. The claim of 'informed sources' in the Information and Broadcasting Ministry that the two members have been removed because of the lack of 'utility' and 'harmony' due to their presence, is indeed ominous. It is not so much the technology as the content of the programmes of Prasar Bharati that crucially requires planning and assessment. That is why the presence on the Board of a historian of the stature of Romila Thapar and a literary and social critic like Rajendra Yadav was so essential from the point of view of 'utility' itself. Their removal is yet another step in the present Government's drive to present a one-sided, chauvinistic view of our culture and heritage. The emphasis on 'harmony' laid by the Ministry sources is a mere cover for establishing a dictated uniformity where democratic norms and the airing of different opinions will be excluded.

While there are obvious constitutional and legal infirmities in the Government's action, we hope that public opinion can be extensively mobilized on the issue so as to stay the Government's hand and compel it to reinstate Romila Thapar and Rajendra Yadav, and thus allow Prasar Bharati to retain some credibility as an independent and creative institution.

Signed by:

M.K. Raina, Romi Khosla, Irfan Habib, R.S. Sharma, Prabhat Patnaik, Javeed Alam, Kumkum Sangari, Githa Hariharan, K.N. Panikkar, Dadi Pudumjee, Anil Nauria, Anil Bhatti, Madhu Prasad, Sashi Kumar, Ruchira Gupta, Kalpana Khosla, Biswamoy Patti, I.G. Khan, Ali Javed, Shireen Moosvi, D.N. Jha, K.M. Shrimali, Ram Rahman, Chanchal Chauhan, Javed Naqvi, Asghar Wajahat, Iqtidar Alam Khan, Anil Chowdhury

4 March 2001

Destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan

We are deeply pained by the news that the Taliban rulers in Afghanistan have started destroying all statues in that country, including two fifth-century statues of Buddha carved into a mountainside in the Central Bamiyan province 125 km west of Kabul. One Buddha, measuring 53 metres, is said to be the world's tallest statue of a standing Buddha, and the smallest is 37 metres tall. Apart from these rare heritage pieces, the Taliban rulers have also decided to destroy hundreds of Buddhist and other statues and artworks housed in Kabul Museum. This is nothing but a barbarous attack on the cultural heritage of Afghanistan and of the world.

The happenings in Afghanistan are a clear demonstration of the threat that fundamentalism of all hues pose to the creativity, culture and civilization of the world. The destruction of the Babri Masjid at the hands of the fundamentalists in our own country, not very long ago, is of a piece with the insanity being indulged in by the Taliban in Afghanistan. We renew our commitment to root out fundamentalism from our midst, from whichever source it may arise.

We extend support to all organizations of the Afghan people who are fighting the Taliban regime and its ideology.

We appeal to all cultural and academic bodies of the world, as also the United Nations, to put pressure on the Taliban rulers to immediately desist from this uncivilized action.

Fundamentalism of any hue is opposed to creativity and innovation, and seeks to enforce a unitary conception on everything, including society, politics and culture. As a result

of this, plurality is destroyed and the creativity generated by the interplay of differing ideas is restricted.

India's rich cultural heritage, which is a manifestation of this plurality, is not safe in the hands of the rising fundamentalist forces.

19 April 2001

UGC Chairman's comments on the social sciences and on introducing astrology courses in universities

We strongly object to the comments of Dr. Hari Om Gautam, Chairman of the UGC, about the social sciences, particularly political science and sociology, and his attempt to reduce these established disciplines to the plane of Vedic astrology while defending the retrograde proposal for the introduction of astrology courses in universities (*Asian Age*, 19 April 2001). This view is disturbing when expressed by someone as important as the Chairman of the UGC. Furthermore, this perspective appears to be widely shared by policy makers in the educational establishment today.

In his effort to claim a scientific status for astrology, Dr. Gautam has defined science in a misleading manner, arguing that it involves 'probing research, investigation and prediction'. By defining science entirely in these terms, he has lost sight of the fundamental tenets of science. Science constitutes a body of knowledge which is not only testable, but is open to interrogation and refutation. It provides explanations for a certain group of phenomena through an integrated and mutually consistent set of propositions. The totality of its propositions, both those involving cause and effect relations and the mechanisms through which they operate, must in principle be testable. All the social sciences are informed by this widely accepted understanding of science. Astrology is not. Otherwise all practitioners of occult and black magic can be called scientists because much probing and prediction are

inherent in these areas as well; these subjects too should then figure among courses offered by universities!

Besides, if astrology, which claims to predict everything from earthquakes to disease, is to be accepted as a science, then there would be no scope left for any other science, such as seismology and medicine, for example. Astrology, whose purported domain is all-encompassing – from planets to human affairs – must then be either accepted as the sole science or rejected in toto.

It augurs ill for higher education in the country if a person who is unable to distinguish between science and superstition or science and ritual, and who casts aspersions on the social sciences while institutionalizing the propagation of unreason, is at the helm of the affairs of the UGC.

1 August 2001

NCERT history textbooks

Ever since the present government has come to power with its agenda of subverting the secular basis of our Constitution, it has conducted a campaign against the NCERT textbooks in History. It needs to be recalled that the RSS was also in the forefront of a campaign during the Janata Party regime of 1977-79 against these very textbooks, but then public opinion was strong enough to thwart it. The Sangh Parivar has now sought to do away with these textbooks by professing to restructure the entire syllabus, in which not only would the content of History be reduced, but such 'History' as remains would be used to promote approved 'religious values' and to present facts in such a fashion as to inculcate 'pride in the nation', that is, in the India of their narrow imagination. It suits them immensely when any attack is launched on the existing NCERT textbooks for reasons howsoever unreasonable and baseless.

For quite some time, the Sangh Parivar's new appointees in the NCERT have been proclaiming that the textbooks had insulted the religious sentiments of Hindus, Jains and Sikhs. It is in the line of that propaganda that all of a sudden an agitation has been built up against Professor Satish Chandra's textbook *Medieval India*, which was published by the NCERT in 1978, and has, therefore, been used in schools all over India for the last twenty-two years. Is it credible that for all these years Sikh teachers and students should have felt no feeling of hurt while reading it, and yet now suddenly the same text is being condemned for the insult it supposedly offers to the Sikhs?

In fact, any non-partisan reader will find that there is no

reason for such a sense of outrage. As to the two statements objected to, the first about Guru Tegh Bahadur's alleged alliance with Hafiz Adam is clearly attributed by Professor Chandra to 'some Persian accounts'. He does not state that this is necessarily true. Professor Satish Chandra goes on to describe what the Sikh tradition has to say. He refers here to the existence of some 'intrigues against the Guru by some members of his family'. There is not the slightest reason to be affronted by this statement either, for this has long been affirmed in Sikh sources themselves.

Professor J.S. Grewal, eminent Sikh historian, has given the following account of how Guru Tegh Bahadur was opposed by certain members of his family:

'Tegh Bahadur ... started his career as the eighth successor of Guru Nanak at Bakala. However, the opposition of his nephew Dhir Mal, at Kartarpur across the river Beas, and from his other nephew Harji, at Ramdasapur, obliged him to leave the Bari Doab, and to Kiratpur. There too he was not a welcome guest for his brother Suraj Mal. During the very first year of his pontificate, therefore, Guru Tegh Bahadur had to look for a new centre. He chose a place called Makhawal, only a few miles from Kiratpur but in the territory of the chief of Kahlur (Bilaspur). By accepting his nomination as the Guru, Tegh Bahadur gave an affront to Aurangzeb, who had presumed to arbitrate in the matter of succession. Had Guru Tegh Bahadur stayed on in Makhawal, Aurangzeb might have ignored the affront.' (J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, Cambridge, 1990, pp 69-70)

In the Sikh tradition, it is indeed distinctly stated that the Guru's nephew Dhir Mal had 'determined to ruin him' and that he 'had instigated Ram Rai (the son of Guru Har Rai at Delhi) to complain again to the emperor regarding his

supersession' (Max Arthur Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion*, Oxford, 1909, Vol. IV, p 338).

There is therefore nothing that Professor Satish Chandra has said on his own. Clearly, conscientious historians are obliged to give different contemporary versions of particular events if such exist. Professor Chandra has not said anything which should hurt the sensibilities of anyone.

Going into such detail is necessary in order to assure those who have been misled into joining the campaign against the NCERT History textbooks, including those from the Opposition, that there is nothing in these books which should hurt the Sikh community.

It can, on the other hand, be seen that the agitation against Professor Satish Chandra's books begun by certain Congressmen has enabled the HRD Minister Murli Manohar Joshi to put into effect what he had always wanted – the subjection of History textbooks to the censorship of 'religious leaders'. Such a position is reprehensible for a country committed to secular values, and cannot be accepted by any historian or social scientist worth the name.

6 August 2001

Statement issued after national convention against Communalization of Education, 4-6 August 2001

We express grave concern at the communalization of education that the BJP-led Central Government has been pursuing since it came to power. There is a national consensus that the goals of democracy, equality and secularism lay down the basic direction that all educational programmes must follow. The various activities and programmes which the present Government has initiated are marked by the abandonment of this course. This poses a serious threat to the unity and integrity of the country.

The present Government has converted almost every national-level educational and academic body into an instrument for implementing the communal agenda of the Sangh Parivar. It has appointed persons as heads and as members of decision-making committees of these bodies, on the sole criterion of their affinity with the ideology of the Sangh Parivar.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development and the bodies under its control, particularly NCERT, have been engaged in attacking the secular and scientific content of the school curriculum, promoting obscurantism under the garb of value education, and tampering with the core curricular area of the scientific temper in the guise of reviving indigenous knowledge. The so-called 'National Curriculum Framework for School Education' prepared by NCERT and released by the Minister of Human Resource Development last November is a blue-print for lowering the quality of school education in

the country and giving it a narrow, exclusive, sectarian and obscurantist orientation. It grossly violates the National Policy on Education (1989, 1992), which had as its basic thrust the promotion of strictly secular values.

In our country where education, notwithstanding its inclusion in the Concurrent list, remains basically a state subject, any 'national' programme in the area of education has to be based on a national consensus and evolved with the full involvement and participation of the states. The present Government has rendered this mechanism of consultation totally irrelevant by refusing to place the so-called National Curriculum Framework for the consideration and approval of the Central Advisory Board of Education. 'The National Curriculum Framework for School Education' is therefore completely devoid of any legitimacy.

The direction of the changes already implemented or being introduced in higher education is no less dangerous. The kinds of courses which the UGC has already decided to introduce in the name of traditional knowledge are aimed at fostering revivalism and obscurantism, and destroying the scientific academic character of higher education. It is heartening that the scientific community in India has raised its voice against these decisions and many universities have refused to accept them as university courses.

We express our deep sense of regret that the partners and allies of the BJP in the present government have remained mute spectators to the policies and programmes which, by destroying the secular character of education, undermine the foundations of India's nationhood and its unity and integrity.

We demand that:

1. The central government should initiate the process of consulting states in matters of national education policy by immediately convening the meeting of the state

- education ministers, and constituting the Central Advisory Board of Education.
2. The document 'National Curriculum Framework for School Education' should be withdrawn and no other document released till a national consensus is evolved.
 3. The UGC circular that introduces so-called 'indigenous systems of knowledge' as university-level courses while starving the universities of funds should be withdrawn.

Signed by:

Sitaram Yechury, Shabana Azmi, Arjun Singh, Brinda Karat, A.B. Burdhan, Mani Shankar Aiyer, Mohammed Salim, Eduardo Falerio (M.P.), Narendra Nath (Education Minister, Delhi), H. Vishwanath (Education Minister, Karnataka), Ramchandra Purve (Education Minister, Bihar), Ratnesh Solomon (Education Minister, Madhya Pradesh), Ajit Jogi (Chief Minister, Chhattisgarh), C.P. Joshi (Education Minister, Rajasthan), Kanti Biswas (Education Minister, West Bengal), Chuba Chang (Education Minister, Nagaland), Satyanarayan Sharma (Education Minister, Chhattisgarh), A.V. Subramaniam (Education Minister, Pondicherry)

13 August 2001

‘Stop this fraud on our children’: scientists protest against Vedic mathematics and astrology in school curriculum

We are deeply concerned by the continuing attempts to thrust the so-called ‘Vedic mathematics’ into the school curriculum by the NCERT. As has been pointed out earlier by historians and mathematicians, the so-called ‘Vedic mathematics’ is neither ‘Vedic’ nor can it be dignified by the name of mathematics.

‘Vedic mathematics’, as is well known, originated with a book of the same name by a former Sankaracharya of Puri (the late Jagadguru Swami Shri Bharati Krishna Tirthji Maharaj), published posthumously in 1965. The book assembled a set of tricks in elementary arithmetic and algebra, to be applied in performing computations with numbers and polynomials. As is pointed out even in the Foreword to the book by the General Editor, Dr. A.S. Agarwala, the aphorisms in Sanskrit to be found in the book have nothing to do with the Vedas. In 1983, the Indian National Science Academy brought out an authoritative book on the ‘Sulbasutras’; this, besides containing a commentary on the Sutras, contain the original Sutras as well as their translation. None of the aphorisms in Vedic mathematics is to be found in these genuine ‘Sulbasutras’. The term ‘Vedic maths’ is therefore entirely misleading; it is neither Vedic nor mathematics.

The teaching of mathematics involves both imparting the basic concepts of the subjects as well as methods of mathematical computation. The so-called ‘Vedic maths’ is

entirely inadequate to this task since it is largely made up of tricks to do some elementary arithmetic computations. Its value is at best recreational and its pedagogical use, limited. The imposition of ‘Vedic mathematics’ therefore is to convert mathematics to a bag of computational tricks and not impart a deeper understanding of the subject. ‘Vedic maths’ also deals only with arithmetic of the middle and high school level. Its claim that ‘there is no part of mathematics, pure or applied, which is beyond their jurisdiction’ is therefore simply ridiculous.

India today has active and excellent centres of research and teaching in mathematics that are at the forefront of modern research in their discipline. They have cherished the legacy of distinguished Indian mathematicians such as Srinivasa Ramanujam, V.K. Patodi, S. Minakshisundaram, Harish Chandra, K.G. Ramanathan, Hansraj Gupta, Syamdas Mukhopadhyay, Ganesh Prasad and many others, including several living Indian mathematicians. Not one of these centres has lent an iota of legitimacy to ‘Vedic maths’.

Nowhere in the world does any school system teach any form of ancient maths as an adjunct to modern mathematical teaching. The imposition of ‘Vedic maths’ by a government agency is a fraud on our children. It will condemn particularly those dependent on public education to a sub-standard mathematical education, and will be calamitous for them. Even if we assume that those who seek to impose ‘Vedic maths’ do so in good faith, it would have been appropriate that the NCERT seek the assistance of renowned Indian mathematicians to evaluate the so-called ‘Vedic mathematics’ before making it part of the National Curricular Framework for School Education. Appallingly, they have not done so.

We demand that the NCERT submit the proposal for the introduction of ‘Vedic maths’ in the school curriculum to a thorough and critical examination by any of the recognized bodies of mathematical experts in India, such as the National

Board of Higher Mathematics (under the Dept. of Atomic Energy), the Mathematics sections of the Indian Academy of Sciences or the Indian National Science Academy. In the meanwhile, no attempt should be made to thrust the subject into the school systems of various states.

The scientific community has greeted with similar protests the recent proposal of the University Grants Commission to introduce courses on astrology, Vastushastra in the universities. The UGC proposes to set up full-fledged departments of Vedic astrology; these departments are to be called Jyotir Vigyan, and they are to be set up from the academic session 2001-02. The HRD Minister, Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi, claims that it is for academics to decide whether to introduce these courses. But the truth is that the UGC is offering cash incentives to cash-strapped universities to start these courses, obviously without any discussion within the academic community. The UGC circular states that 'Vedic astrology is not only one of the main subjects of our traditional and classical knowledge, but this is the discipline which lets us know the events happening in human life and in the universe on time scale [sic].' As if this were not absurd enough, the circular continues: 'There is an urgent need to rejuvenate the science of Vedic astrology in India to allow this scientific knowledge to reach the society at large and provide opportunities to get this important science even exported to the world.' We now need official pundits armed with university degrees to predict earthquakes, for example, presumably to spread even greater panic than they did recently in Gujarat. Perhaps the UGC thinks houses collapsed in Ahmedabad and Bhuj because of the absence of Vastushastra, and not because of poor construction by rapacious contractors.

Vedic astrology traces its origins to Maharshi Parasara's book *Brihat Parasara Hora Sastra*, a compilation of rules and guidelines with reference to marriage, children, illness, wealth and so on. There are also three Vedanga Jyotishas and eighteen

Siddhantas (*Srya Siddhaanta* being one of the most notable among them), all of which codify astronomical knowledge – possibly to facilitate astrological calculations and elaborate on the rules of worship written in the Vedas. As early as AD 499, Aryabhata’s magnum opus *Aryabhatika* differentiated between this ‘real’ and ‘false’ knowledge. He described true knowledge as a jewel he took ‘from the ocean of real and false knowledge’ – with his own intellectual power. The line separating astrology and astronomy was not drawn in a day; it was the result of over fifteen centuries of painstaking study. But today, it is those who claim to be proud of our heritage that are erasing this line, decrying afresh Aryabhata’s distinction between true and false knowledge, between science and pseudo-science. The old belief – that the heavens influence events on earth – is understandable. If seasons are governed by the movement of the stars, why not the fate of kings and the common people? But over the centuries, as we have unravelled the mysteries of nature, such notions have lost their power to explain the world around us. Many people may still believe in astrology; but this is in the realm of belief, best left as part of personal faith. Acts of faith cannot be confused with the study and practice of science in the public sphere.

We are concerned that the essential thrust behind the campaign to introduce the so-called ‘Vedic mathematics’ and ‘Vedic astrology’ has more to do with promoting a particular brand of religious majoritarianism and associated obscuranist ideas, rather than with any serious and meaningful development of mathematical or scientific teaching in India. We note that similar concerns have been expressed about other aspects too of the National Curriculum Framework for school education. We reiterate our firm conviction that all teaching and pedagogy, not just the teaching of mathematics, must be founded on rational, scientific and secular principles.

24 August 2001

NDA HRD Minister misleads Parliament in his reply to debate on 'saffronisation of education'

Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, Union Minister of Human Resource Development, misled Parliament with the statements he made in the reply that he gave to the Lok Sabha on 20 August 2001. The debate, which had been initiated by Shri Somnath Chatterjee four days earlier, on 16 August 2001, on 'Saffronisation of Education', concluded with Dr. Joshi making the following points.

The Minister said that 'Prof. Yashpal, Prof. M. Mukhopadhyaya, Prof. J.N. Kapoor, Dr. Arvind Kumar, Dr. Anirudha Rajan, Dr. Sagat Mitra, Dr. Ravinder Kumar, Prof. Yogendra Singh, Dr. Smt. Kapila Vatsyayan, etc., discussed the preparatory material for the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF)' (p. 12530). The fact is that, in all, eleven experts were invited, most of them to give lectures to the Curriculum Group and not to discuss issues of curriculum. According to our information, Prof. Yashpal, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan and Prof. Yogendra Singh have denied being a party to the formulation of the NCF in its present form. The late Prof. Ravinder Kumar was invited to give a talk on the 'Freedom Movement from 1857 to 1947', not to discuss the problems with the history curriculum.

One of the major issues that was raised during the debate in Parliament was the refusal by the HRD Minister to convene a meeting of CABE (Central Advisory Board of Education) to consider the NCF. It was pointed out that without the CABE's consideration and approval, the NCF is devoid of any

legitimacy. The Minister's contention was that there is no need to call a meeting of the Education Ministers (CABE). This is violative of the National Policy of Education (NPE) for the following reason. The NPE (National Policy on Education), para 10.2 states: 'The Central Advisory Board of Education will play a *pivotal role* in reviewing educational development, determining the changes required to improve the system and moitoring implementation.' Leave alone giving CABE pivotal role according to the NPE, the Minister obviated the necessity of CABE itself.

28 August 2001

The lies of Director of NCERT exposed

Some of the newspapers have reported today that, in a statement issued by him, Dr. J.S. Rajput, Director of NCERT, has refuted allegations levelled both inside and outside Parliament against the NCERT and the National Curriculum Framework prepared by it, which was released by Murli Manohar Joshi, Union Minister of MHRD, on November 14, 2000.

It had been pointed out by critics including Prof. Arjun Dev, to whom Dr. Rajput has specifically referred, that the justification for preparing a new framework of curriculum by NCERT was the misrepresentation and deliberate distortion of the National Policy of Education (NPE 1986, 1992) and the Programme of Action (POA 1992). He had referred to the NPE statement that 'the implementation of various parameters of the policy must be reviewed every five years', and suggested that what was done was required by the NPE. The critics had pointed out that the reference to review 'every five years' had nothing to do with the preparation of the new curriculum framework. Dr. Rajput had also (mis)quoted the POA, which had recommended that '*curricula in various subjects will be examined for any deficiencies and inadequacies and for its moderation*', by deleting the italicized words from this quotation to prove that the POA required the preparation of a new curriculum framework. He had also referred to the preparation of a new curriculum framework as a matter of NCERT honouring 'its commitment to the nation', without saying anything about when the 'nation' had asked for such a commitment and when the NCERT had made it. The programme to prepare the new framework had not been

proposed by any department or body of the NCERT, and the decision in this regard was taken and announced by the NCERT Director without any prior consultation, in a meeting of the heads of departments, within two months of his coming to 'power'.

Dr. Rajput seems to have forgotten all that he had stated earlier in print in justification of the new curriculum framework. Now he gives all the 'credit' for this to Prof. Arjun Dev, then Professor of History and head of NCERT's Department of Education in Social Sciences and Humanities. According to him, because Prof. Arjun Dev and the department headed by him failed to revise the social science curriculum, he decided to 'undertake a review of the curriculum framework as it was anyway overdue'. It is true that Prof. Arjun Dev and his department proposed over a period of three years to prepare a revised/new curriculum framework and syllabi in social sciences and languages, in pursuance of the POA's recommendation for modernisation of subject curricula. However the programme was not pursued for reasons stated in the department's annual progress reports, notably the faculty members' preoccupation with other programmes, which Dr. Rajput must have seen. It is important in this context to note that Dr. Rajput's reference to a comprehensive review of the curriculum framework is completely untrue. Not a line of any such review was ever circulated and in fact no such review was taken up. What was taken up was preparation of what was called a 'discussion document', which reproduced large portions from the 1988 curriculum framework without any quotation marks and much less any comments/review, and newly prepared material reflecting 'new ideas' which were later reflected in the 'final document'. When the discussion document was made available to the faculty in January/February 2000, the common joke in the NCERT campus was that 'a statement was found which was linguistically correct and made some sense in that document, it should be presumed

that it had been lifted from the 1988 framework'. It is also relevant to recall that during the entire period from September 1999, when the discussion document began to be prepared, till after November 2000, when the final document was released, a large number of the NCERT's faculty remained idle because most of the programmes proposed by the faculty had been dropped in anticipation of the new curriculum framework. There was a gap of over ten months between the release of the discussion document and the final document, and little work was done during this period as most of the programmes proposed by the faculty were in the nature of follow-up of the national curriculum framework.

Some newspapers have referred to Dr. Rajput saying that he had circulated 'a seed paper' for discussion in the faculty. The Minister had referred to a 'chhota parcha'. Neither a 'seed paper' nor a 'chhota parcha' was ever circulated to the faculty for discussion. Not a single issue, whether of value education or a composite course in social sciences or any other was ever 'debated' by the faculty. The curriculum group which prepared the discussion document and the final document did not even refer to two major reports which NCERT had prepared in 1999: one was a status study of the upper primary stage in the country which dealt with many issues related to curriculum issues, and two, a detailed report on value orientation in the NCERT curriculum and textbooks which had been presented to the Justice J.S. Verma committee on fundamental duties and had been included in the second volume of that committee's report and published by NCERT. Dr. Rajput has alleged that Prof. Dev 'maintained a mysterious and motivated silence' while everybody else participated in the allegedly consultative process. Dr. Rajput is perhaps suffering from selective, if not complete, amnesia. NCERT's academic staff association organised a discussion on the discussion document in which a number of NCERT's faculty members expressed their critical

views on the document. A report of what was said by who was sent by the association to the Director. This report included what Prof. Dev had to say on the discussion document. On another occasion, a meeting of the department's faculty chaired by the Director was held, in which many members of the faculty expressed their views. Prof. Dev spoke in this meeting and pointed out that any exercise for preparing a new curriculum framework must be based on the preparation of a status note on the implementation of the existing curriculum throughout the country, a critique of the existing curriculum framework, formulation of new areas and issues that need to be discussed, etc. As none of this had been done, the document was not a discussion document. Interestingly, both at the meeting of the association and the meeting chaired by the Director, not a single member of the curriculum group or the Director himself said a word in response to the criticisms that had been made by the members of the faculty. They maintained a stoic silence. This was how the 'debate' on the curriculum was conducted. The same process was followed in the various workshops/seminars which NCERT organised on the discussion document. Participants raised questions but there was no response from those who had framed the framework. They are supposed to have taken notes on what was said. They seem to have made little use of what was said in this meeting/workshop. In any case, no issue was discussed or debated which involved argument and counter-argument leading to some sort of a consensus.

Dr. Rajput as well as the Minister, in his Lok Sabha speech, have mentioned that the discussion document and the final document had been sent to a very large number of people and that a 'level of transparency' in consultation has been received, which means that the 'nation' has approved it. He claims to have evidence that the entire student and school academic communities were 'fully behind' it. Before making such claims, Dr. Rajput should ask his PRO or the librarian to show him

the voluminous file of press clippings of reports and articles on the discussion document and the final document. He would have found that except for mainly his own articles, there were few reports and articles which were not in the nature of 'negative responses'.

Dr. Rajput is quite happy in the belief that the 'nation' is with him except for 'the leftists'. In fact, there are few takers of his curriculum framework in the country and even the non-BJP 'rightists' are not happy with it.

Statement by Arjun Dev

25 September 2001

Dissolution of Kerala Council of Historical Research

The production of historical research on scientific and unbiased lines is a very important task today. This is especially so for all state governments that do not subscribe to the anti-secular measures taken by the present BJP government at the centre, in the realm of education and research. It was, therefore, a most welcome step when the Government of Kerala established a Kerala Council of Historical Research early this year. The Council had an eminent historian like Professor K.N.Panikkar as its Chairman, and distinguished scholars as its members.

Much was expected of the Council, but even before it could implement its projects, the newly elected United Front Government has taken the regrettable decision to dissolve it. No one can be convinced by the argument that its functions can be performed by the newly established Gazetteers Department. While no one can have any quarrel with the proposal to prepare and publish new editions of the District Gazetteers, this work cannot possibly encompass the larger cause of promoting research in the history of Kerala as well as general history.

We are also surprised that such a step should be taken when the Congress leadership itself has been highlighting the threat of 'saffronization' and stressing the need to foster the proper projection of history to our people.

We therefore call upon the Government of Kerala to immediately reinstate the Kerala Council of Historical

Research. Such a step will not only be in conformity with constitutional norms, but also strengthen the cause of promoting historical research on scientific lines.

Signed by:

Prof. R.S. Sharma (former Chairman, ICHR), Prof. Irfan Habib (former Chairman, ICHR), Prof. Satish Chandra (former Chairman, UGC), Prof. K.M. Shrimali, Prof. D.N. Jha, Prof. Sumit Sarkar, Prof. Tanika Sarkar, Prof. Mushirul Hasan, Prof. Arjun Dev, Prof. Shireen Moosvi, Prof. R.L. Shukla, Prof. B.P. Sahu, Prof. R.C. Thakran, Prof. G.P. Sharma, Prof. Iqtidar Alam Khan, Dr. Neeladri Bhattacharya, Dr. D.N. Gupta, Dr. V.M. Jha, Dr. Biswamoy Pati, Dr. Amar Farooqui, Dr. Lata Singh

27 September 2001

Shivaji controversy in Bombay

It is really ironic that in the cosmopolitan city of Bombay, we are witnessing an instance of bigotry in which not only the rabidly communal outfit of the Shiv Sena but also the state administration, which is at the moment under the secular dispensation of the Congress and the NCP, are playing a role to encourage a casteist and prejudicial view of our history. Maharashtra, which has been in the forefront of social reform movements in India, can boast of savants like Mahatma Phule, M.G. Ranade, Pandita Ramabai and several others. One would, therefore, expect that any rational view of the national hero of Maharashtra, Shivaji, shorn of the upper-caste, communal view that has been given currency by the Shiv Sena, would be welcome. Sadly, the Maharashtra administration is demonstrating its ideological predilections by joining the Shiv Sena in intimidating Don Bosco School, Borivili. The prestigious institution was threatened by the local unit of the Shiv Sena on September 19 in which the Deputy Police Commissioner S.S. Khemka was also an active party. The issue was the introduction, on a trial basis, of a handbook on history for teachers. Despite the management's and the author's willingness for a dialogue and the offer to refer the 'controversial chapter' to an expert committee, the intimidation continues.

It is well established by historical research that Shivaji was from the Shudra caste; he rose to fame, glory and popularity because he represented the toiling peasants. This truth is unpalatable to the undemocratic forces since the Shiv Sena mindset cannot accept a Shudra ruling Maharashtra.

We appeal to the Maharashtra government to deal firmly with the intimidating tactics of the Shiv Sena and take exemplary action against erring police officials. The Maharashtra government should provide full security to the author and the Don Bosco School, Borivili.

20 October 2001

Responses to the terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September 2001

As citizens of India committed to democratic values, we feel concerned at a highly slanted representation in India of a number of issues following the terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September 2001.

We condemn without any qualifications the abominable terrorist attacks in the US. Serious note of similar attacks which have been taken place in many parts of the world should have awakened international conscience to such dastardly acts, and brought nations together to fight the menace they signified. It is fortuitous that after 11 September 2001, international conscience has rallied against terrorism.

We also condemn those who have rallied to the ignominious task of open demonstration of support for the terrorists or glorifying them, and characterising any campaign against them as *jihad*. Even if they constitute a tiny fringe of Muslim societies the world over, including India, we wish to state that there can never be any justification for terrorist violence. Those supporting the terrorists, or otherwise glorifying them, in the name of a wholly distorted interpretation of Islam, and this includes figures like the Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid in Delhi as well as the extremist clerics in Pakistan, are misguided and deserve outright condemnation.

We condemn, at the same time, the growing intolerance in the country leading to attempts at stifling all voices of criticism against US motivations in its current campaign against Afghanistan, or to characterise such criticism as anti-national.

Our citizens have a constitutional right to raise such questions and doubts. In any society, as indeed in our own, there are likely to be certain sections that would be hostile to such exercise of democratic rights in a free country. What is disturbing is that the Indian government has taken upon itself to equate criticism of the US strategy as being anti-national. We are aghast at the action of the Indian government to bring non-bailable warrants against six students who were merely exercising their simple democratic right in a sovereign state. In the same vein, we condemn the statements of those leaders, including some occupying high political offices, threatening that whosoever criticises US policies/actions would be put behind bars.

While any group supporting terrorists, whether those active in Kashmir or those who struck on 11 September 2001 in New York and Washington, is condemnable, we strongly deplore attempts to portray expressions of support by fringe elements for the September 11 attacks as the view of Muslims at large. Statements by figures like the Shahi Imam, whom the Indian government itself has vested with public legitimacy (let us not forget that when SIMI was banned, the Prime Minister called only the likes of him for briefing), cannot be attributed to Muslims as a community. We deem it absolutely necessary to condemn attempts to communalize by representing views of fringe groups to be the views of a whole community, as much as we condemn those voicing support for the terrorists, whether in the name of religion or otherwise.

Finally, while we strongly condemn the blatant anti-women and inhuman practices and policies of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, we are firmly opposed to the US's declaration of war against Afghanistan. We unequivocally condemn the bombing of Afghanistan. We hold the conviction that hegemonic state violence provides no solution to terrorist violence. War, like terrorism, only inflicts needless suffering on innocent civilians.

22 October 2001

Imam Bukhari's remarks about Shabana Azmi

We strongly condemn the remarks of Imam Bukhari about Shabana Azmi, social activist, M.P. and film personality, made during the television programme 'We the People' on Sunday, October 21, 2001, viewed by millions of people.

Imam Bukhari described Shabana Azmi as a nautch girl and a prostitute ('*nachne gane wali tavaif*'; the word '*tavaif*' was edited before the telecast). The remarks only reflect the vulgarity of the Imam's mind.

This is not surprising, given his well-known medieval mindset and retrogressive views. The Imam seems to have been rattled by the fact that Shabana Azmi and others were effectively and successfully able to counter the perception that he represented the views of the Muslim community as a whole.

We demand an apology from the Imam and appeal to democratic sections in all communities to unequivocally condemn the statement of Imam Bukhari.

28 November 2001

Segregation of 'minority' handicrafts at IITF

The crude attempt made at the ongoing International Trade Fair (IITF) – a brainwave of the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation incidentally set up for the 'welfare of minorities'! – to segregate a selection of our handicrafts into 'minority' is the most recent and crude expression of a politics that sees people in sectarian and antithetical terms. Not only is the location of this section at the least attractive spot for visitors and therefore a not-so-subtle attempt to limit the sale of 'minority' crafts, it is part of a far more wide-reaching strategy to pigeonhole and then target – through systematic economic and social boycott – a section on the basis of religious identity alone.

Public life and spaces in India, be it our film world, our business, our residential localities, our towns, *kasbas* or villages – have all been the locales for sowing seeds of the 'us' versus 'them' rhetoric. Small and large businesses in Gujarat, and similar minority-owned outfits in Rajasthan, Orissa and Maharashtra have been targeted by brigands of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal, ably supported by the Bharatiya Janata Party and the ideological fountainhead, the Rashtriya Swayamesvak Sangh (RSS).

The incident becomes all the more appalling in view of the fact that the area that sees the rich composite interlocking of different traditions is the area of culture – food, music, art,

crafts, literature and poetry – in our country and the subcontinent.

Such attempts to segregate (and also target) are therefore not superficial or temporary; they are aimed at redefining the vast area of culture in a crude and sectarian manner. Condemnation from lovers of art, crafts, music and food is in order, in the strongest possible terms.

28 November 2001

Attacks on the screening of *Gadar*

The attacks on cinema halls in Bhopal, Lucknow and Delhi screening the film *Gadar* are highly disturbing. The tendency to resort to physical violence whenever there is a difference of opinion/perception is not a healthy one. Fundamentalist groups of different hues are increasingly resorting to such tactics, seriously threatening the freedom of artistic expression, on the one hand, and the rule of law, on the other.

We appeal to all democratically minded citizens to oppose such a tendency wherever it manifests.

We condemn the hooliganism being indulged in by the Ali Sena and others.

28 November 2001

Attacks on Hindu minority in Bangladesh

The targeted attacks on the Hindu minority of Bangladesh, which include sexual violence against girls and women and driving them out of their homes and livelihood, that have resulted in over 2,000 Hindu refugees seeking safety in Kolkata, is the latest manifestation of the cynical manipulation of religion for political ends. The attacks that sharpened during the Durga Pooja season were part-legitimised by the sectarian rhetoric employed by Begum Zia of the Awami League before it emerged triumphant in the recent national elections.

Voices for sanity across the national and religious divide need to strongly condemn and protest such attacks whenever and wherever they take place. Attacks on Hindus, Christians or Muslims because of their religious identity has been the sad and cynical reality of the beleaguered Indian subcontinent. Developments within all the countries that signal a sharp rise of politics that seeks legitimacy on religion-based identity are the inspiration behind these attacks. Each time such attacks take place it becomes a challenge for forces committed to peace, secularism and democracy across the national divide to join hands in unequivocal condemnation.

As in India when such attacks take place (be it in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh or Maharashtra), the recent attacks all over Bangladesh have been highlighted by scribes and intellectuals from within Bangladesh, for which they have faced repression. The arrest and detention of Shahriar Kabir, a journalist who has been campaigning against alleged post-election repression on minorities is the most recent example of this.

The strengthening of voices of rationality, justice and peace that do not succumb to the politics of hysteria and vitriol within all our countries will halt the erosion of secular and democratic ideals that has been the unfortunate trend within all the countries of the region, of late.

February 2002

NCERT Director's allegations against Sahmat

Sahmat's attention has been drawn to a press release (No. 3/2002) issued by NCERT on 1 February, containing statements by its Director, Dr. J.S. Rajput. While attacking Sahmat's note (31.1. 2002) on the new NCERT syllabus, Dr. Rajput claims to be the head of a 'professional' organization. Such a claim is belied by the kind of language he uses and the motives he so readily reads into any criticism of the syllabus.

While the Minister of Human Resource Development, Mr. Murli Manohar Joshi, when he runs out of arguments, calls historians not subscribing to his ideology 'worse than terrorists' and working as 'a mafia', his minions in the NCERT degrade themselves to call the critics of the NCERT syllabus 'anti-national'. This only confirms the fears expressed by a very wide range of the intelligentsia that the present government's policies in education are not merely a promotion of a vicious ideology but constitute an assault on rational discourse itself. Instead of meeting the arguments presented in the Sahmat press conference of January 31, 2002, the Director of the NCERT, a non-historian himself, has sought to justify the errors, omissions and deliberate distortions in the history syllabus as 'reducing curriculum load'.

The Minister of HRD and J.S. Rajput are only reflecting their fascist mindset by characterising hundreds of professional historians as anti-national. Resort to such methods shows that Rajput & co. have no real defence. His attribution of 'wilful misrepresentation' to Sahmat is absurd. The 'units' in a syllabus assign weights to individual topics. There was a petty

conspiracy behind the thrusting of the bulk of medieval India into just one unit, out of the three assigned to Medieval India as a whole. Now Rajput himself acknowledges that it was wrong to have only three units, and within a day has increased the three to twenty-three units! This shows how cavalier NCERT is in playing with the syllabus. But multiplying units is just an arithmetic exercise; one does not know what relative weights are assigned to various topics. Nor does it remove the basic falsification in the syllabus, like claiming Chanakya to be the builder of Indian unity, and omitting important matters like the origins of Dravidian and other Indian languages, and the rise of the caste system. Not a single point raised in the Sahmat press release has been substantially refuted by the NCERT statement.

Rajput's claim that Sahmat divides Indian history into 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' periods is absurd and mischievous, and has been made simply to hide the NCERT's current effort to bring religious bias into the syllabus.

Sahmat will issue a supplementary exposure of the various falsifications, motivated omissions and ignorant errors in the NCERT syllabus, and does not intend to stop in its opposition to saffronisation in Rajput's and his minister's 'interest', which he so arrogantly confuses with the 'national interest'.

19 February 2002

Attempt to evict Sahmat from its office premises at Vithalbhai Patel House, Rafi Marg, New Delhi

Sahmat (Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust) has been running its office for the last 13 years, i.e. since its inception, from the verandah of 8 Vithalbhai Patel House, Rafi Marg, New Delhi. The Janwadi Lekhak Sangh (JLS) has its office in the main room.

This accommodation was provided to JLS and Sahmat by the CPI(M) from its quota of accommodation for its parliamentary group. Due to modification in the rules for providing accommodation to political parties, the CPI(M) ceased to be entitled to this accommodation. The CPI(M) leader in the Rajya Sabha, S.R. Pillai talked to the Director of Estates and requested that the accommodation at Vithalbhai Patel House be transferred in his name as an MP while he surrendered his accommodation elsewhere. This was agreed to by the Director who said she would put it before the Minister, and as the technicality of the transfer may take a few days, the eviction proceedings would not be affected. S.R. Pillai gave a letter to the Director to this effect.

What remains unexplained in the eviction episode is the unseemly haste with which the Director and his staff acted in the matter. What was the reason for scores of policemen to descend on the Sahmat office when an MP's request was pending before the Minister? The eviction staff insisted that they had instructions to evict Sahmat first. They started eviction from the verandah where the Sahmat office is situated, and not from the main room.

Safdar was a member of the CPI(M) and any activity in his memory is surely not going to be run from the BJP office!

26 February 2002

Stop VHP congregation in Ayodhya

The threat held out by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) to start construction of the Ram Mandir on 15 March at the site of the demolished Babri Masjid, in utter disregard of the already initiated judicial process, is reminiscent of the fascist tactics that led to the shameful vandalism of 6 December 1992. Following a nationwide *Ram Japa Yatra*, the VHP is now bringing lakhs of *kar sevaks* to Ayodhya to effect the construction of the temple, to be put together from the mass of materials already assembled near the proposed site in complicity with a pliant administration. Just as at the time of the demolition of the mosque, the Sangh Parivar is going to present a *fait accompli* once again before the nation.

We therefore appeal to all secular parties to exert pressure on the government in the all-Party meeting, to immediately stop the congregation of the VHP *karsevaks* at Ayodhya.

Signed by:

K.N. Panikkar, Kamleshwar, Rajendra Yadav, Shyam Benegal, Mahesh Bhatt, Nikhil Wagle, Sudhir Mishra, Sajjid Rasheed, Sagar Sarhadi, Vivan Sundaram, Geetanjali Shree, Sudhir Chandra, M.K. Raina, Geeta Kapur, Praful Bidwai, Prabhat Patnaik, Teesta Setalvad, Shabnam Hashmi, C.P. Chandrasekhar, Kumkum Sangari, D.N. Jha, Zoya Hasan, Irfan Habib, Sadanand Menon, Shamshad, Gautam Navlakha, Humra Qureshi, Kumar Shahani, Chanchal Chauhan, Arjun Dev, Ibbar Rabbi, Rahul Verma, Amar Farooqi, Abhijit Sen, Ali Javed, Madhu Prasad, Javed Alam, Anil Nauriya, Anwar Jamal, Jayati Ghosh, Lima Kanungo, Saba Khan, Narendra Sharma, Imrana Qadeer, Javed Anand, K.M. Shrimali, Shireen Moosvi, Madangopal Singh, Malini Bhattacharya, Mihir Bhattacharya, Parthiv Shah, Saeed Mirza, Rati Bartholomew, Romi Khosla, Amiya Bagchi,

Jasodhara Bagchi, Deb Kumar Bose, Sanat Bose, Bijon Chaudhury, Prakash Karmakar, Gautam Ghosh, P.N. Roy, R.K. Poddar, Mazhar Husain, Vithal Rajan, Raghu, Rana, Raju, A. Murali , Manjari Katju, Sonia Gupta, Kadeer Zaman, B. Narsinga Rao, Magni Tabbasum, R.S. Sharma, N.D. Jayaprakash, Biswamoy Pati, G.P. Sharma, V.M. Jha, V.K. Jain, Lata Singh, R.C. Thakran, B.P. Sahu, Suraj Bhan, D. Mandal, H.C. Satyarthi, Badri Raina, Krishna Sen Gupta, Kumi Chandra, Ram Rahman, Indira Chandrasekhar, Anil Chandra, Girish Bhai Patel, D.N. Pathak, Gautam Thakkar, Father Cedric Prakash, Indu Bhai Jani, Shiba George, Hanif Lakdawala, H.C. Suresh, Justice Rawani, Rajendra Prasad

27 February 2002

Appeal to Supreme Court of India for suo moto action in Ayodhya

To
Chief Justice S.P. Bharucha,
Supreme Court of India,
New Delhi.

Honourable Sir,

Is the Indian Supreme Court content to remain a mute spectator to a nationwide bloodbath yet again?

The nation is once again being held to cynical ransom by unlawful outfits and elements like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal as they openly signal their intention to flout the Indian Constitution and the rule of law. Repeatedly, statements by the VHP claim that they will not deflect from their decision to begin construction of the Ram temple on the site of an illegally demolished Mosque, on March 15, 2002. These threats are unlawful given that the matter remains unresolved judicially. The local administration has been appealing helplessly to the executive, demanding that the activities and the outfits be declared illegal, but to no avail.

The matter deserves even more prompt and immediate consideration given the ghastly arson and burning alive of over 50 persons travelling in the Sabarmati Express at Godhra in Gujarat yesterday, and the potential of this incident to lead to a nationwide bloodbath of revenge and counter-revenge between groups and communities.

The incident in Godhra deserves to be unequivocally

condemned and the guilty, whoever they are, need to be brought to book forthwith. This incident, just like the systematic mobilisation around the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya, achieves sharp communal polarisation and unleashes hatred among people leading to heinous, mindless violence, and needs to be seen as such. Already, in gruesome and medieval bouts of reprisal in Baroda, Anand and Ahmedabad, minority lives and properties have been targeted. Maharashtra and Rajasthan, where bandh calls have been declared by unlawful outfits like the VHP, Bajrang Dal and their mentors, are in a state of high alert.

Since year 2000, but especially since August 2001, outfits like the Bajrang Dal and the VHP have undertaken a much-publicised programme of arming Indian civil society through the distribution of *trishuls*, that are in fact cleverly disguised four-inch scrap Rampuri knives that can kill. The intelligence wing of the police of at least two states in the country, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, have asked for the banning of the blatantly illegal activities of these outfits on grounds that they generate localised terror. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of such *trishuls* have been systematically distributed to arm bands of youth readied and trained for violence. The threat to the rule of law as enshrined in the Constitution is clear.

Nine years ago, as the Court, the Indian Parliament and the law and order forces mutely watched, a 400-year-old Mosque destroyed in full public view. The view and the movement preceding it gave sanction for a vengeful bloodbath for some months in 1990 and then again in 1992-93, during which Indian religious minorities were singled out and targeted, whether in Rajkot, Ahmedabad, Indore, Mumbai, Purulia, Jaipur, or Gonda – cities spanning different regions across the country. It was clear that in the guise of the construction of a temple to Lord Ram, the politics of violence, hatred and venom ruled the day. India hung its head in shame.

Even then, nine years ago, all wings of the Indian state had been adequately petitioned in advance, of the imminent danger; all singularly failed to uphold the Constitution. Will the same mistake be made again? Already, we are informed through media reports that no less than 10-20 thousand zealots, groomed in irrationality and trained in wielding *lathis* and *trishuls*, geared to break the law, have assembled at Ayodhya. Over 1 lakh more are expected to converge by the assigned date. A few days ago, a former Governor of Uttar Pradesh, Romesh Bhandari, has petitioned you, Honourable Sir, that 'we may be left with a fait accompli and the resultant chaos that we witnessed in December 1992 when the Babri Masjid was demolished in full public glare'. He has appealed to you in light of the fact that so many thousands of *kar sevaks* are gathering in Ayodhya, and urged your taking *suo moto* action in the matter.

Former Governor Bhandari's appeal is reminiscent of the voice of advocate O.P. Sharma who petitioned the then Chief Justice Venkatachaliah, requesting the Supreme Court's *suo moto* action in preventing the demolition, given the fact that hundreds of thousands of *kar sevaks* had reached Ayodhya. That was on November 30, 1992. Reluctant to take the appeal seriously, the Supreme Court had merely sent an observer to Ayodhya, a court official who mutely watched the demolition.

Once again we reiterate the appeal to you, in your capacity as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the apex constitutional authority in the country. As citizens concerned about the quality of public life and discourse in the country, which has suffered from the severe perversions caused by hate speech, blatant falsehoods and violence, we urge that the Supreme Court does not remain a mute spectator yet again and issues *suo moto* orders so that unlawful actions of the *kar sevaks* are restrained, criminal activity stopped and nationwide violence prevented.

Signed, among others, by:

Teesta Setalvad, Shabnam Hashmi, Prabhat Patnaik, K.N. Panikkar,
Farookh Sheikh, Praful Bidwai, Vivan Sundaram, Ram Rahman,
Javed Anand, Rajendra Prasad, Dophy DeSouza, Sajjid Rashid, Nikhil
Wagle

3 March 2002

The situation in Gujarat

In Gujarat brutality and gruesome ‘vengeance’ have torn apart the duplicity of words and slogans. Those who assumed administrative office in the name of the people do not give succour to the victims of a harvest of hatred, but instead fuel the flames in which fifty, hundred, two hundred lives – the figure keeps mounting – are sacrificed and thousands are terrorized.

The face of Indian democracy weeps helplessly from a Reuters photograph on the front page of most national dailies. On television the charred body of a mother, infant clutched to her chest; with folded hands a young Muslim begs for mercy from the mob torching his home. Shame on you India, shame on all of us who call ourselves tolerant heirs to a five thousand-year-old civilization! For all the draconian laws that exist, we are unable to prevent the butchering of the defenceless, and continue to hide this failure by turning the same savagery against the weak, the innocent. Over and over again.

The Prime Minister has a novel solution – he will ask those who spew the doctrine of hate against the minorities to intercede on behalf of his government! The RSS, of which the BJP is one face, is to negotiate with its other face – the VHP. For the past few months the VHP has been proclaiming that it cares not a whit for constitutional law. Yet it has been permitted by the pliant central and state governments to gather at Ayodhya the very forces that started the current cycle of blood-letting ten years ago, by demolishing the Babri Masjid. The RSS chief minister of Gujarat has taken the cue, deploying the army too late and too selectively while blaming ‘Muslims’ and holding their ‘nature’ responsible for the violence. The VHP

has laid down 'conditions' for the cessation of violence – government must disrespect the Supreme Court judgement and promise, in writing, to hand over the land they demand for temple construction.

The people of the country watch this charade in shock and disbelief. For the past decade they have seen the politics of brinkmanship inaugurated by L.K. Advani's *Rath Yatra* and the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The talk of building a Ram *mandir* initially whipped up and exploited emotions for a time, but over the past two years people have exercised their democratic choice and rejected the BJP-led regime and the divisive politics of the RSS/Sangh Parivar. The recent elections have made this decisively clear. Far from respecting the people's mandate, the Sangh Parivar is desperately attempting to subvert it with an orgy of hate and violence.

We can no longer be silent.

We demand

- declaration of Gujarat as a disturbed area and restoration of normalcy by immediate and effective deployment of the army
- immediate dismissal of the Narendra Modi government
- punishment to those guilty of inciting and perpetrating violence in Godhra, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Mehsana, Rajkot, Bhavnagar, and other parts of Gujarat
- immediate arrest of those occupying and desecrating places of worship
- banning of the VHP and Bajrang Dal
- removal of *kar sevaks* from Ayodhya and strict prevention of all further influx
- that any action violating the Supreme Court judgement on Ayodhya be dealt with severely and swiftly.

6 March 2002

Supreme Court judgment on Arundhati Roy

We are dismayed and pained at the Supreme Court judgment harshly convicting writer and activist Arundhati Roy of contempt of court for her criticism of the judicial verdict in the Narmada case, among other things.

The sentence is far from 'symbolic' and entails three months' imprisonment if Roy does not pay a Rs. 2,000 fine.

The judgment will be widely seen as discouraging and deterring any criticism of judicial verdicts, even if it is reasonable, factually correct, logically sound, and in the public interest. This has distressing implications for the freedom of expression and a writer's ability to communicate creatively. Its impact on the media, which already has to battle growing political and commercial interference, will be deleterious.

While expressing our solidarity with Arundhati Roy, and the heroic movement of the people of the Narmada Valley, we call upon the Supreme Court to review its judgment.

Signed, among others, by:

K. Satchidanandan, Krishna Sobti, Gopi Chand Narang, Githa Hariharan, Namwar Singh, Kunwar Narain, Praful Bidwai, Achin Vanaik, Prabhat Patnaik, Irfan Habib, Sukumar Muralidharan, Shabnam Hashmi, Rajendra Prasad

23 March 2002

The Gujarat Situation

Today we are gathered here as anguished witnesses to the continuing violence in Gujarat. We are gathered here to express a sense of deep national shame. We are gathered here to restate our resolve to not let this pass.

The mass killings in Gujarat represent the biggest attack launched by communal forces on the principles of civil society, the very basis of a democracy. The carnage in Gujarat has been sought to be presented by the state and its apologists as an 'inevitable reaction' to the attack on passengers of the Sabarmati Express at Godhra. We know that there has been no ambiguity in the outright condemnation of this heinous attack by the entire nation. Yet the state and the Hindutva forces continue to use the perverse logic of 'retaliation' to justify the subsequent destruction of human lives.

The violence in Gujarat, far from being spontaneous, was clearly facilitated by state complicity all through. Ministers of the state government and other political representatives were perpetrators of mob violence; the police professed inability to bring the situation under control; there was an unexplained delay in bringing in the army; and the chief minister presided over the mass murders.

The post-Godhra violence in Gujarat is not a riot therefore, but the culmination of a long-term strategy for implementing the Hindutva agenda. This includes economic debilitation, social ghettoization and cultural disintegration of the minorities. These are systematic and relentless efforts to convert what was historically a region marked by a composite culture, the land of Gandhi, into a laboratory of a 'Hindu rashtra'.

There was terrifying precision in the infrastructure utilized

to conduct the killings, arson and looting. Listings, statistics, state records and documents were used to identify members and business establishments of the Muslim community. The mobs were well equipped with arms and weapons, transport and communication facilities. The nature and scale of the violence in Gujarat amounts to a targeted extermination of an entire community: through slaughter, rape, burnings. We still do not know the number of those who died.

The violence continues even as about a hundred thousand people in Gujarat have been left homeless. They are now lodged in makeshift tents in relief camps which are desperately ill-equipped. These are managed mostly by voluntary organisations. There is no support from the state government for rehabilitating the helpless people who have fled for safety. In addition, large sections of Muslims are confined to their homes in sub-clusters, unable to conduct day-to-day life.

While there has been widespread revulsion and anger at the events in Gujarat, a matching relief operation is still missing.

We must join hands and coordinate with groups and organisations for immediate relief measures in Gujarat.

We must be involved in longer-term recuperation of the civil society that has been so brutally ruptured.

We must build up the political pressure to expose the criminal culpability of the ruling party in both the state and the centre.

We demand the dismissal of Narendra Modi, the chief minister of Gujarat.

We demand the banning of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal.

12 April 2002

Crimes against the common heritage of humanity

The Nazi mass murderer Herman Goering would undo the buttons of his gun holster every time he heard the word 'culture'. With their passion for simplifying matters, the VHP and Bajrang Dal mobs have shown that they would rather reach for the sledge-hammer every time they see a symbol of humanity's common cultural heritage.

Within a day of the Godhra outrage, the VHP mobs that have held Gujarat in their terrorist grip for over a month had demolished the tomb of Wali Gujarati. The state government that has allowed tens of thousands of citizens to become refugees living in dread of the next visit of the vengeful mob, then showed a rare appreciation of its civic responsibilities. Even as the protests began over the wanton destruction of an important cultural landmark, it paved over the spot where Wali's tomb had stood. It was obviously working on the belief that effacing every evidence of a cultural monument would obliterate all the rich traditions that it served as a reminder of.

Wali is acknowledged almost universally by all with an authentic appreciation of the evolution of Indian culture, as the founder of the modern Urdu poem. Born in Aurangabad in 1667, he was known during his brief lifespan as Wali Aurangabadi or Wali Dakhani. He travelled widely over India, his visit to Delhi in 1700 and his interactions there being an especially significant event in the growth of the *ghazal* as an art form. He was a frequent traveller through Gujarat and wrote lovingly of its urban centres, especially Surat. He died

in Ahmedabad in 1707 on one of his numerous visits. The people of Gujarat, then living in more enlightened times, built a tomb for him in Ahmedabad and proudly laid claim to his legacy by bestowing upon him the title of Wali Gujarati.

The mobs seem intent on defiling even more recent memories of the cultural traditions to which Gujarat has been heir. Early this month, the tomb of Ustad Faiyaz Khan in Baroda was attacked and wreathed in burning tyres. Extensive damage has been inflicted on the façade of the structure commemorating the man who was, in 1912, declared by the erstwhile ruling dynasty of Baroda as the greatest singer in the realm.

Faiyaz Khan's musical lineage is considered to go back to Tansen himself. Though renowned as a performer and a practising teacher, he was also associated with the academic efforts of Pandit Vishnu Narain Bhatkhande and others to revive and systematise classical Indian music forms during the first half of the century. As nationalist India began the rediscovery of its cultural heritage, he set new canons of musical interpretation and appreciation. When he died in 1950, an informed critic noted: 'He was the last of the race of giants. The like of him will not be born again. He was a gift, a national asset. As time widens the gulf between the noble dead and the hopeful living, he stands out as a beacon, a bulwark of genius and tradition, whose inspiration will not be wasted even on the most cynical among us.'

This critic obviously did not foresee the depths of depravity that could be plumbed by the rampaging VHP mobs. Yet these two are by no means the only recent instances of the wanton destruction of cultural monuments in Gujarat. The Indian History Congress has pointed out that the mosque of Malik Asin (Asas, Imadul Mulk) at Ahmedabad, built in the reign of Sultan Mahmud Begada (1458-1511) has been destroyed. A protected monument built in stone, this structure was destroyed within hours in an operation involving the use of

bulldozers. At around the same time, the mosque of Muhafiz Khan at Ahmedabad was badly damaged.

The Hague Convention of 1954 (or the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict) recognised that the preservation of ‘cultural heritage is of great importance for all peoples of the world’, and that ‘damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind’. India is a signatory to this Convention. In 1972, a protocol to this Convention was adopted, which identified ‘cultural heritage’ as, among other things, ‘monuments, architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science’. Every State that had acceded to the Hague Convention, it held, recognised that ‘the duty of ensuring the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage situated on its territory, belongs primarily to that State’.

At its General Conference meeting in 2001, UNESCO adopted a resolution that sought to define the circumstances under which an act could be construed as a ‘crime against the common heritage of humanity’. It reiterated the need for all member-States to accede to and observe the various conventions it had evolved over the years. And it authorised the Director-General of the organisation to formulate for the next session of the General Conference, a ‘Draft Declaration’ which would define the circumstances under which the ‘Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage’ could be deemed to have taken place.

By these norms of international conduct, the BJP-led government at the Centre is in gross and flagrant default. And quite apart from its horrific crimes against the living, the

Narendra Modi government's crimes against the common heritage of humanity are adequate to earn it the most severe indictment in the court of universal cultural values.

30 April 2002

Statements by BJP's Uma Bharati and Vijay Kumar Malhotra on Gujarat

BJP spokespersons Uma Bharati, inside Parliament, and Vijay Kumar Malhotra have claimed that documented cases of barbarism against women in particular – rape, slashing open of the womb and burning the foetus – are being falsely propagated by Sahmat/Communalism Combat.

The case of a woman's womb being slashed was first reported in an article in the *Times of India* by a serving IAS officer on deputation in Gujarat, Harsh Mander. The case of Qausar Bano is corroborated by three independent reports:

'Naroda Patiya: The *Times of India* of March 13 says that, according to the police, 107 were burned to death in Naroda Patiya and the adjacent area. . . . Amina, an educated woman who worked in a printing press and lived near the Noorani Masjid in this area, said that the rioters separated the women and children from the men, but after this happened the women were also attacked brutally. A pregnant woman, Quasar, was slashed through her stomach with a sword and killed. . . . Sabira Bibi and Chand Bibi confirmed the story about Quasar. In fact, the latter said she was an eyewitness. (*State Sponsored Carnage in Gujarat*, Report of the CPI(M)-AIDWA delegation, p. 23)

'That terrible day (February 28, 2002), I was hiding with some others on the roof of my house. From there I saw my dearest friend Qausar Bano (resident of Pirojnagar, opposite Noorani Masjid, Kumbhajini Chawl, Naroda Patiya) raped, her unborn baby slashed out from her womb before being tossed into the fire to be roasted alive. Thereafter she too was

brutally cut up and torched. She was 9 months pregnant.’ (Witness Amina Aapa, Hussain Nagar, Naroda Patiya, in *Genocide Gujarat 2002, Communalism Combat*, March-April 2002, p. 21)

‘Members of the fact-finding committee have seen photographic evidence of the burnt bodies of a mother and a foetus lying on the mother’s belly, as if torn from the uterus and left on the gash. We do not know if that was Qauser Bano.’ (Fact-finding Women’s Panel in its report, *The Survivors Speak*, April 2002, p. 10)

Several testimonies given by fathers, mothers, husbands and victims who managed to survive in independent reports show ‘how mobs can rape women’ – a fact that the BJP spokespersons find impossible.

40 survivors who came to Delhi recently narrated their terrible experiences to the President of India and his statement to the nation reflects his anguish at the brutality they have been subjected to.

We strongly condemn the BJP’s attempt to cover for their stormtroopers the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, and dupe the nation about their true face.

10 May 2002

Tribute to Kaifi Azmi

We are deeply grieved to learn of Kaifi Azmi's demise on the morning of the 10th of May, 2002.

Kaifi Azmi was one of the last of that generation of poets who were born in a colonized country, fought for its freedom, hoped for and struggled to build a secular, democratic and socialist India. It is ironic that a man who fought religious orthodoxy in his early youth, fought the colonial rulers and lived his entire life according to the principles that he professed, breathed his last as the secular fabric of his beloved motherland lay in tatters.

Kaifi Azmi was born into the feudal family of Mijwan near Phulpur in Azamgarh district in 1917. His interest in poetry had been noticed even in his childhood and he began writing traditional *ghazals* at age 11.

After early education in a *madrassa* in his home town, he went to Lucknow, which exposed him to an entirely new world, a world that was rising against feudal exploitation and colonial rule. Kaifi imbibed these ideas more readily than the lessons of theology that were intended for him. He initiated the formation of a students' union and led a strike for the demands of the students. The strike lasted for a year and a half before being called off. Kaifi was expelled from the seminary for his troubles.

It was during this period that his qualities of leadership were noticed by the Communist Party and the leading progressive writers of Lucknow. The Communist Party and the Progressive Writers movement gave him all possible help. While the path of his future as a theologian was blocked with his expulsion, the doors to a new world were opened for him.

He joined the Communist Party as the 1930s were coming to a close. Kaifi moved to Bombay and began work as a whole timer in *Quami Jang*, the Urdu weekly of the Communist Party. He also involved himself in organizing trade union activities among the textile and other industrial workers of Bombay.

Throughout this period his poetry was gradually getting transformed and he began moving away from the traditional form and content of the *ghazal* to that of the *nazm*. It was around this time that Kaifi began writing songs for films. His lyrics for *Kagaz ke Phool*, *Haqeeqat* and *Heer Ranjha*, and his screenplay for *Heer Ranjha* established him as one of the leading lyricists of Hindustani cinema.

Kaifi's poetry was poetry with a purpose, once he accepted the ideals of an equitable social order, just as he spent his entire life propagating them. Many of his film lyrics talk of this dream and it is this idealism that imbues his poetry and his lyrics with strength and beauty.

Jhankaar, *Aukhir-e-Shab*, *Aawara Sajde*, *Iblees ki Majlis-e-Shoora* are some of his published works. *Aawara Sajde*, proscribed during the emergency regime of 1975-77, later went on to win several national and international awards, including the UP Sahitya Akademi award, the Soviet Land Nehru award and the national Sahitya Akademi Award. He was also given the Maharashtra State Urdu Academy Award for his life-long contribution to Urdu, besides the Lotus Award instituted by the Afro-Asian Writers Association.

Kaifi Azmi leaves behind Shaukat, his wife and well-known theatre and cinema actress of yesteryears, his daughter Shabana Azmi, activist, actress and MP, cinematographer son Baba Azmi, and a host of grieving comrades, lovers of Urdu and of cinema. We convey our deep-felt condolences to the members of his family.

23 May 2002

Police action in Goa against screening of films promoting communal harmony

We strongly condemn the patently illegal police action in Velim in south Goa on May 21, 2002, whereby the video cassettes of a film being screened for promoting communal harmony were seized from a private show. It is ironic that the chief minister of Goa, who belongs to a party which is so blatantly spewing communal venom on the minorities in the country, claims that the screening constitutes an offence under section 153-A and 153-B of the Indian Penal Code. This section relate to promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, etc.

Three independent filmmakers have made short video films following the carnage in Gujarat – *Hey Ram* by Gopal Menon, *Evil Stalks the Land* by Gauhar Raza and *In the Name of Faith* by Pankaj Shankar. The films heavily rely on interviews with the victims of violence who unambiguously accuse the BJP state administration and the different wings of the Sangh Parivar and their ideology as responsible for the carnage. The films have a clear message of communal amity and express full faith in secular India. It is the secular message of these films that has rattled the BJP in Goa, faced with an impending electoral defeat.

The police action in Goa constitutes a gross violation of the constitutional right of freedom of expression. Given the complexion of the government there and the secular character of the films, this communal offensive against secular creativity has to be defeated by the joint efforts of all the democratic and secular groups.

10 July 2002

Reject call for early elections in Gujarat

We are astounded by the gratuitous comment of K.P.S. Gill, Security Advisor to the Gujarat Chief Minister, calling for early elections to the State Assembly to end the climate of 'fear and violence'. It is highly inappropriate for Mr. Gill to make an explicitly political comment on a subject that falls outside the purview of his assignment.

Worse, the proposition that early elections will help restore normalcy in Gujarat is dangerously misguided. Gujarat's people have certainly not recovered from independent India's most shameful pogrom. The situation in the state is marked by extreme communal polarisation, intimidation of the minorities, widespread insecurity and lawlessness. Those responsible for the massacre of 2,000 citizens are at large. The state machinery, still under the control of rank communalists, continues to further terrorise the pogrom's victims.

These conditions are definitely not conducive to the exercise of rational choice by voters, central to free and fair elections. Holding elections till peace, normalcy and the rule of law are fully restored, and the culprits prosecuted, will be a travesty of democracy. To voice the election demand on the eve of the Jagannath Rath Yatra is to further intimidate Gujarat's already fearful minorities.

We appeal to all citizens and political parties to reject early elections and help restore communal harmony in Gujarat.

We urge the Election Commission to clarify that there will be no elections in Gujarat until normalcy and public confidence are fully restored.

Signed, among others, by:

Surendra Mohan, Mohini Giri, Syeda Saidaeen Hameed, Praful Bidwai, Javeed Alam, Teesta Setalvad, Zoya Hasan, Vivan Sundaram, Shabnam Hashmi, Prabhat Patnaik, Nasir Tyabji, Mushirul Hasan, Rajendra Prasad

12 July 2002

Unlawful detention of social activists in Delhi

We are shocked to learn the unlawful detention of a number of social activists including journalists, writers, editors and civil rights activists, on July 11 from a public place in Delhi. It is learnt that a number of public figures, including veteran journalists Kuldip Nayyar and Kamleshwar, had taken the initiative to start a dialogue with different strands of the political spectrum in Nepal and the meeting on July 11 was a sequel to this, to finalise arrangements for a public meeting on the subject.

The detention, which was effected without any warrants, is an intimidatory tactic against those who are exposing the undemocratic and unlawful practices of the establishment, whether in Delhi or in Ahmedabad. The intelligentsia in the country is not going to be cowed down by such tactics.

23 July 2002

Police stop screening of video films in Mumbai

We strongly condemn the arbitrary and high-handed action of the police in Mumbai in stopping the screening of the video films *Junoon ke Badhte Kadam* and *In Dark Times* by Gauhar Raza, at DAV College, Bhandup, on July 20, 2002. The show was organized by a group of cultural activists and artists called Insaniyat. Two of the organizers, artists Archana Hande and Sameer, were detained in a patently illegal action and the video cassettes have been confiscated without any authorization. It is obvious that the police in Bhandup has acted at the behest of the local ABVP and BJP unit.

The police action in Mumbai goes against the constitutional right to freedom of expression. Given the political complexion of the Maharashtra government and the secular character of the films, this communal offensive is all the more surprising. We express our solidarity with Insaniyat and call upon all secular groups and parties to defeat such moves.

25 July 2002

Memorandum to the Election Commission of India: Situation in Gujarat not conducive to a free and fair election

Even though the Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani told the Lok Sabha that a snap poll must be held in Gujarat so that the chief minister could get a 'certificate from the people', numerous reports from diverse sources reveal that the conditions in the state are far from normal and certainly a long way from the normalcy necessary for the conduct of a free and fair poll.

An important gauge of normalcy must be the performance and functioning of the government in the area of relief and rehabilitation in the aftermath of the worst communal carnage in India's post-independence history. Ensuring the basic right to a life with security and dignity is the responsibility of the government. The government has not offered any comprehensive rehabilitation plan, nor has fair and non-discriminatory relief and compensation been offered to restore people's faith in the government and administration.

Despite all the protestations to the contrary, normalcy has not returned to Gujarat in an adequate measure, as is evident from the news reports emanating almost daily from the state. An absence of organised violence does not mean normalcy. An improvement in the law and order situation is also not enough for holding elections. Fair elections can be held only when the conditions are such that every registered voter can cast his or her vote in a free and fearless manner. Such conditions do not exist in Gujarat.

Determined to show normalcy, the government is

pressurising members of the minority community to return home, but in most cases where Muslims have returned to their villages, they are faced with economic and social boycott for having named the guilty, or they have returned only to find their homes and shops occupied by others.

Over two dozen affidavits filed before the Gujarat High Court show that blatantly aggressive methods, including threatening the camp managers with detention under POTA, were used by district collectors to shut down camps, that is, the government claim of voluntary closure of camps is a lie.

Of the over 70 camps, 60 were hastily closed down when the situation does not warrant their closure. The authorities stopped the supply of essential commodities and drinking water to the camps though not one of the inmates had moved out or was provided alternative shelter. The victims residing in the existing camps are poor, and still urgently in need of food rations, shelter during monsoons and fair compensation. The compensation paid out so far has gone to only a small percentage and is grossly inadequate.

While no compelling reasons were given for the dissolution of the assembly, the six-month rule in Article 174, to the effect that a new assembly must reconvene within six months of the last session of the previous assembly, is now being invoked to pressurise the Election Commission to hold early elections. The Election Commission however is not bound by the six-month rule: for example, if in Gujarat dissolution took place in September, the Election Commission could not possibly have conducted the election in a few days to comply with the six-month rule.

Instead of calling for a premature election, the chief minister should have called an assembly session both to comply with the six-month rule as well as for a substantial discussion on the situation in the state. He could also have obtained concurrence for dissolution. The very fact that the assembly was dissolved without observing any of these rules is ample

indication that the chief minister's primary motive is to gain electoral dividends from the sectarian polarisation created by the communal carnage. This is tantamount to legitimising not only majoritarianism, but also cruelty, violence and intolerance.

An election held under the prevailing circumstances will be deficient in moral and democratic credibility.

25 September 2002

Attack on Swaminarayan temple in Gandhinagar

We strongly condemn the dastardly attack on the Swaminarayan temple in Gandhi Nagar on September 24, in which scores of people including women and children were killed.

This cowardly attack, coming in the wake of the Gujarat carnage and the despicable hate speeches during the so-called 'Gaurav Yatra', is yet another assault on the secular fabric of our country.

At this hour of crisis we appeal to people to remain calm and vigilant.

We send our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families.

23 October 2002

Prejudice masquerading as knowledge

In a shameful incident, five young Dalit men were lynched in Haryana ostensibly because they were skinning a dead cow. In a totally abhorrent move, VHP leaders have sought to justify this gruesome event by quoting the scriptures. Giriraj Kishore is reported to have said, '*Shastron ke hisab se gau ka jivan bahut mulyavan hota hai.*' It is no mere accident that the same scriptural sanction, in a more specific version, is found in the class VI textbook, *India and the World* (written by Makhan Lal *et al.*), recently released by the NCERT. On page 89 of this book, in the chapter on 'Vedic Civilization', it is stated: 'Vedas prescribe punishment for injuring or killing cow by expulsion from the kingdom or by death penalty, as the case may be.' This sounds like an exhortation to the young to indulge in similar activities in the name of a superior Vedic civilization.

This is yet another case, after Narendra Modi's action-reaction theory justifying the Gujarat carnage, where prejudice masquerading as knowledge is used to justify most horrendous crimes in contemporary India.

While we condemn the Haryana incident and demand punishment to the guilty, we also demand that the VHP leaders, and the author of the textbook and NCERT authorities are not allowed to go scotfree.

25 February 2003

Savarkar's portrait in Parliament

It is reported that Savarkar's portrait is to be unveiled in Parliament on February 26. This disgraceful act denigrates the memory of Mahatma Gandhi, the most revered leader of our national movement, in whose murder the protagonist of Hindutva was deeply implicated. The following objections to the installation of the portrait should also be noted.

1. Savarkar's chief claim to national recognition is based on his earlier record which led to his incarceration in the Cellular Jail in Port Blair, Andaman Islands. However, from jail he addressed mercy petitions to the British Raj. His mercy petition dated November 14, 1913 is published in R.C. Majumdar's book, *Penal Settlement in Andamans*. In his mercy petition Savarkar wrote: 'the excited and hopeless situation of India in 1906-1907 beguiled us from the path of peace and progress'. 'Now no man having the good of India and humanity at heart will blindly step on the thorny paths'; therefore, if the government in their manifold beneficence and mercy 'release me, I for one cannot but be the staunchest advocate of constitutional progress and loyalty to the English government which is the foremost condition of that progress'. In accordance with this undertaking Savarkar never thereafter took part in the freedom movement.
2. On August 15, 1943 Savarkar declared: 'I have no quarrel with Mr Jinnah's two-nation theory. We Hindus are a nation by ourselves and it is a historical fact that Hindus and Muslims are two nations.' (*Indian Annual Register*, Vol. II, 1943, p. 10)

3. Finally, Savarkar was implicated in the Gandhi murder case. Although legal responsibility was apparently not proved according to the evidentiary process, his political responsibility was widely acknowledged. That is why even during the murder investigation Savarkar pleaded illness, and gave, as was his wont, an undertaking. This is not widely known. He said: ‘Consequently, in order to disarm all suspicion . . . I wish to express my willingness to give an undertaking to the government that I shall refrain from taking part in any communal or political activity for any period the Government may require in case I am released on that condition.’ (K. L. Gauba, *Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 209).

8 March 2003

Concern about the Allahabad High Court orders for excavation at Babri Masjid site

1. The orders that the Allahabad High Court (Lucknow Bench) issued on 5 March for an archaeological excavation of the site of the destroyed Babri Masjid, in order to find out if there are any signs of an earlier temple there, have raised widespread concerns about the basic ethics of how the whole matter of the Babri Masjid is being dealt with. In a resolution passed by the Indian History Congress 'by an overwhelming majority' at its annual session on 15 February 1993 (the first after the mosque's destruction on 6 December 1992), the principal organisation of Indian historians had protested against the principle that 'a monument can be destroyed or removed if there are any grounds for assuming that a religious structure of another community had previously stood at its site'. It went on to warn that 'such a post-facto rationalisation of what was done on 6 December 1992 would place in jeopardy the fate of numerous historical monuments all over the country, an increasing number of which are being targeted for destruction by the communal forces'. It would seem that ten years later the very principle that the historians had found so intolerable, has received tacit judicial recognition. Otherwise the hon'ble High Court's order remains inexplicable.
2. From the text of the order, it appears that the High Court had earlier ordered a geophysical survey through a 'Canadian' company, Tojo-Vikas International (Pvt.)

- Limited, Kalkaji, New Delhi. This company has no known previous experience of archaeological surveying. Nor are the credentials of Mr. Claude Robillard, a ‘Canadian citizen’ and the company’s ‘Advisor and Chief Geophysicists [sic]’, any less doubtful, since no biodata whatsoever about him are furnished in the company’s report.
3. The company’s report is singularly taciturn on what exactly it was required to find out. Geophysical surveying for archaeological purposes resorts basically to two kinds of instruments: (1) ‘magnetic’, which essentially help locate metal artefacts and hearths, and (2) ‘resistivity’, which give clues about filled pits, buried walls, etc. For reasons not stated, the company’s survey was confined only to a resistivity survey, using Ground Penetrating Radar. No magneto-meter was at all employed, so that there remained no possibility of locating hearths which would have indicated domestic habitations and, to that extent, could have narrowed the area where one might be looking for ‘temple signs’.
 4. While the Tojo-Vikas team in its report does not refer to any background information about the dispute being furnished to it, it certainly lets slip the fact that it was somehow expected by certain quarters to trace ‘pillars’, since the Parivar’s late convert, Professor B.B. Lal, in his second version (1989) of his original findings on his excavations near the Babri Masjid, proclaimed his earlier secret discovery of certain aligned ‘pillar bases’, which he thought had belonged to a large Rama Temple. The anxiety to bring in ‘pillars’ anyhow, comes out very clearly from the following statement in the Tojo-Vikas report (p. 30): ‘Some of these anomalies . . . may correspond to pillars [sic] alignment, broken up sections of wall foundations or fortuitous patterns of independent objects or natural features.’ Would anyone, with such

varied possibilities available, have even thought of 'aligned pillars', unless one had a previous briefing that pillar-bases must be looked for? Not only does the Tojo-Vikas team stop here, but in its conclusion goes on to relate the same very 'variety of anomalies' quite confidently to 'structures such as pillars, foundation walls, slab flooring, extending over a large portion of the site'.

Such an addiction to 'pillars' on its part is all the more remarkable when we find that the Tojo-Vikas team itself employs much space (pp. 26-27) and two diagrams to show that 'NOT all hyperbolas [sic] shaped radar anomaly [sic] correspond to pillars or wall foundations', adding that 'they could also come from debris or even a simple boulder of a certain size and shape'.

Curiously, on the other hand, they try to make no distinction between strong mortar-bonded rubble (indicative of Muslim construction) and loose debris, and between stones or baked bricks and sun-dried bricks /rammed clay, which one should have expected from such a survey as theirs. (The geophysical survey by the German-Italian team at Mohenjo Daro in 1982-83 successfully demarcated the baked-brick and clay-platform zones precisely by use of resistivity instruments.) Such work would again have helped to separate medieval-Muslim structures from earlier remains.

5. It is thus clear that, despite its cautions and reservations, the Tojo-Vikas report is not free of bias; and it is unfortunate that the hon'ble High Court has now explicitly desired that the excavations be conducted by the Archaeological Survey of India with the advice and assistance of the Tojo-Vikas Company.

6. Questions can also very fairly be raised about the competence of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to conduct rigorous, scientific and impartial excavations. For about ten years, this organisation has not had a professional Director-General to head it, and persons belonging to the administrative service have occupied this once highly prestigious position at the sweet will of the government. Almost the very day the High Court gave its orders, it was announced that there had been a change at the top in the ASI, and the Additional Secretary, Department of Culture, had been made the new Director-General. When the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Human Resources Development themselves stand accused of having participated directly in the Babri Masjid demolition, no agency under their complete control can be held to be above suspicion.
7. Finally, one must remember that archaeological finds are subject to a wide range of interpretations. One does not know what the hon'ble High Court is precisely looking for. If it is trying to find out whether the Babri Masjid was immediately built upon a temple, then any stratum of lime-mortar bound rubble or medieval baked bricks or glazed pottery below the mosque should be enough to prove that such was not the case. If the search is on for anything that could possibly belong to a non-Muslim shrine of any sort at any earlier time, then almost anything could be defined as a temple relic: a pre-thirteenth-century carved stone or image or even a Kushana-period brick, though such might easily have come from a domestic house. In that case the dispute would be unending; or one could simply give the VHP the benefit of doubt and declare that archeology has spoken and decided in its favour. Whether such a course would accord with the rule of law, let alone the spirit of our secular Constitution, is another matter.

26 March 2003

Massacre of Kashmiri Pandits

We strongly condemn the massacre of 24 Kashmiri Pandits at Nadimarg on

March 24. The vicious attack seems to have been undertaken with a view to derail the peace process in the trouble-torn state of Jammu and Kashmir. We demand of the Central and state governments to ensure the security of Kashmiri Pandits in the Valley.

We urge the people of Jammu and Kashmir, both Muslims and Hindus, to reassert the secular values of Kashmiriyat and safeguard them despite the provocations by religious fundamentalists.

17 April 2003

Destruction of National Museum of Antiquities in Baghdad

Iraq has often been called the cradle of civilization. Even the most Eurocentric of historians have had little hesitation in tracing the cultural genealogy of Europe back to Iraq (Mesopotamia) through the debt classical Greece owed to it in learning and art. India too has had its history entwined in various ways with that of Iraq – a country which gave India its first ever known name, ‘Meluhha’, some 4,500 years ago.

Not only does Iraq contain the world’s earliest cities, but it has vast collections of books on clay tablets in cuneiform characters, some going back to 2000 BC, including the world’s earliest inscribed codes of law. It has preserved incredibly fine works of art in metal, stone, brick and terracotta dating back to 2000 BC and much beyond. These have been diligently recovered from hundreds of sites in the last two centuries by archaeologists from all over the world and by Iraqi archaeologists themselves. Many of the most valuable of these finds were placed in the National Museum of Antiquities, Baghdad, which became a repository not only of very ancient artefacts, but also of works from the dazzling periods of Islam, notably that of the Great Abbasids (ninth and tenth centuries) and the Ottoman Empire. The Museum was deservedly reckoned as one of the seven richest centres of historical artefacts in the world.

But no longer: the ‘Coalition Forces’ led by the US have wilfully ensured its destruction. The policy of encouraging looting of civil and public property with a view to secure an element of support from hooligans and criminals has been a

marked element in the final stages of the US-British campaign to subjugate Iraq, once it became clear that no section of Iraq's population was prepared to greet the invaders as 'liberators'. Even western correspondents have reported that private houses and public buildings, warehouses, libraries and hospitals, have been looted bare and burnt down in Basra and then Baghdad and other Iraqi cities, in full view of the occupying forces and with their full connivance. Even the UN agencies have described the situation as 'anarchy' and a plain violation of the Geneva Convention by the occupying forces.

The ransacking of the National Museum by armed looters began on 10 March soon after the Iraqi forces had been driven out of the area of Baghdad where the Museum is located. Despite the presence of US tanks in the vicinity, the looting continued for two days unchecked till, it is reported, little that is valuable was left. Such museum officials, attendants and archaeologists as tried to prevent the looting were threatened with being denounced to the US authorities. The US forces cannot plead that they were caught by surprise. Even before the invasion began, the American Association of Museum Art Director, the American Council for Cultural Policy and the Archaeological Institute of America issued statements calling on the US to protect cultural sites in Iraq during the impending war. McGuire Gibson of the University of Chicago told *Washington Post* that he and other concerned specialists had repeatedly requested the Pentagon to prevent harm to the National Museum and other collections; but the pleas of the scholars fell on deaf ears. The US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, responding to the news of the National Museum's destruction, put his philosophy pithily in one sentence: 'Bad things happen in life, and people do loot.' Ominously, a powerful dealers' lobby in the USA is already demanding that the much-trumpeted US law against sale of stolen cultural artefacts in the US be waived with regard to Iraq, so as to enable the dealers to make profits out of the

artefacts looted from the National Museum and other museums and libraries in Iraq.

The value of the loss cannot be fully estimated, even in terms of money. We are told the pieces lost include some of the great works of world art: a solid Sumerian gold harp, a sculptured woman's head from Uruk, both over 4000 years old; ancient jewellery of similar dates; cuneiform tablets containing invaluable records of the past; friezes, tapestry, works of Islamic art. An Iraqi archaeologist, Raid Abdul Ridhar Muhammad, grieving over this organised destruction of Iraq's rich heritage, told the *New York Times*: 'This is not a liberation, this is a humiliation' for the Iraqi people. Perhaps this is what the attempt throughout has been: to destroy the Iraqi people's sense of national dignity and force them into utter subjection.

What has happened to the National Museum in Baghdad is, however, not only a crime against the people of Iraq; it is a crime against the whole of humanity, since the great heritage of Iraq is also a precious part of the world's heritage. It is significant that the US and Britain have technically protected themselves, the US by not signing, and UK by not ratifying the Hague Convention of 1954, which required protection of cultural and religious sites during hostilities. Obviously these two powers think they have a right to target and destroy whatever they wish of the cultural heritage of other countries.

Sahmat calls upon all people, especially historians, archaeologists, artists, literary persons and lovers of cultural heritage, to join in the worldwide protest against this heinous act. It is time that UNESCO and cultural organizations of any worth throughout the world also speak up. If there are no courts yet to punish the real perpetrators of this crime, let us all so act that the criminals will remain ever bound to pillory in the eyes of the civilized world, despite all the state-of-art weaponry they might possess.

26 April 2003

Gujarat – a state under siege

Terror continues to be unleashed systematically against the Muslim minority in Gujarat, through indiscriminate arrests and illegal detentions by the Ahmedabad Crime Branch of at least 80 Muslim youth, the selective application of POTA against 12 Muslims for alleged involvement in the Haren Pandya murder and 123 accused in the Godhra mass arson. Muslim women, relatives of allegedly absconding accused and even detained persons, have also been brutally abused during questioning by the Ahmedabad police. A delegation of Muslim women petitioned the Ahmedabad Police Commissioner Kaushik on this matter the day before yesterday. The Sunni Bohra community is the singular target of these actions.

While the investigation into Mr Pandya's murder has been formally handed over to the CBI, it has effectively been 'hijacked' by the city Crime Branch. Over the past fortnight, police officers like P.N. Barot and others directly accused of close proximity to the ruling political dispensation have been brought in, and are terrorising people in order to extort money from them.

One year later, the genocide in Gujarat continues through social and economic boycott of Muslims in at least 10 of the 24 districts of the state, and a politically vindictive state headed by Chief Minister Narendra Modi seeks to subvert all criminal investigations into the incidents of violence last year. Moreover, a sinister and systematic plan to target over 325 Muslim-run institutions, including *madrasas*, has been put in place with the help of the Education Department, Charity Commissioner's Office and the city and state police. A survey of *madrasas* has already been made supervised by the state Home Minister to

put this operation in place. Meanwhile, Christian institutions have also been picked for objectionable questioning by the state's Education Department.

We appeal to the nation, to institutions of democracy in the country, to the national and regional media, and to all secular political parties, to respond to the continuing tragedy, the low-intensity terror and genocide that continue in Gujarat.

Human rights defenders, our associates in Gujarat, social workers, and lawyers of the minority community fighting cases for justice, have all been threatened and face a serious threat to their lives. Activists and workers coordinating the Gulberg massacre, the Naroda Gaon and Patiya carnages are especially receiving regular threats.

The main accused in the Gulberg massacre run free in the Chamanpura locality and terrorize victim survivors trying to rebuild their homes destroyed through blood and murder on February 28 last year. About 45 families who have had to go back to Naroda constrained by poverty, face verbal sexual threats from the major accused who are also free.

The role of the state's public prosecutors in the major carnages has been highly questionable. The Godhra investigation too is highly politically motivated, and 123 accused on whom POTA was applied last month have not been seen by their families since then. Five were even injected with serum that dulled their senses (an objectionable practice violative of national and international law) during questioning.

While tribal areas of the state reel with the onset of hunger and yet another year of drought, the Constitution is being breached with impunity in Gujarat. It is time that the entire civil society, as well as all our institutions for enforcing the rule of law including courts, took stock of the situation in Gujarat, which is no less alarming than what prevailed during the Nazi regime in Germany.

26 May 2003

Campaign against Professor Romila Thapar

The Aligarh Historians Society and Sahmat unreservedly condemn the well-orchestrated campaign against Professor Romila Thapar over the issue of her appointment as Kluge Professor at the Library of Congress, USA. The campaign is clearly instigated by the country's saffron forces, and is designed to dissuade foreign academic bodies from according honours to such Indian scholars as the Hindutva forces regard as 'liberal' or 'leftist'. The more eminent the scholar, as Romila Thapar undoubtedly is, the more fierce and bitter the attack.

Professor Romila Thapar has received the highest possible honours within this country, and these honours have come her way because of her dedication to academic rigour, a scientific approach and a steadfast espousal of democratic and secular values. Any recognition of her work abroad brings honour to this country, and those who decry her contributions to scholarship in effect belittle our country's status in the academic world.

We are sure that such tactics of the saffron brigade will not succeed; and Indian historians and scholars, as hitherto, will continue to defend the cause of independence and rationality in the pursuit of their profession.

17 June 2003

ASI excavations at Babri Masjid site

The Archaeological Survey of India's excavations at the site of the Babri Masjid, Ayodhya are now drawing to a close, though the ASI has sought the High Court's permission to continue the work till the end of this month, apparently to enable them to excavate two or three trenches in the so-called 'sanctuary' where the Ram Lalla image is now placed. By this time the ASI has dug up and destroyed what the *kar sevaks* had not demolished, namely, the floors and foundation-walls of the Masjid. In any archaeological operation elsewhere such treatment of monumental remains would be deemed totally unprofessional and impermissible.

All this has been done in the expectations aroused by the earlier Tojo-Vikas International's geo-physical survey report (undated), on the basis of which the Allahabad High Court (Lucknow Bench) was pleased to order the excavation. This report spoke of 'anomalies' and 'pillars' below the Babri Masjid, and so suggested that structural remains would be found beneath the mosque. It may be recalled that Sahmat issued a statement on 8 March doubting the credentials of this company, questioning its surveying methods and finally its interpretation of data. Sahmat had pointed out that the company itself provided for a wide range of possibilities from its data, but selected for specific mention only such of these as might please their employers. It was, on the face of it, thoroughly unprofessional conduct on their part.

In pursuit of Tojo-Vikas International's predicted pre-Masjid structures, the ASI dug up 82 trenches by 5 June 2003. Except for a small area around Ram Lalla, the entire area of the Masjid complex including the Ram Chabutra has been

dug to depths of several metres. The ASI submitted its first progress report to the High Court on work done till 24 April 2003 when as many as 52 trenches (4 x 4 metres each) had been excavated. Sahmat, in its statement on 6 May showed that the only structural remains the ASI actually found were those associated with the construction of the Masjid or of the period of Muslim habitation; the pervasive presence of animal bones with cut marks and Muslim glazed ware, and the entire absence of even a trace of anything that could indicate structural remains of a temple. The ASI report seemed to clutch at straws, which on close scrutiny could be seen as contrary to the details it had itself provided.

Matters have become definitively clear with the ASI's latest progress report that deals with the latest period, 22 May to 5 June, covering 30 new trenches, so that now the entire mosque complex and much of the surrounding area has been covered. In trench after trench, no structural remains below the mosque's floor level have been found. The structural remains found in some trenches are all of construction associated with the mosque, viz. brick walls, mosque floors, lime mortar, etc. The 'structural bases', which were mentioned with some enthusiasm in the ASI's first progress report, but were, alas, found to be uniformly of brick-bats and so neither load-bearing nor in any way associated with any known tradition of Hindu temple architecture, are now termed 'pillar bases': only seven have been claimed to be found in six trenches out of the thirty excavated. No alignment or uniformity of level is claimed for them.

The ASI's report also lists finds yielded by the excavation. It needs to be noted that in trench F3, the '1.61 metre high decorated black stone pillar (broken) with Yaksha figurines on four corners' is one of the black pillars which had belonged to the Babri Masjid and which was broken when the Masjid was destroyed by the *kar sevaks*. It has been retrieved from above the Babri Masjid floor, and is therefore no new discovery

and has nothing to do with any possible temple remains below the mosque. On the other hand, all the other finds suggest either Muslim habitation ('Arabic inscription of holy verses', glazed tiles) or ordinary medieval occupation.

In view of all this, the VHP and its supporters are now falling back on 'faith'. But they are unable to produce any scriptural authority or any document to show that Lord Rama was really born and exactly at this spot. In other words, the 'faith' they are talking about is faith invented by them.

Others of the BJP camp, faced with the debacle that the excavations have placed them in, are speaking of a 'compromise'. The conditions of this 'compromise', as they have so far appeared in the press, are that (1) Muslims can build a mosque 10 km away from the Babri Masjid site, and (2) the Hindu claims on mosques at Varanasi and Mathura will not be pursued.

One does not understand whom these proposals are expected to fool. The present main mosque at Ayodhya is itself barely 1½ km from the Babri Masjid site, and there are other mosques in the town. Anyone who owns land can build a mosque at any distance from the Masjid: so what is the sense of the 10 km restriction?

Secondly, any change in the religious status of a place of worship from what it was on 15 August 1947 is barred by an Act of Parliament, 1991. What the proposed compromise suggests is that this too is an open issue, which it is not.

Finally, what is forgotten is the heinous crime carried out on 6 December 1992. No talk of compromise has any meaning when the perpetrators of that outrage not only walk free, but are in control of the state itself. They must, above all, be first brought to book.

18 June 2003

The RSS and American funds

The report of the Campaign to Stop Funding Hate (*A Foreign Exchange of Hate: IDRF and the American Funding of Hindutva*) raised the ire of Yankee Hindutva because it comprehensively exposed one of its main funding organizations in the US, the India Development and Relief Fund (IDRF). The report made two substantial claims: that 83 per cent of the money IDRF sends to India from the United States go toward Hindutva organizations, and that it raises these monies with the claim to being non-sectarian when in fact it finances groups that routinely discriminate against those who do not fit its definition of 'Indian'.

After months of calumny against those who wrote and supported the report, the Yankee Hindutvawadis respond with *A Factual Response to the Hate Attack on the India Development and Relief Fund*. Generous in length but quite stingy in depth, the response establishes that the IDRF is indeed unapologetically close to the RSS, and indeed that in its view the RSS does 'good work' with the American funds. However, the *Response* fails to address the central ethical question of IDRF practice: does it tell those from whom it raises money that it is ideologically close to the RSS, and that most of its money goes to RSS-entrusted groups?

The *Response* in two places says that the IDRF's main persona, Dr. Vinod Prakash, 'has an ideological kinship with the RSS'. Furthermore, it makes it quite plain that there is no need to be chary about the RSS-IDRF link because the RSS does 'good work'.

Whereas previously the IDRF tried to distance itself from the RSS, now it seems it is proud of the connection and admits

one of the crucial points made by *A Foreign Exchange of Hate*: that the IDRf is awash in Hindutva. On the face of it, people are free to give their money to fund hate if this is what they want to do, but then the organization that raises the money must be open about its agenda. The IDRf claims to provide funds for ‘development’ and ‘relief’ for ‘India’, and most of those who send it money expect it to do just that. It turns out, by its own admission, that it funds those groups that linger on the fringes of the right, service organisations blessed or entrusted by the RSS to do its type of work. The IDRf funds the RSS agenda, that much is now clear.

The IDRf has consistently denied its relationship with the RSS. On 22 July 2002, Vinod Prakash told the press, ‘The IDRf has given absolutely no money to the RSS’, and IDRf’s Nagraj Patil said, ‘There is no relation between the VHP/RSS and the IDRf’. And yet, the *Response* now accepts that there is such a relationship.

The IDRf raises money on false pretenses, claiming that it is for the development of India, when in fact it is for the furtherance of Hindutva. The IDRf says that it raises money to do charitable work in India, and so it gets US government permission to raise funds, but it turns out that it directs those funds to pro-Hindutva organizations, entrusted by the RSS, who sully the body-politic, conduct communal pogroms and destabilize the social life of India. The IDRf is registered in the United States under 501(c) (3), in other words, as a non-profit, non-electoral and non-religious organization. The IDRf raises money under the claim that it is non-sectarian when it is plain that it has a kin relationship with the RSS and with Hindutva – plainly sectarian outfits, with the RSS being the Hindutva Hezbollah.

IDRF funds do go toward ‘development’ and ‘relief’, but its form of development is not the agenda set forth in the Constitution of India, but by Hindutva. By not being forthright with the US government and with those who give it money,

IDRF violates the fundamental ethical norm of non-profit, charity organizations: transparency.

Statement by Vijay Prashad

28 June 2003

NCERT's continuing assault on history

A major component of the present regime's agenda to communalize education has been its assault on history through the instrumentality of the various organizations which are controlled by the Union government. NCERT, during the last three years, has been the chief organization implementing this agenda in the area of school education. The first set of new history textbooks that it brought out last year were criticised by historians, teachers, other academics, concerned citizens and the press throughout the country for their blatant communal distortions and utter disregard of elementary historical facts. Many schools in Delhi and elsewhere decided that they would not use these textbooks. Sahmat brought out a compilation of the views of experts and teachers and comments in the press, under the title *Saffronized and Substandard*. NCERT has brought out a few more history textbooks as a part of its new series and even a cursory reading of these shows that there is no let-up in the assault on history; in fact, new dimensions have now been added to the assault.

One of the new textbooks is *Modern India* for Class XII by Satish Chandra Mittal, who retired as a professor of history from Kurukshetra University. In a pamphlet written by him some years ago, this historian had expressed his unhappiness with what he called too much emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity and composite culture in history books. While the authorities of NCERT decided to discard such books, it naturally chose him for his known antipathy to such notions to write a new book to replace one of the existing ones. In his foreword to the new book, the NCERT Director has written, 'The whole character of history is affected by new techniques,

inventions and outlook.’ The book presents an example of the ‘new techniques, inventions and outlook’. One of the ‘new techniques’ which informs the author’s historical ‘inventions and outlook’ is the liberty which the author takes with elementary facts of history. The new historians of NCERT, including the present one, seem to have converted taking liberties with historical facts into a fundamental right. A few examples of the historical ‘inventions’ are given here to indicate the general quality of this book.

On page 246, ‘the former Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, General Dyer’ is stated to have been shot dead in 1940. (General Dyer died in 1927 of cerebral haemorrhage. The Lieutenant Governor who was shot dead was Michael O’Dwyer.)

Five lines later on the same page (246), quoting a ‘scholar-writer’, he says that Savarkar suggested to Subhas Bose to escape from the country, ‘like his elder brother Rash Bihari Bose’. (The author is right because all men are brothers and all Boses more so!)

Earlier on the same page (246), it is stated that the formation of the Forward Bloc by Subhas Bose ‘invoked sharp reactions from the Gandhites leading to his resignation from the presidentship of the Congress’. (Subhas Bose formed the Forward Bloc after he had resigned from the Presidentship of the Congress.)

On the next page (247), the three senior officers of INA are stated to have been ‘acquitted. (In fact, all of them had been found guilty but were released.)

On page 168, the author says, ‘The Chapekar brothers were caught deceitfully and hanged by two British officials – Rand and Aryst.’ However, a few pages later (on page 184), the author changes his mind and says, ‘The Chapekar brothers... decided to assassinate the two officers [Rand and Ayerst, the latter’s name spelt as Aryst on p. 168 and Ayrst on p. 184], which they did on the very day.’ (As this is a book for

Class XII and would be the basis for the public CBSE examination, either of the two statements as answers to an examination question would be deemed to be correct.)

As is to be expected, there is quite a lot about Savarkar in the book, including his advice to Subhas Bose to escape from the country. While there is almost a whole page on the Communists' 'opposition' to the Quit India movement (pp. 243, 244-45), Savarkar only 'directed his followers not to take part in the movement' (p. 243).

On an earlier page (185), Savarkar is stated to have 'engaged himself in the activities of the Hindu organizations' – the organizations, including the Hindu Mahasabha, remain unnamed. It is nowhere stated in the book that he was a leader of the Hindu Mahasabha and presided over its annual session in 1937 (and also subsequently), where he expounded his two-nation theory.

On page 185, Jackson is stated to have been assassinated in Aurangabad, but on the next page in Nasik.

There is quite a bit about Muslim League and Muslim communalism, only a short box item on the Hindu Mahasabha on the same page, but nothing on Hindu communalism – the Hindu Mahasabha's objective was only 'revival of social and cultural consciousness among the Hindus'. (In this box, Savarkar is mentioned among those who 'participated in it'.)

The opposition of the Hindu Mahasabha to the Quit India movement is not mentioned but it is stated that the 'role of the Sikh community was similar to that of the Hindu Mahasabha'.

The use of the term 'community', etc. by this author is quite original. In the preface to the book, he says: 'Various castes, classes and communities participated in our freedom struggle and sacrificed their life for the sake of their country's freedom.' He does not say anything about who survived after 'various castes, classes and communities' had 'sacrificed their life' in 'our freedom struggle' for 'their country's freedom'.

Another textbook released last week is *Contemporary World History*, also for Class XII. The authors are two Readers in History from the faculty of NCERT – Mohammed Anwar-ul Haque and Pratyusa K. Mandal – and a Professor of Ancient Indian History – Himansu S. Patnaik, from Utkal University. There has been some controversy about this book in the press. There was, it seems, another manuscript by another author who had been commissioned by NCERT, and there was also a workshop to review it. In March or April, NCERT decided not to publish it. So the present book was prepared apparently without a review workshop. This is the only book which does not mention ‘Participants of the Review Workshop’; it instead mentions the names of ‘Members of the Review Group’, which include, besides the three authors, one Lecturer of a Delhi college, one Principal of a school in Bahadurgarh and two school teachers from Bhopal. Whether this Group met anywhere or the four non-authors reviewed it individually, is not stated.

This book adds a new dimension to NCERT’s new history – some of it reads like old US-inspired Cold War propaganda stuff of the McCarthy variety. The Soviet Union (and Communism) are stated to be equally responsible, along with Hitler and Nazi Germany, for the Second World War (pp. 92, 129, etc.). There was ‘universal hatred’ for communism which Germany and Japan exploited when they signed the Anti-Comintern Pact (p. 98). The Truman Doctrine – of ‘containment’ of communism – ‘was necessitated by the Greek situation. After the War, communists of the country started a civil war’ (p. 170).

The anti-communist hysteria and the spy scare of the McCarthy period, long since denounced in the US, has found support in NCERT’s new history. NCERT historians write: ‘Stalin told his secret agents all over the world to steal the US’s secrets. The Western countries had many people with communist leanings who viewed the USSR as their true nation.

Their treasonable activities helped Stalin get hold of the blueprints for making an Atom Bomb. He then housed his top nuclear scientists in a secret location in remote Kazakhstan and coerced them to develop a bomb' (p. 172). (This year marks the 50th anniversary of the execution of the Rosenbergs on the charge of passing atomic secrets to the Soviet Union. The execution had shocked the world and remains a blot on USA's judicial history. The *New York Times*, in an editorial on the 50th anniversary of the execution [19 June 2003] wrote, 'The Rosenbergs' case still haunts American history, reminding us of the injustice that can be done when a nation gets caught up in hysteria.' It should be a matter of some shame that NCERT historians are reviving the atmosphere of that hysteria.)

The secret clauses of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact, according to our Cold War warriors, provided that Ukraine and Byelorussia would go to the USSR (pp. 100-01). Both these countries had been among the founder republics of the USSR in 1922, a fact which is unknown to these 'historians'.

The Non-Aligned Movement just about finds a mention and is denigrated in this Indian book on contemporary world history published by a 'national' body set up by the Government of India. Non-Alignment, it says, 'has a nervous existence right from the beginning' (p. 175). While there is little on its role during the Cold War and not a word for its contribution to bringing about the collapse of colonialism, the authors see it as an organization like SEATO and CENTO. They write: 'After the Cold War ended, there was talk of folding it up along the lines of SEATO and CENTO which had become irrelevant' (p. 176).

Like the other new history books of NCERT, this book abounds in factual errors. That the organization of the book renders it utterly irrelevant to promoting any understanding of contemporary history is too obvious to require any detailed

comment. A few examples of the disregard of elementary facts, however, may be in order.

'In October 1922, he [Mussolini] organised a "March to Rome" in which hundreds of thousands of "Black Shirts" took part' (pp. 81-82). In fact there was no march. This is a myth which was inspired by fascists. The reference to 'hundreds of thousands' is our historians' original contribution.

The book makes some references to the developments in China from 1911 to 1915 which are all wrong. It says, '...Pu Yi was installed on the throne and in his name an ambitious General, Yuan Shihkai ruled... Yuan dealt with them [warlords] strongly, but himself got ambitious in the process. In 1915, he upstaged the child Emperor and crowned himself king' (p. 105). There is no reference to the 1911 Revolution, the overthrow of the Manchu rule and proclamation of the Republic, nor to Sun Yat-sen who was the leader of the Revolution. Pu Yi gave up the throne in February 1912, Yuan replaced Sun Yat-sen as President in March 1912; Yuan did not crown himself king, he did not abdicate and he died in 1916.

The authors' geographical knowledge is comparable to Professor Hari Om's who had placed Madagascar in the Arabian Sea. There is a section in the book with the caption 'South American State Mexico', which says, 'The conjunction of Mexico, a South American State, with Latin American countries in the context noted below has warranted the inclusion of Mexico here' (p. 117). There is nothing on the so-called 'conjunction' or on the 'context' below or anywhere else, but that is unimportant as there are numerous such meaningless statements in the book, but Mexico is certainly not a South American state and is equally certainly a Latin American country.

In 1974, the Salazar dictatorship was overthrown...' (p. 144). Salazar had died in 1970.

Referring to the 1948 Berlin Blockade – the Soviet

authorities in their occupied zone in Germany had stopped all road and rail traffic from the west to Berlin – this book says, ‘The Soviets sealed all roads, rails and canal links between the West and East Berlin. Thus, western aid could not reach the trapped people in East Berlin’ (p. 170).

On page 172, two different dates are mentioned for the setting up of the Warsaw Pact – first 1954, then 1955 .

Ngo Dinh Diem (Diem Ngo Dinh in the book), who was brought to Vietnam under French and US patronage in 1954 and became the President of South Vietnam, is referred to as a leader of the nationalists (p. 187).

There is reference to the Geneva conference and to the war, and the responsibility for war is equally apportioned, and therefore there is no reference to the Geneva Accords which had called for elections in 1956 to establish a unified independent Vietnam and Diem’s and the US’s refusal to do so.

The examples given above are a small sample of the enormity of the distortions of history and disregard for elementary historical facts in which the two books abound. They must not be allowed to be used as textbooks.

11 July 2003

On the Minority Commission's statement on Zahira Sheikh

It is unfortunate that the chairman of the Minority Commission has tried to devalue the statements of the key witness in the Best Bakery Case, Zahira Sheikh and her mother Seherunissa, demanding a retrial of the case outside Gujarat. In a television interview on July 8, Mr. Trilochan Singh ridiculed Zahira's statement to the press in Bombay and echoed the opinion of the BJP MLA who had threatened Zahira during the trial, leading to the acquittal of all the accused.

At a time when the National Human Rights Commission and the entire national press has characterised the acquittal as a miscarriage of justice and national shame, the conduct of the chairman of the Minority Commission is reprehensible. And it is not for the first time that the Minority Commission under the present dispensation has acted as the voice of those who are pursuing a majoritarian agenda.

The Minority Commission chairman should quit his job since he has miserably failed to instil confidence among the minorities, instead of making a mockery of the institution that he heads.

12 July 2003

Tribute to Bhisham Sahni

We are deeply grieved at the passing away of Bhisham Sahni, one of the best known Hindi writers of our times, on July 11, 2003. He was 87. Bhishamji will always be remembered in the literary world and among cultural activists for his abiding commitment to the values of peace, justice and secularism, and for his untiring efforts in forging solidarity amongst Afro-Asian writers.

For all of us at Sahmat, Bhishamji was a very special and inspiring presence. He had been in the forefront of the spontaneous protest that followed Safdar Hashmi's brutal murder in 1989, and was Founder Chairman of the Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust. Sahmat's activities, always enlivened by his enthusiastic participation and creative contribution, bore the stamp of his wise counsel till the very end.

Bhishamji's novel *Tamas (Darkness)* was to become the most powerful and celebrated portrayal of the tragedy of Partition. He was given the Sahitya Akademi award for *Tamas* in 1976, and he later went to become 'Mahatter Sadasya' (Fellow) of the Akademi. He was also honoured with the Soviet Land Nehru Award, the Lotus Award of the Afro-Asian Writers Conference and the Padma Bhushan. Bhishamji was the General Secretary of the Progressive Writers' Association for a long period.

Mayyadas ki Madi, Kunto and *Neelu, Neelima, Neelofer* are his other major novels. He also published nine short-story collections. In the realistic stream of contemporary Hindi, his was one of the most important voices. Introduced to the stage through IPTA, he not only wrote six significant Hindi plays including such renowned plays as *Hanoosh* and *Kabira Khada*

Bazaar Mein, he also went to act on stage and later even in a few films and serials. He also penned (in English) a biography of his elder brother, renowned actor Balraj Sahni, *Balraj My Brother*.

He will be deeply missed by the Sahmat fraternity all over the country.

To Kalpana, Varun, Romi and Rohini, and other members of the family, we convey our heartfelt condolences.

19 August 2003

Disruption of Habib Tanvir's play in Bhopal

Sahmat strongly condemns the disruption sought to be created by the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha activists during the performance of a play by noted theatre personality Habib Tanvir on the morning of August 15 at Gwalior. The play, *Ponga Pandit*, being performed since 1958, which critiques the regressive caste ideology, emphasises that 'equality of man is through deed not birth'. The play was also attacked ten years ago when it was performed in Gwalior.

This is yet another instance of the intolerance displayed by the Sangh Parivar outfits to any talk of reform in the Hindu society. It may be recalled that a couple of years ago Deepa Mehta was made to abandon the shooting of the film *Water* by the Sangh Parivar because it had dared to discuss the plight of widows under Hindu orthodoxy. It is ironical to witness the Sangh Parivar defending the most backward of practices among Hindus – like *Sati* and untouchability – while demanding a uniform civil code.

Sahmat appeals to the Madhya Pradesh administration to take stringent action under the law against the disruptors. Sahmat calls upon the artistic community, particularly in Madhya Pradesh where Habib Tanvir is currently touring, to express solidarity with him and foil the designs of the Parivar outfits through united action.

29 August 2003

Problems with the ASI Report on Ayodhya excavations

There are several problems with the Report submitted by the ASI on the excavations conducted at Ayodhya between March and August 2003. The most glaring is the chronological sequence proposed for the occupational deposits of the upper layers. For example, Period V described as Post Gupta-Rajput, is assigned between the 7th and 10th centuries AD; Period VI (Medieval-Sultanate) as 11th-12th centuries AD and Period VII (Medieval) from the end of the 12th century to the beginning of the 16th century AD). What is pertinent is that it is from these periods that non-residential/public structures have been reported. In order to ascribe dates to the various structures, the associated artefacts and the relevant strata have to be taken into consideration. Yet, on p. 271 it is mentioned that 'during and after Period IV (Gupta level) onwards up to Period IX (late and post-Mughal level) the regular habitation deposits disappear in the concerned levels and the structural phases are associated with either structural debris or filling material taken out from the adjoining area to level the ground for construction. As a result of which much of the earlier material in the form of pottery, terracottas, and other objects of preceding periods, particularly of Period I (NBPW level) and Period III (Kushana level) are found in the deposits of later periods mixed along with the contemporary material.' This mixed-up material includes NBPW, terracotta figurines, brick and stone fragments, glazed pottery, glazed tiles and animal bones. Thus, the artefacts of different periods are all mixed up and cannot be used to date these structures. However,

some of this material appears to have been used by the ASI to date these levels. One cannot in this situation selectively use some of the artefacts for dating and exclude others.

It has been averred on p. 272 that ‘viewing in totality and taking into account the archaeological evidence of a massive structure just below the disputed structure and evidence of continuity in structural phases from the 10th century onwards up to the construction of the disputed structure along with the yield of stone and decorated bricks as well as mutilated sculpture of divine couple, and carved architectural members including foliage patterns, *amalaka*, *kapotapali*, doorjamb, semi-circular pilaster, broken octagonal shaft of black schist pillar, lotus motifs, circular shrine having *pranala* (water chute) in the north, fifty pillar bases in association of the huge structure are indicative of remains which are distinctive features found associated with the temples of north India’. Thus, the suggestion is that from the 10th century onwards the site had a shrine, followed by a temple with different structural phases. Yet on p. 270, it is clearly mentioned that ‘animal bones have been recovered from various levels of different periods’. So, if there was a shrine and a temple at this site, how do we account for the presence of animal bones? Considering the quantity of animal bones recovered from different periods, one also wonders why there is no separate chapter on animal bones.

The other evidence cited, like stone and decorated bricks, could have been used in any building, not necessarily only in a temple. Further, the carved architectural members have come from the debris and not from a stratified context. Finally, the 50-metre-long wall that was supposed to belong to a ‘massive structure’ below the ‘disputed structure’ is nothing but the foundation of the main western wall of a masjid. Why is it that only the western wall of a supposed temple has been found and not the other walls? Regarding the pillar bases, objections have been raised during the excavation regarding the very

nature of the excavation procedures being followed by the ASI archaeologists.

It is also claimed that 'pillar bases on north of the makeshift structure have survived in the very nature along with their contemporary floor'. The suggestion being made is that these pillar bases in the north are the original pillar bases of this supposed 'massive structure' on which were affixed the black schist pillars that were found in the Babri Masjid. Yet, the size of these bases in the north range from 48.5 x 43 cm, 50 x 50 cm, 47 x 46.5 cm to 48 x 56 cm, and just do not match with the black schist pillars that have sizes ranging from 21 x 21 cm or 24 x 24 cm.

These few points are illustrative of the kinds of problems that are there in the final Report of the ASI. It is very clear that the ASI Report is biased and goes against the very norms of archaeological objectivity.

1 September 2003

Attacks on Habib Tanvir and Naya Theatre

On September 1, Habib Tanvir turns 80. For the many hundreds of those who have over the years watched and loved his plays, this is an occasion to celebrate and salute an extraordinarily creative career. It is also, however, a time to reflect on the dangers faced by artists in our dark times. For Habib Tanvir and his band of rural actors have been under vicious attack from the Sangh Parivar for the last fortnight or so.

The attacks began a day after Independence Day, when Tanvir's Naya Theatre was performing in Gwalior. The plays being performed were *Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya Vo Janmya Hi Nai* and *Ponga Pandit*. Naya Theatre had been commissioned by the Department of Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh, to perform the two plays. Activists of the RSS-VHP-Bajrang Dal-BJP combine followed the plays in several cities, and disrupted its performances. The plays were attacked at Hoshangabad on 18th August, at Seoni on the 19th, at Balaghat on the 20th, and Mandla on the 21st. According to newspaper reports, the performance at Narsinghpur was cancelled. A protest march to the Bhopal BJP office by intellectuals, artists and organizations was stoned by Sangh Parivar activists. The attacks, then, have been sustained, pinpointed and coordinated – proof, if any was required, that the attacks were not a spontaneous outburst of 'people's emotions'.

The Deccan Herald reported on 20 August: 'Led by the [Itarsi] BJP MLA Itasharan Sharma, the Sangh Parivar's storm

troopers threw rotten eggs and chairs on the dais minutes after the performance of 'Ponga Pandit-Jamadarin' began at an auditorium in Hoshangabad... When the police forced the miscreants out, some of them climbed on a electricity pole and snapped power supply to the auditorium, forcing abandonment of the performance. On August 16 [at Gwalior] even the presence of the district collector and SP in the auditorium could not deter the miscreants. After the collector's warning had no effect on the slogan-shouting disrupters, cops, present in sizeable strength, lathicharged the trouble-makers and drove them out.'

As in most such cases of cultural vandalism, those attacking the plays had not even seen them. *The Indian Express* of the same day reported: 'When asked what was objectionable [about the play], he [BJP organizing general secretary for Madhya Pradesh, Kaptan Singh Solanki], while admitting that he had not seen the play, said he had been told 'a man is shown entering a temple with his shoes on. A jamadarin is shown striking a Brahmin. This is a direct attack on our sanskriti [culture].'

Former leader of the Opposition Gauri Shankar Shejwar, a Dalit, again admitting he had not seen the play said: 'I object to the name. It clearly shows a desire to drive a wedge based on caste. *Panditon ko ponga nahin kehna chahiye* (pandits should not be called ponga [fraud]).' BJP MLA S.C. Sharma, who spearheaded the opposition to a performance yesterday, said: 'We had opposed the staging of the play. The SDM said if we found anything objectionable he would stop the play. Then the play *Lahore* was stopped when Tanvir said *kattarwadi rajneta* (political extremists) were responsible for the communal riots in the state.'

While defending Tanvir and his actors' freedom of expression, it is also important to be aware of the facts of the case. Ironically, neither of the two plays has been authored by Tanvir himself. *Lahore* is written by the noted Hindi writer

Asghar Wajahat, and *Jamadarin/Ponga Pandit* was first composed in the 1930s by two Chhattisgarhi rural actors, Sukhram and Sitaram. Several generations of folk players of Chhattisgarh have been performing the play for the last seventy years. Tanvir's Naya Theatre has inherited the play from the rural actors who joined him.

Ponga Pandit is an excellent example of rural creativity in which there is a robust intermingling of the sacred and the profane, of pure fun and social incisiveness. Naya Theatre has been staging the play since the 1960s for diverse audiences all over the country. All these years no one found it objectionable or called it anti-Hindu. Significantly, it was only in 1992, following the demolition of Babri Masjid, that the play first came under attack from the BJP-RSS-VHP cadre. Since then it has been systematically targeted by these forces, who attacked it even in England.

The Sangh Parivar alleges that the play attacks Hinduism. This is not true. It does not attack the spiritual or philosophical aspects of Hinduism. What it does attack is the caste system, superstition, priestcraft, brahmanism and untouchability. To claim that the play attacks the Hindu faith, as the Sangh Parivar does, is to argue that all this is what constitutes Hinduism.

The other play, *Lahore*, is the story of an old Punjabi Hindu woman who is left behind in a big *haveli* in Lahore when her family flees the city at the time of Partition. It shows both the bloodthirsty fanaticism of some vested interests as well as the ability of others to reach out with love and compassion to fellow-beings regardless of his or her creed. In visualizing Asghar Wajahat's script for the stage, Habib Tanvir has given an added appeal and interest by incorporating, by way of the chorus, a whole selection of anti-communal and anti-Partition poetry from several poets, including Rahi Masoom Raza, Sahir Ludhianvi and Amrita Pritam.

It is obvious that main message or thrust of these two plays is social amity and harmony. In other words, those

spreading communal tensions are not Habib Tanvir and his actors, but the forces of Hindutva who are attacking them.

We appeal to artists, intellectuals and the secular masses to reject this politics of hatred and defend Habib Tanvir and his actors' right to the freedom of expression enshrined in the Constitution.

Statement issued by:

Jana Natya Manch, Aman Ekta Manch, Janvadi Lekhak Sangh, IPTA, Progressive Writers' Association, Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (Sahmat), Jana Sanskriti, Delhi University Forum for Democracy, Delhi Science Forum and Jan Sanskriti Manch

3 October 2003

ASI Report on Ayodhya excavations: An effort to establish that there was a temple under the Babri mosque

The Report on the Ayodhya excavations submitted by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to the Allahabad High Court is a matter of concern for all historians, archaeologists and other scholars. Apart from the fact that the Court-mandated excavations to settle what is basically a property dispute were uncalled for, the Report itself is a reflection on the functioning of the ASI which has undoubtedly played a fraud on the people of India.

The two-volume Report, running into 574 pages, is an unashamed effort to establish that there was a temple under the Babri Mosque, as is clear from the manipulation of evidence seen in this volume. According to the independent archaeologists who were permitted by the High Court to observe the excavation work, the site has yielded animal bones with cut marks from different layers including the one which preceded the mosque floor level identified by the ASI with the level of the 'temple' of its imagination. Neither have these been dated by the C-14 method, nor have they been discussed in the Report except for a solitary reference to the 270 bone remains in its concluding section. Glazed pottery, often called 'Muslim glazed ware', has been recovered in significant number from the early medieval and Mughal layers but these have not been tabulated level-wise or dated by the thermoluminescent method. The manner in which the bones and ceramic materials have been dealt with by the authors of the Report implies foul play by them and violates the High Court's directive to keep a

full record of these. The Ayodhya Report deliberately misleads people by talking emphatically of the so-called 'pillar-bases'. These 'bases' are not found in any alignment and are not capable of supporting a temple or any other structure. The ASI refers to a very small number of stones and objects of Jain, Buddhist and Shaivite provenances, obviously brought in from other places during the construction of the Babri Mosque and which could not have been part of a Hindu temple whose existence the Ayodhya Report seeks to prove by misleading presentation of evidence.

The Report is shoddy and full of internal contradictions. We therefore demand its thorough examination by specialists. We also demand that the site notebooks of Ayodhya excavations carried out earlier by B.B. Lal and of the recent one carried by the ASI under Court orders be made available for scrutiny by experts.

Signed by:

R.S. Sharma (Patna), D.N. Jha (Delhi), R.C. Thakran (Delhi), B.P. Sahu (Delhi), R.C. Singh (Patna), Former Director of Archaeology, Government of Uttar Pradesh, Sitaram Roy (Patna), Former Director of Archaeology, Government of Bihar, Shireen Moosvi (Aligarh), S.C. Mishra (Delhi), D. Mandal (Allahabad), Arjun Dev (Delhi), Amar Faruqui (Delhi), V.M. Jha (Delhi), P.K. Choudhury (Delhi), S.M. Jha (Delhi), Rajan Gurukkal (Kottayam)

9 September 2003

On attacks against Habib Tanvir

Over the years, Habib Tanvir's plays have brought together a robust rural voice and a modern worldview. It is not often that we have the gift of an artist who selects the best of our traditional heritage and puts it to use to take on our modern cultural needs, problems and questions. And Habib Tanvir has arrived at this point through years of learning and honing his craft. From the early *Agra Bazar* to the renowned *Mitti ki Gaadi*, the plays by Habib Tanvir and his Naya Theatre have celebrated the language, humour, songs and stories of the Chhattisgarhi peasants and tribals. To the resulting vitality has been added a unique modern Indian perspective. This means Tanvir's India is not romanticised, or parochial, or bigoted, or complacent, or satisfied with easy answers and labels.

It seems only a natural and logical response to admire and learn from such an artist. Indeed, this has been the response to the Naya Theatre plays, not just in cities in India and elsewhere, but in the rural India they draw their inspiration and energy from. But as if to illustrate that the bigotry the plays meet head-on is only too real, Habib Tanvir and his actors are now under attack. In the last few months, the cultural goons of the RSS-VHP-Bajrang Dal-BJP ilk have displayed their love for living Indian culture by throwing rotten eggs and chairs on the stage; by slogan-shouting during performances; by cutting power supply to the auditorium; by forcing audiences into leaving or performances into being cancelled. Given their passionate interest in culture, the attackers have not even seen the plays they are attacking. Even worse is the implication that 'Muslim artists' should only

portray and criticise the 'Muslim' thread of our complex social fabric.

We, as artists, writers and fellow-citizens, must take on Habib Tanvir's attackers in our work, on the stage, in the media, and on the streets. And we must do this in a voice as bold and powerful as that of Habib Tanvir's plays.

Signed by:

Vijay Tendulkar, Ramachandra Guha, Sanjana Kapoor, S. Raghunandan, Githa Hariharan, Khushwant Singh, Krishna Sobti, Amitav Ghosh, Amit Chaudhuri, Paul Zacharia, Mahesh Dattani, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Alok Rai, Shashi Deshpande, Nandita Das, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Urvashi Butalia, Arun Khopkar, Shanta Gokhale, Anita Badami, Esther David, Satish Alekar, Vilas Khopkar, Sohail Hashmi, Rajen Prasad, Vivan Sundaram, Madangopal Singh, M.K. Raina, Shamshad, Indira Chandrasekhar, Parthiv Shah, Anil Chandra, Ramu Ramanathan, Ram Rahman, Rajinder Arora, Rahul Verma, Sashi Kumar, Rukmini Bhaya Nair, Chetan Datar, Suman Mukhopadhyaya, G.P. Deshpande, N.S. Yamuna, Jaimini Pathak, Siriyavan Anand, Prabir Purkayastha, Brijesh Mohan, Moloyashree Hashmi, Sudhanva Deshpande, Amit Sen Gupta, Ashish Ghosh, Rajinder Nath, Anuradha Kapur, Bapi Bose, Anamika Haksar, Arvind Gaur, Mushtaq Kak, Maya Rao, Robin Das

27 October 2003

Harassment of Mallika Sarabhai

The manner in which noted actress and danseuse Ms Mallika Sarabhai is being intimidated and harassed in Gujarat on patently trumped-up charges is very disturbing. Even a cursory reading of the facts of the case, in which Ms Sarabhai is sought to be implicated by the local police under various sections of the IPC, makes it quite clear that this is being used as political vendetta by the state administration and police.

Strictly in accordance with the terms of the contract, the Darpana Academy of Ms Sarabhai returned the money received in advance from a number of aspiring dancers who wished to go on a foreign trip but could not do so on denial of a visa. After months of investigations when nothing tangible could be found either against the Academy or Ms Sarabhai, the state administration and its political leadership utilised the services of a local NGO whose pro-government record is well known, to file a police case against the Academy and Ms Sarabhai.

It is well known that Mallika Sarabhai has been in the forefront in filing an appeal in the Supreme Court of India demanding compensation and justice for the victims of the Gujarat carnage of last year. The appeal is coming up for hearing now. The timing of the filing of a case against Mallika Sarabhai is to stifle her voice that is seeking justice for the victims of communal violence. This is nothing but a blatant political vendetta and an attempt to muzzle the voice of dissent using state machinery.

We express complete solidarity with Mallika Sarabhai. We are confident that the opinion of the creative community and democratic citizens is fully behind her at this juncture. We appeal that the Prime Minister advise the Narendra Modi

government to desist from the vindictive course of hounding Ms Mallika Sarabhai.

18 November 2003

Praveen Togadia's hate speech

The report carried in the *Telegraph* of 17th November 2003 of statements made by Praveen Togadia at a meeting in Ahmedabad is extremely disturbing. The irrational declarations of this fundamentalist constitute a grave and continuing threat to the democratic fabric of our society and nation.

Togadia viciously attacked secular forces working for justice for victims of the Gujarat carnage and the families of those who perished in the Sabarmati Express at Godhra. He singled out Teesta Setalvad as a prime target of his hate speech and declared that she should be prevented from entering Gujarat.

Sahmat strongly condemns this barely veiled call to the irrational following of the VHP/Bajrang Dal/Sangh Parivar to take the law into their own hands and pursue individuals as the object of a murderous hate campaign.

The 82-year-old Mr. Rawal who lost his wife and son in the Godhra incident has repeatedly said that he is being pressurised and subjected to threat. Sahmat demands that the Gujarat government and administration ensure that protection is provided to him immediately.

Sahmat demands that Praveen Togadia should be restrained from making offensive public statements targeting minority communities and individuals working for peace and justice. If he does not desist from his current hate campaign, Sahmat demands that action be taken against him according to the law of the land.

6 January 2004

Vandalism at Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune

We strongly condemn the vandalism at the internationally renowned Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, on January 5, 2004. A mob of vandals is reported to have destroyed thousands of rare manuscripts and other priceless articles, ransacked the cupboards, torn thousands of books and taken away several rare books, and damaged the writings on palmleaf manuscripts.

We also condemn the attack on the well known Sanskrit scholar, Dr. Srikant Bahulkar.

No words are enough to express our anguish at such wanton destruction of our precious heritage. It is quite clear that our cultural heritage is not safe with the fundamentalist forces who are having a free run in the country. They are being actively encouraged by the ideology that preaches intolerance and has no respect for half a millennium-old monuments, contemporary art practices and scholarly pursuits.

The government of Maharashtra should do everything possible to recover the material and mete out exemplary punishment to the guilty.

Signed, among others, by:

R.S. Sharma, R.C. Thakran, Amar Farooqui, Suraj Bhan, B.P. Sahu,
S.C. Mishra, Irfan Habib, V.M. Jha, R.P. Rana, D.N. Jha, Shireen
Moosvi, Iqbal Husain, K.M. Shrimali, Iqtidar Alam Khan,
Ramakrishna Chatterjee

31 January 2004

Attack on artists and artworks in Surat

We strongly condemn at this meeting of artists and concerned citizens, the most recent attack on artists and artworks by the vandals of the VHP and Bajrang Dal, part of the Sangh Parivar, in the city of Surat.

On 29th January, nearly 200 people forced their way into the new art gallery set up by the Surat industrialist Praful Shah. They tore down, broke and burnt artworks on display, including two paintings by the veteran artist, the late N.S. Bendre, one early painting of M.F. Husain, and damaged several others. One painting of a younger artist from Kolkata, Chitravanu Mazumdar, was forcibly taken away from the gallery.

This is one in a series of intimidatory and violent attacks on the contemporary arts, on scholarship, and on the culture and heritage of this country, as the recent attack on the Bhandarkar Research Institute in Pune, so tragically demonstrated. These are not any longer isolated instances of mindless groups but part of the very process whereby civil society and our civilizational heritage with its complex structure of spiritual relationships are being systematically communalized, vulgarized and destroyed. For this, the hate ideology being perpetrated by the Sangh Parivar and its ruling combine is squarely responsible. This has happened with crude impunity during the last decade, beginning with the demolition of the 16th century Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. Its most tragic consequences have been witnessed in the state of Gujarat recently where the rule of the mob seems to have open state sanction.

We would like to put forward the following propositions with regard to the immediate incident.

The right of freedom of expression is not simply to be seen as artists' prerogative and thence lampooned as an irresponsible expression of an individual's subjective perceptions of life and culture. It is a right vital for the imagination to flourish and produce surprising interpretations of human understanding; it is, even more than that, the right of citizens in a country like India with its most enlightened Constitution that guarantees the right of free expression as a constituent part of citizenship. In such a society, differences, dissent and conflict have to be faced and resolved in a democratic way distinctly different from those adopted by fascist societies. The methods of protest in an advanced democracy like ours are manifold: the non-violent heritage of protest and, added to it, the legal and discursive methods that distinguish a civil society such as ours from brute force and fascistic coercion.

The Garden Gallery, representing a major collection that the Shah family has built up since the last 25 years, is a gift to the city of Surat and to the people of Gujarat, and may indeed be one of the very few private collections of contemporary Indian art to be put up for public viewing. We would hope this would become an example for other such private institutions to come up to support creative endeavour in the country. But this is now being met with contempt and the persons concerned are being intimidated to accommodate to the ignorance and prejudice of the vandals and their leaders whose agenda has little to do with art, artists, culture, scholarship, or indeed any form of enlightened religion.

We wish to point out that the head of the government, while he rightly disapproved of the banning of the book on Shivaji recently, had nothing to say about the vandalism at a major national institution like the Bhandarkar Research Institute. We demand that the government take a clear and

strong stand against these vandals so that the recurrence of such instances and the damage they cause is stopped immediately.

Signed, among others, by:

Krishen Khanna, Geeta Kapur, Githa Hariharan, Ram Rahman, Veer Munshi, Dadi Pudumjee, Shamshad, H.G. Arun Kumar, Shukla Sawant, Gigi Scaria, Pooja Sood, Shantanu Lodh, Sarala Maheshwari, Maya Rao, M.K. Raina, Rajeev Dhavan, Nupur Kundu, Inder Salim, Sheba Chhachhi, Sonia Jabbar, Chanchal Chauhan

17 April 2004

M.F. Husain forced to withdraw his film *Meenaxi*

We are saddened by the decision taken by M.F. Husain to withdraw his film *Meenaxi: The Tale of Three Cities* from being screened in theatre halls. Husain has been forced to take the step after several Muslim organizations objected to the phrase *Noor-un-ala-noor* being used in a song, which, according to them, hurt their religious sentiments. It is very unfortunate that such grounds are being proffered by conservative and fundamentalist elements to curb intellectual and artistic creativity. If such trends, which have increased alarmingly in the recent past, continue unchecked, we will soon be reduced to being an artistically and intellectually barren society.

28 April 2004

Shiv Sainiks attack journalists in Maharashtra

We strongly condemn the attacks on journalists in Maharashtra and urge the state government to apprehend the culprits.

Editor of *Aapla Mahanagar*, Nikhil Wagle, was brutally attacked and narrowly escaped being burnt alive when a group of Shiv Sainiks, inspired by the former Maharashtra Chief Minister Mr. Narayan Rane, assaulted him and two others at Malvan in Konkan, the western coast of Maharashtra, today.

The attack took place at about 8.15 am. Mr. Wagle's colleagues Mr. Yuvraj Mohite and Mr. Pramod Nigudkar were also seriously injured. Until 2 pm today, when we are releasing this statement, no action has been taken on the attackers by the Malvan police. Mr. Wagle and his colleagues were attacked after they conducted a workshop for local activists yesterday.

Mr. Wagle and his colleagues have refused any treatment until those responsible for the attack have been apprehended.

The attack on Mr. Wagle and his colleagues is the second serious attempt on the lives of journalists in Maharashtra. Only four days ago, on August 24, Mr. Sajid Rashid, editor of *Hamara Mahanagar*, was brutally attacked by a section of religious fanatics.

10 May 2004

Sangh Parivar insults 1857 martyrs

On May 9, several newspapers and TV channels carried a surrogate advertisement (on behalf of the BJP), in an appeal to the voters who were to cast their votes the next day, in the fourth and last round of polling. The advertisement said: It was on the 10th of May in 1857 that Mangal Pandey raised the banner of revolt and 'fired the first shot against the foreigners' (meaning the British); now the voters will have to think whether (impliedly on the same date in 2004) they would like to 'hand the country over to a foreigner'. The appeal to the voters was: 'Don't insult the sacrifices made by lakhs of our martyrs, and honour the sacred day of May 10.'

That the advertisement was issued in utter violation of the Election Commission of India's clear-cut directive against surrogate advertisement, is itself an indication of how much the BJP and its hangers-on care for the sanctity of our constitutional bodies.

In the said advertisement, the insinuation against Mrs Sonia Gandhi could not be clearer.

There also remains the question whether the BJP and its cohorts have ever deemed it necessary to remember the sacred day of May 10. It is clear that it was their electoral compulsion that made them remember this day only this year.

Apart from the poor taste in which the said advertisement referred to Mrs Sonia Gandhi, it involves a more weighty consideration. And this is that the RSS-BJP brand of history has never been truthful to the facts of history.

For, the fact is that martyr Mangal Pandey raised the banner of revolt against the British not on May 10, 1857, but in February that year at Barrackpore in Bengal, and for his

patriotism he was put to death in March 1857. It was the sepoys of Meerut who raised the banner of revolt on May 10, 1857, came to Delhi the next day, and proclaimed Bahadur Shah Zafar the emperor of India.

No freedom-loving Indian would ever think of denying the role of martyr Mangal Pandey and his supreme sacrifice for the cause of the country's independence. We all have the greatest regard for the heroism displayed by Mangal Pandey and his comrades and also by the lakhs of sepoys, the common peasants and their leaders like Nana Saheb, Tantya Tope, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Bakht Khan, Maulvi Ahmadullah, Aminullah, Prince Birjis Qadr and, not the least, by Rani Lakshmi Bai, who all fought valiantly against the British. But the Sangh Parivar has gravely insulted the sacred memory of these sepoys, peasants and their leaders by trying to gain electoral capital in their name. The fact is that in its mad drive to somehow garner votes, the Sangh Parivar did not even think it necessary to get the facts right.

But, then, who could expect a regard for historical facts from an outfit that did not participate in our momentous freedom struggle, and, moreover, does not care a fig for studying the history of that momentous struggle?

The latest surrogate advertisement is not only an insult to the patriotic sense of we Indians, but indicates how the RSS and its outfits have been trying to teach history to our younger generations.

13 May 2004

Verdit in Gujarat against the politics of hatred

The resounding and clear verdict of the people of India, epitomized by the verdict in Gujarat, is clearly against the politics of hatred and division and a plea for humane and just governance. The Gujarat genocide of 2002 repulsed and horrified both the people of Gujarat and India, even two years ago. In December 2002 also 49 per cent of Gujaratis voted against the political peddling of hatred despite state intimidation and terror. Yet the ruling NDA and the BJP government in Gujarat shamefully did not accept moral and physical responsibility for the carnage, and gloated over their electoral victory which came after the violence.

Now, two years later, the stand of all right-thinking Indians, regardless of caste and creed, is vindicated. The people of India have decisively shown that the divisive politics of communalism has no lasting space in India. What all Indians want is a life of dignity and peace, a harmony that has deep and civilizational roots in this land. While welcoming this verdict, we urge the next government to re-dedicate itself to the politics of fairplay and non-discrimination, and work towards eradication of poverty, hunger, hatred and division.

Signed, among others, by:

M.K. Raina, Rajendra Prasad, Javed Anand, Teesta Setalvad, Ram Rahman, Vivan Sundaram

20 May 2004

The UPA government must ‘detoxify’ the academic and cultural agenda of the previous BJP-led government

The resounding and clear verdict of the people of India, epitomised by the verdict in Gujarat, is clearly against the politics of hatred and division and a plea for humane and just governance. The Gujarat genocide of 2002 repulsed and horrified both the people of Gujarat and India. In December 2002 also, 49 per cent of Gujaratis voted against the political peddling of hatred despite state intimidation and terror. Yet the ruling NDA and the BJP government in Gujarat shamefully did not accept moral and physical responsibility for the carnage and gloated over their electoral victory which came after the violence.

Now, two years later, the stand of all right-thinking Indians, regardless of caste and creed, stands vindicated. In the just concluded elections, the Congress, contesting on a secular platform, has got a majority in 92 assembly segments as against 90 by the BJP. The people of India have decisively shown that the divisive politics of communalism has no lasting space in India. What all Indians want is a life of dignity and peace, a harmony that has deep and civilizational roots in this land. While welcoming this verdict, we urge the next government to undertake measures to ensure justice to the riot victims in Gujarat, to undo the damage done to institutions with the appointment of RSS men in key posts, to desaffronize education, and to create and maintain an atmosphere of harmony in which creative endeavour is not endangered by the lumpens of the Sangh Parivar.

In the last year alone there have been several attempts to stifle creative and scholarly expression as witnessed in the attacks on Habib Tanvir in Madhya Pradesh, vandalism at the Bhandarkar Institute in Pune, and attacks on artists and artworks in Surat by the vandals of the VHP and Bajrang Dal, to list just a few instances. A democratic society has to weed out such bigotry.

The Supreme Court judgement in the Best Bakery case confirms what secular groups and citizens have been saying in relation to providing justice to the victims of state-sponsored communal violence in Gujarat even after two years of the worst-ever carnage. The tragedy of Gujarat was compounded by an unrepentant administration and executive described as 'modern day Neros' by the judgement.

The six years of the BJP-led government's rule have been a period of unmitigated disaster for all national-level academic and cultural organizations over which the BJP-led government exercised its authority. Their autonomous academic and professional character was subverted and they were converted into instruments for implementing the blatantly communal agenda of the BJP and its parent organization, the RSS, and its various 'educational' and 'cultural' bodies. Within a short period of its coming to power, the BJP-led government appointed persons who were totally committed to the communal ideology of the BJP and to implementing the BJP's communal agenda, to head almost every national-level organization.

The composition of the various bodies of these organizations was changed to ensure that there was no deviation in their activities and programmes from the communal agenda which the BJP had set for them.

It is incumbent upon the new government to immediately take steps to undo the damage which the six years of the BJP-led government's rule has inflicted on the various academic and cultural organizations of the country. We urge the

government of the United Progressive Alliance to take the following steps at the earliest:

To hold an inquiry (or a series of inquiries) into the functioning of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), Indian Council for Historical Research (ICHR), University Grants Commission (UGC), Indian Institute of Advanced Studies (IIAS), Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), Indian Council for Philosophical Research (ICPR), Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), National Open School (NOS), National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), and to take steps to restore and strengthen the professional, autonomous and secular character of these organizations.

To remove from office those heads of organizations who have brazenly misused their position to convert the organizations headed by them as instruments for implementing BJP's communal agenda, and to initiate proceedings against them for violating norms and rules of conduct governing the offices held by them.

To inquire into all appointments and promotions made by the heads of these organizations appointed by the BJP-led government for any violation of rules and norms in appointments and promotions, and to take corrective measures.

To inquire into cases of harassment of the staff of academic organisations and to annul all transfers which were made to harass academic staff and to suppress free expression of opinions in academic matters.

To set up committees to examine the programmes and activities pursued by these organisations and the projects funded by them, and immediately put a stop to those programmes and activities which were designed to serve a communal agenda.

To immediately order the publications of the 'Towards

Freedom' volumes prepared under the auspices of the ICHR, which had been withdrawn at the instance of the BJP-led government .

To reconstitute and convene the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) which the BJP-led government had declared defunct, and had refused to reconstitute and convene, in violation of the directions of the Supreme Court.

To withdraw the so-called National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NFSCE) and to set up a committee to consider afresh the question of formulating a national curriculum framework.

To set up expert committees to review the syllabuses prepared by the NCERT on the basis of the NCFSE and all new textbooks brought out by NCERT from 2002 to 2004, based on these syllabuses.

To immediately withdraw the new social science and history syllabuses and textbooks based on them brought out by NCERT during 2002-04, which have been condemned by academic opinion throughout the country for their blatantly communal distortions and sub-standard quality, and to immediately stop their reprinting and distribution.

To restore the social science and history syllabuses which were in use till 2001 and all textbooks based on them brought out by NCERT till 2001, particularly all history textbooks, and to immediately bring out their reprint editions; to direct the CBSE to prescribe them from the 2004-05 academic session; to also direct the CBSE to withdraw the circular issued by it in October 2001 ordering deletion of some passages from four history textbooks of the NCERT which had been prescribed by the CBSE up to 2001.

To review the materials brought out by the NOS, particularly in the areas of social studies, history, culture and other subjects, and to withdraw all such materials which are found to be promoting communalism and obscurantism.

To stop funding of various 'educational' bodies set up by

various organizations of the Sangh Parivar and to take all necessary steps to stop the misuse of educational institutions for disseminating communal hatred and prejudice.

To stop the UGC from taking any step which infringes upon the autonomy of universities and other institutions of higher learning.

To put an end to the interference in the functioning of IIMs.

To do away with the Central Admission Test (CAT) for admissions to technical and management courses in all universities.

It may be added that these are among the initial steps that the government must take to undo the damage done by the BJP-led government to academic and cultural organizations. The inquiry committees to be set up to look into their functioning and activities will uncover many more misuses of authority and programmes to serve the communal agenda, which would need to be appropriately addressed.

5 July 2004

The pro-people economic agenda that needs to be followed by the UPA government

The vote against the NDA government in the recent elections was also a rejection of the neo-liberal economic policies that have been in vogue for the last thirteen years, and which the NDA in particular was pursuing relentlessly. The people's verdict against neo-liberalism was scarcely surprising: the pursuit of these policies has led to a severe deflation of the economy, reducing the purchasing power of the rural population in particular; it has reduced per capita foodgrain absorption to levels prevailing at the beginning of the Second World War; it has played havoc with the agrarian economy with extreme tangible consequences by way of mass suicides by farmers; it has greatly aggravated the problem of unemployment in both rural and urban India; and it has not only accentuated income inequalities but also handed over public assets to favoured private individuals at throwaway prices.

The Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the new government, which recognizes the need for, and provides the outlines of, an alternative development trajectory, predictably, has aroused opposition from financial interests, which is one possible reason, among many, for the subdued state of the stockmarket. It is imperative, however, that the CMP is not impeded by the state of the stockmarket, which has hardly any bearing on the level of corporate investment, let alone on overall investment in the economy, and which attracts the participation of only a minuscule minority. Corporate

investment, past experience indicates, would be stimulated by larger public expenditure. In addition, investment in the medium and small-scale sectors and in the infrastructural area must be supported by a renewed emphasis on development banking aiming to restore the role of investment demand as opposed to dominantly private, debt-financed consumption demand as the trigger for industrial growth. Once controls on capital flows into and out of the country are in place, which insulate the economy from the caprices of globalized finance, the stockmarket should be allowed to reach its own level while the CMP is implemented.

The additional resource mobilisation that the implementation of the CMP, with its emphasis on reviving the agrarian economy and on putting in place an Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS), would require, is well within the capacity of the economy. The EGS, for instance, can be financed and a balance left over, if only the central government recaptures the central tax revenue-GDP ratio that prevailed in the mid-1980s. Additionally, service sector taxation, asset taxation and taxation of financial transactions offer major revenue sources, as does the plugging of loopholes in the existing income tax laws. Besides, in a situation of demand constraint such as we have had, fiscal deficit, if judiciously used, need not be a cause for concern. The Fiscal Responsibility Act, which ties the hands of the government, is an illogical piece of legislation, especially when financial flows are relatively unrestricted; it should be done away with.

Putting the EGS in place, however, would take time. Meanwhile, urgent succour has to be provided to the peasantry, which has been exposed to a double squeeze by the neo-liberal dispensation – through decreased output prices and increased input prices, including of credit. A food-for-work programme must be started forthwith, particularly in areas of acute hunger and deprivation, and steps must be taken to universalize the public distribution system (PDS), which is an essential

complement to the EGS. The government has announced certain steps for increasing institutional rural credit, but an immediate debt relief programme must be launched to stem the spate of peasant suicides that continue even now. Price support, sustained by appropriate protectionism, must be given to the peasantry forthwith. In addition, ways have to be devised to have a degree of social control over the pattern of land and water use, without which a serious crisis may emerge in the coming years.

The CMP cannot be implemented without strengthening the fiscal situation of the state governments, for which a complete write-off of non-small savings debt, and an interest rate reduction on small savings debt are essential. The exorbitant interest rates that the centre has charged on its loans to states in the past must be done away with. The interest rate in the future must be discernibly below the average GDP growth rate. A transition to VAT carries with it a serious threat to state finances and must be eschewed until its implications are examined in detail.

The social sector initiatives outlined in the CMP, as well as the promised affirmative action in the form of reservations for dalits in the private sector, must be taken up in right earnest. A more egalitarian society in which development is spearheaded by the growth of the home market stimulated by a dynamic agrarian economy must be our objective, not mere growth fetishism *per se*, nor leaving the task of development to the mercies of the world market, the whims of direct foreign investment or the caprices of globalized finance.

Some of the policy measures that need to be immediately undertaken are:

1. Immediate introduction of a food-for-work programme, especially in areas characterized by acute hunger.
2. Introduction of a universal PDS as a complement to the EGS.
3. Increase in central tax-GDP ratio for financing the EGS.

4. EGS to be integrated with plans for rural infrastructure development.
5. Tapping service taxation, asset taxation, taxation of financial transactions and taxation of forex use, and using such taxation differentially for serving a range of objectives.
6. Debt write-off for states on non-small savings debt. On small savings debt, lowering of interest rates through debt switching. All future interest rates on central loans to be well below GDP growth rates.
7. VAT to be kept in abeyance until its implications are thoroughly studied.
8. Step up public investment in agriculture and other areas, and debt relief for farmers.
9. Extension of reservations for dalits to the private sector.
10. An increase in social sector expenditure to specific target levels.
11. Setting up a commission to study social control over land and water use.
12. Rededication of a whole range of public financial institutions to development tasks through measures like divesting their current portfolios of debt through securitization.
13. Withdrawal of the Fiscal Responsibility Act.

15 July 2004

Statement by outgoing Director of NCERT

Our attention has been drawn to a statement by the outgoing director of the NCERT wherein he has claimed that the Supreme Court judgement in the school education case has 'upheld the superiority of the history textbooks during my regime'. The statement is patently false, misleading and mischievous. It also amounts to contempt of court.

It may be recalled that the history textbooks were never under the review of the Supreme Court and therefore a Supreme Court opinion on their merit does not arise at all. The Supreme Court in fact focused on the following two issues: (i) the role and importance of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) in approving the curriculum and whether the NCFSE can be held illegal in the absence of the CABE's approval, and (ii) whether the inclusion of 'education about religions' violates Article 28 (1) of the Constitution.

The Supreme Court, in its judgement, held that non-consultation with CABE cannot be the ground for setting aside the National Curriculum Framework of School Education. At the same time, a majority of the three-judge bench also underlined the desirability of the constitution of the CABE. As a matter of fact, the MHRD under Mr. M.M. Joshi had committed contempt of court by not constituting CABE.

Mr. Rajput's latest assertion is in total violation of the conduct of service rules which apply even after his retirement, and the MHRD should take immediate disciplinary action against him.

11 June 2004

Statement issued after Sahmat Convention on the new government's agenda for culture and education

This convention, held under the auspices of Sahmat on 11 June 2004 at New Delhi, declares its solidarity with all groups and individuals who have stood up in resistance to the semi-fascist anti-secular measures of the BJP regime. It notes with great satisfaction that contrary to all media predictions, the people of India have decisively given an overwhelming majority in Parliament to parties expressly committed to opposing the communal and nationally divisive agenda of the BJP. The one clear national mandate to the new government is, therefore, that the entire project of the BJP government to spread communal poison through the educational system be immediately and uncompromisingly demolished.

The most serious attempt to corrupt school education began with the NCERT's National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NSFSE, 2000), opening the doors to communalism through the device of exalting so-called 'religious values'. This was followed by getting heavily communalised textbooks written by Sangh Parivar-sponsored authors. These not only contain gross inventions but also indulge in open derision of beliefs of other religions in the name of presenting 'religious values'. These textbooks were printed in lakhs of copies as prescribed texts for History and Social Science classes of the CBSE system throughout the country. These steps violated precedent and convention since the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), with representation of states on it, was not convened; and a majority

of states in a conference of state Chief Ministers and Education Ministers at Delhi, rejected the new curriculum framework in its entirety. Academic opinion too has been unanimous in protesting against both the new Curriculum Framework and the new textbooks.

This convention strongly feels that not a day should be lost in withdrawing the Curriculum Framework of 2000 and recalling the textbooks, especially those of History and Social Sciences, prepared under it. The older National Curriculum Framework of 1988 should be restored and the earlier textbooks, with necessary updating, should be reissued. These changes ought to be given effect to from the current academic session.

The Indian people have surely not changed their government to merely continue the status quo, which is the general tenor of advice to the government by a section of the media. A firm stance to protect the secular foundations of the nation by decisive action in the realm of school education is called for; and the government should not allow procedural or bureaucratic delays to hamper action according to the priorities it needs to set.

This convention hopes that these words will be paid heed to by the new government, and speedy and decisive action taken to keep the school child safe from the communal contagion.

The participants at the Convention held on 11th June 2004 under the auspices of Sahmat adopted the following statement:

We, the participants at the Convention, drawn from various areas of education and culture, express our unbounded delight at the serious blow which the people of our country have dealt to the communal and fascist forces in the parliamentary elections held recently. We join the people of our country in celebrating the rout of the communal and fascist

forces and the coming to power of the government of the United Progressive Alliance with its programme of, among others, strengthening the secular foundations of our Republic and eliminating communalism in all its forms and manifestations which has vitiated the country's national life during the past few years. We particularly welcome the resolve which the United Progressive Alliance has articulated in its Common Minimum Programme (CMP).

The past six years of rule by the BJP-led government have been a period of unmitigated disaster for the country and for every aspect of our national life. The communal fascist onslaught on every field and every institution of education and culture has been particularly vicious. We note with satisfaction the resolve expressed by the United Progressive Alliance government to undo the damage caused to the secular nature of our education and culture during the past six years.

From the very beginning of the communal and fascist onslaught on education and culture, Sahmat has been a rallying point for all those who, irrespective of their views on various other issues, were determined to resist and fight that onslaught. It succeeded in bringing together persons belonging to diverse political and ideological ways of thinking on a common platform to give battle to the forces of communalism and fascism. After the victory of the United Progressive Alliance, it organised a press conference on the 20th of May 2004 where it urged the government to take immediate steps on some issues to initiate the process of undoing the damage inflicted by the BJP-led government. Among the issues that required immediate attention were those relating to school curricula and textbooks which had been vitiated by communal distortions. While this was true for all areas and subjects of school curriculum and of the school curriculum as a whole, the communal distortion of history brooked no delay, for it provided the mainstay to the ideology of communalism. It may be recalled that among the first victims of the communal onslaught were school

curricula, particularly the history curriculum, and the replacement of textbooks which the NCERT had brought out over the years by blatantly communalised textbooks of an extremely substandard quality.

While we are constrained to express our feeling of disappointment at the absence of any effective steps taken by the government of the United Progressive Alliance to remove from the school curriculum, as a first step, the communalized and substandard textbooks, we wish to bring to the notice of the government and secular parties, groups and individuals, the disinformation campaign which has been launched to restrain the government from taking immediate action on school curricula and textbooks, including history textbooks. It is being asserted that the communalized and substandard books had been approved by the Supreme Court and that any changes in the curriculum can be made only after obtaining the approval of CAGE. Even the leaders of BJP who had declared CAGE as a dead body and had refused to convene it, in defiance of the directive of the Supreme Court to do so, have suddenly started demanding the convening of the CAGE. We wish to point out that what is being asserted is a total misrepresentation of the Supreme Court judgment. That judgment nowhere gave its 'okay' to the new textbooks of NCERT; the judgment, in fact, was not concerned with textbooks at all.

We also wish to point out that the so-called National Curriculum Framework was rejected by the vast majority of the states in the country and was, therefore, totally devoid of any claim to being 'national'. That Framework has become defunct with the downfall of the BJP-led government. While it is important to reconstitute CAGE and convene it as early as possible to consider many important issues of educational reform and development, including the question of the necessity of formulating a new curriculum to replace the 1988 NCF which it had approved and evolving the mechanisms for

doing so, CABE's approval is not required to annul the NCFSE 2000.

We urge upon the government to initiate immediate action on the steps outlined in the Sahmat statement of 20th May 2004, to restore the *status quo ante* in the area of school curriculum, and while the curricula and textbooks in various school subjects should be subjected to expert review, the courses and textbooks imposed by the BJP-led government should be immediately withdrawn and replaced, for the present, by the history courses and textbooks which were in use in the school system under the Union government before 2002.

We also urge upon the government to restrain the present authorities of the NCERT, pending the outcome of a formal inquiry, from functioning and causing further damage to the organization and to the system of education.

6 September 2004

Let the people of India be on guard!

Three and a half months ago, the people of India gave a decisive verdict against the divisive and communal policies of the BJP Government and put in its place the Government of the United Progressive Alliance, which, with the support of other secular parties, has an overwhelming majority in Parliament. However, the BJP has not accepted the popular verdict and in true fascist fashion, has brought to a standstill the functioning of Parliament. It has not only thus directly attacked India's democratic structure, it has also taken the road of reviving communal hatred. As writers, artists, educationists, historians and academics from various disciplines, we feel it our duty to warn our fellow-citizens to be vigilant about the conspiracy being hatched by the BJP against our democratic institutions and the unity of the country.

As to the two issues on which BJP continued the disruption of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha in the last days of the budget session, namely, those of Ms Uma Bharati and V.D. Savarkar, it must be emphasised that neither has anything at all to do with our national honour. Whatever the fate of the criminal proceedings against her, it was Ms Uma Bharati who insulted the national flag by using it as an excuse to ignite a communal flare-up which resulted in considerable loss of human life. As for Savarkar, while no one disputes his services to the freedom struggle before his incarceration in the Andamans, the facts of his later political life, his apologetic undertakings to the British government, his 'two-nation' pronouncements, his Hindutva communalism, and his post-Andamans abstention from the freedom struggle, are all established facts. Finally, he must always remain under a cloud

in the case of the assassination of the Father of our Nation. It is extremely hurtful to the sentiments of the people to demand that Savarkar be paid homage on behalf of the whole nation in any manner whatsoever.

Simultaneously, the BJP and the Sangh Parivar are seeking to prevent the desaffronisation of school textbooks by a campaign of vilification and disinformation. The fantasies and falsehoods introduced into the NCERT school textbooks under the BJP regime are now being sought to be passed off as merely a part of a 'nationalist' exposition of history as against a 'leftist' one in the older textbooks, as if 'nationalism' (read communalism) can legitimise wholesale departures from truth. To call any corrective action against the BJP regime's poison-laden textbooks 'anti-national' is an unacceptable belittling of the nation itself. We also wish to ask the RSS, what contribution did the RSS ever make to the freedom struggle? And will they not too, like Savarkar, ever remain under a cloud over Gandhiji's murder, what with their constant tirade of abuse against him over his defence of Hindu-Muslim unity and their spontaneous jubilation all over the country after his martyrdom?

These facts cannot be erased from our memory, no matter how much noise and rowdyism the BJP lets loose.

Let the people be on guard!

Signed by:

Irfan Habib, Prabhat Patnaik, Githa Hariharan, M.K. Raina, R.S. Sharma, B.P. Sahu, Madhu Prasad, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Atulur Murali, Javeed Alam, Ram Rahman, Vivan Sundaram, Arjun Dev, Shamshad, Anil Chandra, Indira Chandrasekhar, Jayati Ghosh, Nalini Taneja, Ashok Rao, C.P. Chandrasekhar, Sohail Hashmi, Teesta Setalvad, G.P. Sharma, Kumkum Sangari, Zoya Hasan, D.N. Jha, Geeta Kapur, Venkatesh Athreya, Suraj Bhan, K.L. Tuteja, N. Rajendran, Lima Kanungo, B.P. Sharma, Biswamoy Pati, Kanti Mohan, Zahoor Siddiqui, Lata Singh, Utsa Patnaik, R.C. Thakran,

Madangopal Singh, Rajinder Arora, S.B. Rai, Shireen Moosvi, Jhabri Mal Parekh, Archana Prasad, V.M. Jha, Vijaya Thakur, Sukumar Muralidharan, Praveen Jha, M.A. Jawed, S.N.R. Rizvi, Aditya Mukherjee, K.K. Sharma, B.P. Mishra, V. Ramakrishna, Arun Bandopadhyaya, Suvira Jaiswal, A. Satyanarayan, A. Bobbili, Suranjan Das, S.Z.H. Jafri, Amar Farooqui, R.L. Shukla, A.K. Thakur, R.P. Bahuguna, Sitaram Rai, Datanand Rai, Nasir Tyabji, Ramakrishna Chatterje, Mahendra Pratap Singh

19 October 2004

Statement on the necessary features of the Employment Guarantee Act

The crisis of livelihoods in large parts of rural India is a cause for extreme concern. A crucial step that addresses this crisis is an Employment Guarantee Act (EGA), as promised by the National Common Minimum Programme, with the requisite devolution of funds to state governments. Towards this, the Ministry of Rural Development has prepared a Draft EGA. The provisions of this Draft should be seen in light of the following essential requirements.

1. *Entitlement:* Any rural adult who is willing to do casual manual work at the statutory minimum wage should be entitled to employment within 15 days, for as many days as he/she has applied. Workers should be paid within seven days of the week when work has been done, in front of the community, and equal wages should be paid to men and women. Work should be provided within the Block, with travel allowances to be paid beyond 5 kilometres. If work is not provided within 15 days, the applicant should be entitled to an unemployment allowance equal to at least half of the statutory minimum wage. Labourers employed under the Act should be entitled to basic worksite facilities such as clean drinking water, emergency health care, child-minding, and compensation in the event of accident or death.

2. *Women's entitlements:* The Act should safeguard the interests of women and give full attention to their concerns with regard to availability, location, type and organisation of work. In the unfortunate event where the employment guarantee is restricted to a specified number of days per

household (as proposed in the Common Minimum Programme), it should be ensured that at least 40 per cent of workers employed in a particular Block are women, so that women are not pushed disproportionately on to the unemployment allowance or out of the scheme.

3. *Nature of works:* All works undertaken under the Act should be productive in the broad sense that they contribute directly or indirectly to the increase of production, the creation of durable assets, the provision of essential public services, the preservation of the environment, or the improvement of the quality of life.

4. *Contractors:* Contractors should not be used by Gram Panchayats. If the use of contractors by Block Officers is permitted at all, it should be restricted to specific types of work and subject to case-by-case permission. In all cases where contractors are used, the Programme Officer should arrange for wages to be paid directly to the workers within seven days of the week when work has been done, in front of the community.

5. *Financing:* The Act should not impose any additional financial burden on the state governments. The Employment Guarantee Programme should be fully financed by the Centre, and all expenditure for the implementation of the scheme should be met by the Central Government through a Central Employment Guarantee Fund. The Central Government should devolve finances to the State's Employment Guarantee Fund in an account specified for this and only this particular purpose.

6. *Wage, material and administrative costs:* The wage contribution of the centre must extend at least to a national norm initially fixed at no less than Rs 66 per day, and indexed to the All India CPI-AL for future revision. Additionally, the Centre should finance material costs in the ratio of 70:30 labour:material. When there is a delay in the devolution of funds to the state government from the Central Fund, the

Central Government must reimburse the state government for the associated unemployment allowance payments. To meet the administrative costs of the Programme, the funds devolved by the Centre to each state should include an additional component amounting to 5% of the total spending on wages and materials.

7. *Decentralised planning, transparency and accountability:* At least half the funds under the Programme should be devolved to the Gram Panchayats. Village-level works should be planned and executed by Gram Panchayats, based on the recommendations of the Gram Sabha. Panchayats should ensure timely social audits of all the works. There should be detailed provisions for transparency and accountability at all levels, including convenient availability of all records to the public, regular social audits by the Gram Sabhas, payment of wages in front of the community, public display of muster rolls, regular maintenance of job cards, and so on.

8. *Monitoring and redressal:* The Employment Guarantee Programme should be monitored at the Centre by a Central Employment Guarantee Council, and by State Employment Guarantee Councils at the state level. Each state should have an ombudsman or a quasi-legal body for redressal that can direct government functionaries to investigate and report all complaints on its behalf. The Act should explicitly provide for penalties against responsible officers if they do not perform their duty.

9. *Scope and time frame:* The Act should come into force immediately in at least one-third of the districts, and be extended to the whole of India within three years. If the scope of the Act is initially restricted to rural areas, similar legislation for urban areas should be introduced within one year.

10. *Protection to farmers:* The interests of farmers should be protected in the present context of agrarian crisis. Given that the implementation of the Act is likely to exert an upward

pressure on agricultural wages, these wage increases should be taken into account while setting the minimum support prices of agricultural commodities, so that farmers do not suffer further losses.

4 November 2004

Zahira Sheikh's changed stand in the Best Bakery retrial

The statement by Zahira Sheikh in Vadodara on November 3 changing her position in the Best Bakery retrial is disturbing. It indicates that the sinister forces that are operating to deny justice to the victims of communal genocide in Gujarat are still very active. Zahira Sheikh's statement that Teesta Setalvad was in any way coercing her lacks total credibility. Even before Citizens for Peace and Justice took up the Best Bakery case asking for retrial in the Supreme Court, Zahira Sheikh had approached the National Human Rights Commission and given a lengthy deposition before the Commission officials. The eyewitness accounts of several other witnesses in the Best Bakery retrial at Mumbai also go to show that Zahira Sheikh is now acting under pressure. We are confident that the course of justice will not be derailed by this episode.

22 March 2005

US visa denied to Narendra Modi

While Mr. Narendra Modi's infamous role in the pogrom against Muslims that occurred in Gujarat has been highlighted by the National Human Rights Commission, and the total callousness of his administration, both during the grisly events and subsequently, in bringing the culprits to book, has been commented upon by the Supreme Court, one can hardly derive any satisfaction from the denial of a visa to Mr. Modi by the US government. The US is not only the worst violator of human rights around the world, but is known to play the 'human rights' card selectively, systematically and duplicitously, to further its imperialist interests. Indeed Mr. Modi himself was a beneficiary of this duplicity when the US, unlike certain European countries, made not the slightest noise against the Gujarat pogrom at the time it occurred. It is also significant that in almost every case where the US has intervened ostensibly in defence of the human rights of particular ethnic or religious groups in other countries, it has ended up exacerbating the fissures in those societies.

There is no gainsaying of course that the granting of a US visa is the sole prerogative of the US administration, but the fact that it turned down a request of the Indian government cannot be a matter of unconcern, let alone satisfaction, for any of us, no matter what our views are about whether the Indian government should have made the request at all.

The only way of escaping the clutches of the 'human rights imperialism' of the US, however, is to put our own house in order, by ensuring not only that such pogroms never occur again, but also that the perpetrators of such pogroms are brought to speedy justice and receive appropriate punishment.

The UPA government, which has been punctilious in advancing Mr Modi's case for a visa on the grounds of his being a State official, should also now take the steps, which it should have taken earlier, to ensure that the Indian State is rid of Narendra Modis, now and forever.

16 April 2005

Convention on the Gujarat situation

Harrowing tales of the victims of the Gujarat genocide and their long drawn-out struggle for justice were recounted on April 16, 2005 at a convention in New Delhi (organized by the Citizens for Justice and Peace, Mumbai, Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust, New Delhi, and Human Rights Law Network, New Delhi) at the Speaker's Hall, Constitution Club, New Delhi. These testimonies once again highlighted the stark fact that as long as Narendra Modi remains at the helm of affairs in Gujarat, the perpetrators of the genocide have little chance of being brought to book. If justice is to prevail, a necessary condition for this must be created through the dismissal of the Modi government under Article 356 of the Constitution.

For justice to be finally ensured for the carnages, let alone the hundreds of major crimes that took place in Gujarat 2002, the process of struggling for justice needs to be supported by the state and its administration. Instead, key witnesses of the carnages, three years after the horrors that lost them their near and dear ones, cannot move back into their villages or localities simply because they have chosen to fight for justice. This is the stark and shameful reality of Gujarat three years after the genocide where, at a rough estimate, about 61, 000 persons remain internally displaced within the state, of whom all or most belong to the minority community.

Eye-witnesses, who are also victims, of incidents like the Gulberg massacre (28 February 2002 wherein 68 persons were slaughtered, including former Member of Parliament Shri Ahsan Jaffri, and 10-15 girls and women subjected to brute sexual violence), Naroda Gaon and Patiya (28 February 2002 wherein over 120 persons were similarly exterminated while

a complicit police and elected representatives watched and led mobs respectively), Sardarpura (1 March 2002 wherein 33 persons were brutally killed and in another incident 14 burnt alive), and the Ode killings in Anand district (on 1-3 March 2002 in which totally 27 persons were killed) recounted their life stories. Many eye-witnesses, like a key witness from Naroda Gaon and his family members, have been penalized three or four times on account of their desire to struggle for justice and utterly false criminal cases have been slapped against them. The attempt is clearly to intimidate all those who stand for the struggle for justice. Over 65 witnesses from the major massacres have filed affidavits in the Supreme Court of India pointing out these gross facts, due to which the criminal trials in these cases have been stayed by the Supreme Court since 21 November 2003. Pleas for re-investigation by the CBI have been pending and need to be heard forthwith.

While there are legitimate apprehensions among many about the use of Article 356, lest it may set a precedent for the Centre to get rid of the government in opposition-ruled states, the Gujarat case is an exceptional one in so far as the state government has been seriously implicated by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and even the Supreme Court, in what is perhaps the most inhuman, horrendous and un-constitutional acts in the history of post-Independence India. In the past few months, courageous statements of serving police officials have lent voice to the outrage expressed by these institutions and hundreds of groups and individuals. These stands by serving policemen, which have been made public, clearly show that orders were issued by none less than the present chief minister Narendra Modi, that minorities who resist or protest should be exterminated. All this put together, the imposition of Article 356 in Gujarat is warranted not only on grounds of humanity and constitutional propriety, but for the very maintenance of the country's unity, integrity and secular fabric.

We, the undersigned social and political activists, artists and members of the legal and academic professions, demand that the Modi government be dismissed forthwith under Article 356.

Signed, among others, by:

M.K. Raina, Vivian Sundaram, Rahul Bose, Javed Akhtar, Rajendra Prasad, Prabhat Patnaik, Zoya Hasan, D.N. Jha, Madhu Prasad, Madhukar Upadhyay, Madangopal Singh, Shamsad, Ram Rahman, Teesta Setalvad, Anil Dharkar, Nikhil Wagle, Jaidev Hattangady, Sumedh Jadhav, Suresh Bhosale, Cedric Prakash, Javed Anand, Indira Chandrasekhar, Mahesh Bhatt

21 April 2005

Letter to Minister of HRD on National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS)

Dear Shri Arjun Singh-ji,

We would like to draw your attention to the state of affairs in the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS, formerly, National Open School), especially the continued use of this major educational institution as a vehicle for propagating the ideology of the Sangh Parivar. Whereas in the recent period public attention has largely been focused on the process of saffronization and communalization of organizations such as the NCERT, particularly the history textbooks published by it during the NDA regime, the NIOS has largely escaped scrutiny. This is partly due to the perception that open schooling is marginal to the educational system. However, it needs to be emphasized that the NIOS, which is directly under the Union HRD Ministry, has a very wide reach. It is the apex body in the country in the area of open and distance education at the school level. Every year, about three lakh students take admission to its courses from all over the country and abroad. Active enrolment at a given time in NIOS is about 12 lakhs.

Under the BJP-led NDA government, there was a systematic attempt to impose the ideology of the Sangh Parivar on the courses and study material of the NIOS. This was largely carried out under the direction of N.K. Ambasht, former chairman and an appointee of Murli Manohar Joshi, and Kuldeep Agrawal, former director (academic). Further, K.G. Rastogi, who, it may be recalled, was removed from various committees of the NCERT due to the controversy surrounding

him, was appointed on various course committees of the NIOS. Rastogi eventually became the main channel through whom links of the NIOS were established with different RSS organizations such as the Saraswati Shishu Mandirs and Vidya Bharati.

During the tenure of Ambasht, a large number of schools and institutions which are part of the networks of Vidya Bharati, Saraswati Shishu Mandir, Seva Bharati, etc., have been given accreditation without following proper procedures. The accredited institutions of the NIOS are authorized to run various academic/vocational courses of the NIOS. The extent of the damage being done through the accreditation of institutions with RSS affiliations may well be imagined.

Whereas, on the one hand, Ambasht halted the ongoing exercise for development of material for the senior secondary course in history, which was being carried out by a committee comprising a number of outstanding historians and which had completed most of its work, on the other hand, course material relating to the social sciences was redesigned (often surreptitiously, introducing new passages in existing published material) in order to make it conform to the communal-fascist world view of the Sangh Parivar.

Suddenly RSS stalwarts such as Hedgewar and the supposed contribution of the RSS to the anti-imperialist struggle found an important place in the course material. Some of the course material was virtually reduced to crude RSS propaganda. For instance, a social science text states that the RSS is 'today making great contributions to India's resurgence through its social wings like "Vidya Bharati" and "Seva Bharati"'! (Some excerpts from the textbook entitled *Social Science 2* for the secondary course, which continues to be in use, are enclosed.) Special booklets on Shyama Prasad Mookerji and Deen Dayal Upadhyaya were brought out in a series on prominent Indians presented as role models for students.

It is a matter of grave concern that the same study material and generally saffronized approach in the running of the institute continues even under the UPA government. The present chairman, M.C. Pant, was appointed by the former Union HRD minister Murli Manohar Joshi at the fag end of the tenure of the BJP government. He has been given a tenure of five years. This will ensure that the Sangh Parivar becomes fully entrenched in the institution and its programmes at public expense. That he means business is clear also from the intensified victimization and harassment of employees/scholars who do not subscribe to the views of the Sangh Parivar and have resisted, whenever possible and at grave personal risk, the saffron onslaught.

We urge upon you to urgently intervene in this matter and initiate effective steps to stop the saffronization of NIOS and restore its secular, liberal and democratic character.

Signed by:

Irfan Habib, Arjun Dev, D.N. Jha, Shireen Moosvi, R.C. Thakran,
V.M. Jha, Amar Farooqui

25 May 2005

Neglect of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML)

We express our serious concern over the continued neglect of a prestigious academic national institution like the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML). Apart from containing a museum dedicated to Jawaharlal Nehru and Delhi's only planetarium, the NMML has a major library of international repute, which is one of the foremost repositories of books and archival sources pertaining to modern Indian history, especially the freedom struggle. An important part of the library is the Centre for Contemporary Research in Modern Indian History and Contemporary Studies. The Centre is required to promote pathbreaking research and hold regular seminars and conferences. It also provides fellowships to outstanding scholars for research on modern and contemporary India. History is the main thrust area of the Centre, although it awards fellowships to sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and other social scientists in order to encourage inter-disciplinary research.

It is indeed unfortunate that although the NMML has been without a Director for more than a year (Dr. O.P. Kejriwal, the last Director, had retired in February 2004), the present government has speeded up the efforts to appoint a new Director only this year. Apart from leaving the institution direction-less in academic matters (the NMML has been headed earlier by scholars of the eminence of B.R. Nanda and Ravinder Kumar), the absence of a full-time Director has adversely impacted the fellowship programme with a number of fellowships lying vacant.

To add fuel to fire, the idea of having the interviews on 12 May 2005 – after they had been abandoned last year under similar conditions, when the matter had been brought to the notice of the Union Minister of Culture (the NMML falls within the Ministry of Culture) – raises further questions. Besides the fact that the conditions have remained unaltered since last year and the NMML continues to be a headless organization, the process is flawed also since:

1. The original advertisement had appeared nearly 18 months ago and in the absence of a re-advertisement many serious scholars were prevented from applying.
2. In the absence of a new advertisement, several scholars who were called last time were not called this time; this is a legally untenable point.
3. The committee performing the screening of applications, though comprising eminent scholars, contained no specialists or experts in modern Indian history (history is the main thrust area of the Centre.)

It may be mentioned that these interviews were postponed in June last year because there was no full time Director in the Centre. This postponement was done at the request of some concerned scholars who wanted a full-time Director to be in place before the fellowships were awarded. Apparently the administration had resolved to stop the selection of fellows till a full-time Director was appointed.

All these complications are primarily because of the absence of a full-time Director and the lack of serious attention being given to this premier institution by the concerned Ministry and the government.

25 May 2005

Undoing the anti-secular legacy of the BJP regime: the unfinished agenda in education and culture

It is now one year since the BJP-led NDA regime was voted out at the Centre. This was a mandate against the communal and anti-people policies pursued by the NDA government. The BJP blatantly misused its power to undermine the Constitution and to aggressively implement the Sangh Parivar's communal agenda. Right from the communalization of education through saffronized textbooks to the Gujarat pogrom, the Sangh Parivar played havoc with India's secular polity and society. Education and culture were major targets of the NDA regime, and the state intervened both surreptitiously and openly to destroy the autonomy of public educational and cultural institutions, and to impose its divisive communal ideology on and/or through them. Hardly any institution was left untouched. The subversion of the NCERT, ICHR, ICSSR, Indian Institute of Advanced Study (Shimla), ASI, NCTE, National Institute of Open Schooling, Sangeet Natak Akadami and ICCR, to name only a few institutions, was a key element in the policy of the Sangh Parivar.

The formation of the Congress-led UPA government, supported by left and secular political parties, brought with it the promise of undoing the damage inflicted by the BJP regime in the areas of education and culture. The urgency of this task can hardly be overemphasized. However, the pace at which the UPA government has been attempting to undo the anti-secular legacy of the BJP regime has not been very satisfactory.

During the last one year the UPA government has taken

some steps to reverse the policies of the BJP regime: the reconstitution of CABE, which had been rendered defunct by the NDA government; the somewhat reluctant restoration of NCERT history textbooks which had been withdrawn; the setting up of a review committee to go into the affairs of the ICHR and the Indian Institute of Advanced Study; the revival of the prestigious ‘Towards Freedom’ project of the ICHR; and the formation of new councils for the ICHR and ICSSR comprising recognised scholars in their respective fields.

However, it would appear that the UPA government has not really grasped the significance of its mandate. Opposition to the communal politics of the Sangh Parivar forms the basis of the support extended to the UPA government by left and secular political parties, groups and individuals. The sustained campaign against this politics during the years that the BJP was in power helped in mobilizing public opinion against the onslaught of the Sangh Parivar, which created the conditions for the formation of a secular government. The ideological struggle against communalism is therefore a major responsibility of the UPA.

This task, obviously, has not been accorded the priority that it requires. In some cases a section of the bureaucracy has been far from enthusiastic in undoing the communal legacy of the Sangh Parivar. Apart from long-term initiatives in education and culture, there are some measures that need to be taken forthwith. The ASI, which in the wake of the Babri Masjid issue has acquired a political role as well and which the Sangh Parivar tried to use for its own communal agenda, has not received much attention. The longstanding demand that it should be headed by an academic rather than by a bureaucrat has been ignored, even though the Indian History Congress in its 2004 session passed a resolution on this issue. What is more, only a small fraction of its reports pertaining to excavations undertaken during the last few decades have been published, and so are not available for public scrutiny.

Also, the seventy crore rupees Saraswati project launched by the previous government, which is supposed to have been disbanded, continues under a different nomenclature. A similar apathy is visible in the case of major national institutions such as the National Museum, the National Archives of India (NAI) and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML). All these institutions continue to be headed by bureaucrats. The government was recently put to much embarrassment when it appointed a person of relatively junior rank from the ASI, and with no archival training, as DG of the NAI and had to cancel the appointment after protests.

In the case of NMML, it has been without a full-time Director for well over a year now. An important part of the library is the Centre for Contemporary Research in Modern Indian History and Contemporary Studies, which provides research fellowships to outstanding scholars for research on modern and contemporary India. Interviews were held recently for these fellowships even in the absence of a full-time Director, ignoring the protests of scholars.

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS, formerly National Open School) has escaped public notice and continues to be used as a vehicle for propagating the ideological views of the Sangh Parivar. The NIOS, which is directly under the Union HRD Ministry, has a very wide reach. It is the apex body to provide open and distance education at the school level. Every year about three lakh students take admission in its courses from all over the country and abroad. Active enrolment at a given time in NIOS is about 12 lakhs. Under the BJP-led NDA government, there was a systematic attempt to impose the ideology of the Sangh Parivar on the courses and study material of the NIOS. Social science textbooks glorified the Sangh Parivar, especially the RSS. Surprisingly, these books are still in use and almost nothing has been done to 'detoxify' the teaching material prepared by the NIOS.

While most of the earlier history textbooks have been

restored, they are stated to have been based on the National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2000 and the syllabi prepared in accordance with it, which had been prepared under the BJP-led regime to communalize education. There could be no worse travesty. Numerous other institutions, such as the Indian Council for Philosophical Research and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, which are publicly funded, remain in a saffronized mode due to the ideological apathy of the UPA government. The inability of the Minister for Culture to sort out the mess in the Sangeet Natak Akadami has already received wide publicity. Several institutions under the Ministry of Culture have not been reorganized. The chairman of the governing body of the National School of Drama has not been appointed for the past several months.

Finally, no long-term steps have been initiated to tackle the problem of textbooks used in private schools, Shishu Mandirs and *madrasas*, as well as government schools in some states, which propagate communal ideologies, are marked by a gender bias, inculcate obscurantist values, uphold caste inequalities and are anti-dalit in their outlook. The sinister ideological agenda of the Sangh Parivar was sought to be implemented with impunity during the BJP regime. The Gujarat pogrom was one example of its destructive consequences. The UPA government has a mandate to restore the secular character of our society and polity, and must accord top priority to this task.

22 June 2005

Denial of police permission to theatre group Asmita

We protest the arbitrary and authoritarian action of the Delhi Police in denying permission to Asmita, a leading theatre group of the capital, to perform their new play, *Jinnah*. Whatever the stated purpose and claim of Delhi Police may be, this is nothing short of censorship. We wish to state that the very act of the Delhi Police in asking the theatre group to furnish the script of the play is beyond their scope of power. The Delhi Police is not a censor board, nor does it have the power to dictate to theatre groups what to include in their playscripts. No one had lodged a formal, written complaint with the police about the play. No one had even gone to Delhi Police with any objection. Nor has the play led to any disturbance of public order and peace.

In such a situation, there was no reason whatsoever for the police to ask to be shown the script, and then deny permission to the group to perform the play. In fact, even after the group had furnished the script – which, by law, it is under no obligation to do, it is beyond belief that it took Delhi Police six days to make up their mind that the script was ‘illegible’. To say, as Delhi Police officials have said in the press, that permission has only been ‘deferred’ and not denied, is specious.

All theatre groups in the capital face enormous red tape, delays and a notoriously unsympathetic bureaucratic and police set-up every time a play has to be mounted. Theatre groups have, often enough in the past, approached various authorities to evolve systems that would make seeking

permission for performance simpler. What has happened, however, seems to be the opposite, going by the current instance: police authorities have overstepped their bounds in preventing a leading theatre group that mounts hundreds of shows a year from performing their latest play.

We demand that Delhi Police immediately revoke their arbitrary and highly authoritarian decision to not allow performance of the play.

Signed by:

M.K. Raina (Sahmat), Moloyashree Hashmi (Jana Natya Manch),
N.K. Sharma (Act One)

5 July 2005

Attack on Ramjanmabhoomi complex

Communalism Combat, SAHMAT and the National Campaign in Support of Democracy condemn the attack on the Ramjanmabhoomi complex by unidentified persons this morning, and appeal to all to maintain peace and calm. This incident reveals a serious lapse in security. Those who have perpetrated this crime need to be investigated and punished. However, all persons in authority, political leaders and leaders of all organizations, need to be held responsible to the Indian Constitution and Indian law so that an atmosphere of hatred and venom is not spread by those interested in whipping up communal sentiments all over the country.

Such an incident poses a challenge to the secular fabric of the country. Transparency needs to be followed in investigation. The media needs also to respond responsibly to information when labels like 'terrorist' and '*jehadi* terrorist' are used intentionally by some organizations. Above all, this should not become an occasion for venom and hatred against minorities, clouding our public sphere once again.

17 March 2006

Attack on Aamir Khan by BJP activists in Gujarat

Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust condemns the vandalism of BJP activists in Gujarat directed against Aamir Khan for his support of the rehabilitation of oustees from the Narmada dam site. Aamir Khan, in a very reasoned position, has asked for rehabilitation without taking a position on the height of the dam, which has to be decided in conformity with the decision of the Supreme Court. Sahmat expresses solidarity with Aamir Khan and is confident that all efforts to bully him into resiling from his rational position will not succeed.

2 May 2006

Demolition of *dargah* by police in Vadodara

The action of the Vadodara police in shooting at and killing protestors agitating the demolition of an old *dargah* in the city yesterday needs to be looked at seriously. The 'compromise' formula worked out between the community leaders and the administration a day before clearly appears to have been that a part of the shrine would be sacrificed for 'development'. The next day, apparently, the police and the Corporation came with a sinister motive, demolished the whole structure and by afternoon had even paved a road over it. This is exactly what was done to Wali Dakhani's tomb in Ahmedabad just outside the Commissioner of Police's office on March 1, 2002. The attempt appears to be to culturally annihilate a section by targeting the places of worship.

Worse still, when the police came to 'demolish' the place of worship and found protestors, they shot to kill. This action of the police, apart from being a crime and punishable under law, is not in any way conducive to building any trust between citizens and the police.

Teesta Setalvad and Javed Anand (Communalism Combat, Mumbai),
Rajendra Prasad and M.K. Raina (Sahmat, Delhi), Fr. Cedric Prakash
(Prashant, Ahmedabad), Sheba George (SAHRWARU, Ahmedabad)

2 May 2006

Situation in Jammu and Kashmir

Communalism Combat, Citizens for Justice and Peace, Sahmat, Prashant, SAHRWARU, People's Union for Human Rights and a host of undersigned organisations including the Muslims for Secular Democracy condemn the shameful killings by communally minded terrorists in the Udhampur and Doda districts of Jammu and Kashmir over the past few days. Such acts of motivated communal terror are aimed at creating unbridgeable divides among peoples and societies, and are a real threat to the secular fabric of our country.

We immediately urge that the Government of India, through the Minorities Commission, conduct public hearings in different parts of J & K where minorities and other citizens can depose about the daily conditions of their lives. Steps can then be initiated to assist them. The terrorist bullet is aimed at all innocents who come in their way and other residents of J & K are as vulnerable, but when such communal terrorist acts are committed on the eve of peace talks between India and Pakistan especially, special steps need to be taken by the administration.

We also urge that the Government of India to examine the issues of all minorities living in different parts of the country, but especially in sensitive states like J & K, parts of the North East like Manipur and Assam, and the western Indian state of Gujarat. It may be recalled that on February 15, 2006, a wide forum of over 15 individuals and representatives of organizations including representatives of Hindus in J & K , Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, and representatives of the tribal areas of the North East, had met Shri A.R. Antulay and presented him with a detailed

memorandum that laid out the theoretical position that minorities are vital to a rich and vibrant democracy; that religion must not be the only basis of categorization; that district-wise application of the concept would mean that Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists, wherever they live, would feel more secure and have their minority rights protected; that the word 'minority' should not be typified into meaning just one community.

Teesta Setalvad (*Communalism Combat*); Javed Anand (Muslims for Secular Democracy); Rajendra Prasad, M.K. Raina, Ram Rahman (Sahmat)

S. W. Narboo (MLA from Leh and former minister in Sheikh Abdullah's cabinet), Motilal Bhat (from the Kashmiri Pandit community working with the Hindu Welfare Society, Srinagar, who has lived in the Valley through the insurgency); Bal Patil (Member, Maharashtra Minorities Commission), Justice Kolse-Patil (retd, working with Adivasis and Muslims); Prof. Zahur-ud-Din (from the Dogra Muslim community); Sushoba Barve (Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation); Sofia Khan (from Gujarat); John Dayal (All India Catholic Union); Suhas Chakma (from the North East); Sunil Sardar (a representative of Dalit Christians); D. Sherifa (Tamil Nadu Women's Jamaat); H.S. Phoolka; Fr. Cedric Prakash (Prashant, Ahmedabad); Sheba George (SAHRWARU, Ahmedabad)

8 May 2006

Letter to Home Minister on M.F. Husain

The artists and the community of creative people of India are deeply disturbed by recent reports in two newspapers (*The Telegraph*, Saturday, April 8, 2006, and *The Hindustan Times*, Friday, May 5, 2006, copies enclosed), indicating that the Home Ministry is considering or has issued an Advisory to the Police Commissioners of Delhi and Mumbai that there are grounds to believe that certain paintings of the painter M.F. Husain hurt the religious sentiments of the majority community and therefore might be a provocation for communal disturbances. The Home Ministry has therefore asked the Police Commissioners to take appropriate action. Both the reports quote sources saying that the IB has advised the Home Ministry after submitting information to the Law Ministry.

If these reports are true, they are extremely disturbing to the creative community as this would be the first time such an action would be taken by the Government of India against a visual artist. The implications of such a step are very serious and strike at the very foundations of our democratic polity.

M.F. Husain's work is a celebration of the multi-cultural and multi-religious life of post-independent India. Though himself a Muslim, he has done a series of paintings celebrating the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the mythological traditions of other Indian religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism in addition to Islam. In this manner, he has identified himself with the common multi-cultural heritage of India. It is for this reason that his work has earned him so much acclaim not only from the people but from successive governments, including nomination to the Rajya Sabha.

The entire community of artists, scholars and art historians has clearly shown that there has never been any obscenity, malice or deliberate slur on any community in any of his works, and people who purport to see such elements in them have a clearly divisive political agenda. On the contrary, Husain has engaged with Indian mythology with a passion and intelligence that have given old stories a contemporary meaning and form, as no other Indian artist in post-independent India has done. Perhaps this is what irks the forces that attack him.

M.F. Husain and his work have been a prominent target of attack by communal forces for many years now. Almost all the reported 'offensive images' are the same images that the communal groups have interpreted previously in their own vulgar terms. All the previous legal cases on these same images have been settled by the courts in the past. We are, therefore, shocked that the present government now sees fit to issue an Advisory like this. M.F. Husain has been targeted by retrogressive outfits with a clear political agenda because he is a Muslim, and because, as a symbol of our nation's multiculturalism, he serves their purpose best.

In recent months, threats of violence against the painter have been publicly issued with offers of monetary rewards, which are a criminal offence. The state and the central governments have done practically nothing to punish the people who have issued these calls to murder.

We therefore urge you to please seriously consider any action that the government may contemplate with a reference to its wider implications for our democratic traditions and institutions. An attack on creativity, of which this is an instance, is a precursor to an attempt to regiment society, which needs to be frustrated.

We therefore appeal to you:

to immediately withdraw the Advisory, if it has been issued, to the Police Commissioners of Delhi and Mumbai or any

other authority; to diligently pursue cases against and ensure punishment of organizations and individuals who had issued calls for the murder or mutilation of M F Husain, so that the government is clearly seen to be standing for secularism, the rights of minorities and freedom of creative expression.

26 May 2006

Mob censorship in Gujarat

The shocking incident of the 'unofficial' ban on the film *Fanaa* in the state of Gujarat should make all the citizens of the country stand up in alarm. Gujarat now has the distinction of allowing a small group of people with political affiliations and a clear agenda of communal hate politics to deprive the entire population of their state access to culture. This recent incident follows the attack on and subsequent closure of the Garden Art Museum in Surat in 2004, the burning of the Husain Doshi Gufa in Ahmedabad and the 'ban' on Husain's film *Gajagamini* – all through violence or threats of violence.

The protestations of the state government that none of these has official sanction or are official positions of the BJP carry no weight. The groups involved in these actions are all affiliated to the ruling party in the state. It is the duty of the government to protect the rights of artists and film-makers to show their work to the public, and for the public to decide on the merits of the work. None of the works in question has been censored or banned by any state authority.

Gujarat has a rich tradition of cultural pluralism and we have no doubt whatsoever that audiences there have a sophisticated critical outlook. We appeal to the people of Gujarat to stand against the censorship of culture by a motivated handful through violence. They should not let their state become unique in the Indian Union by allowing 'unofficial' and increasingly widespread culture policing.

21 July 2006

Letter to Home Minister on VHP statement

We are both shocked and horrified to read the statement of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) chief Ashok Singhal that the 'Hindu community' had conducted a '*jhatka*' against the Muslims in Gujarat in 2002.

Mr. Singhal's remarks of July 18, 2006 (carried on the front page of the *Indian Express* of July 19, 2006) are a blatant and transparent attempt to whip up communal violence in the country in the wake of the Mumbai blasts.

The VHP chief has warned against another '*jhatka*' against Muslims – like the one conducted in Gujarat. According to his published remarks, Mr. Singhal has also owned up to the Gujarat pogrom of 2002.

We demand that the Home Ministry immediately direct the Delhi police to institute criminal proceedings against Mr. Ashok Singhal for inciting persons to commit terrorist acts against members of the minority community.

We would be grateful if you could keep us posted on the action you order against the VHP chief, who has a known history of making communal speeches.

25 September 2006

Statement on Karnataka Education Minister's remarks about Tipu Sultan

We view with dismay the remarks about Tipu Sultan attributed to Shri D.H. Shankaramurthy, Minister for Higher Education, Government of Karnataka. He has added to the existing list of Tipu Sultan's alleged faults (urged for so long by the British and the Sangh Parivar), that he replaced the Kannada language by Persian in all government work and so was 'anti-Kannada', and that his memory must therefore be spurned by all patriotic people of Karnataka. If the Minister were to look into Tipu Sultan's letters and orders (e.g. India Office Manuscript, I.O. 4685, folios 130a, 152a, 159a-b, etc.), he would find numerous references to various officials and clerks appointed for keeping records in Kannada and Marathi in the treasury and other government offices, and, wherever named, the persons holding the posts are found to be mostly Hindus. It is highly irresponsible of a Minister holding the charge of Higher Education in one of India's most advanced states, to indulge in such reckless disregard of historical truth.

The Minister reportedly wishes the name of Tipu Sultan to be expunged from all textbooks. Such a desire suits only those who have scant respect for the memory of India's long fight against foreign invaders or colonial rule. It is inconceivable that the people of Karnataka, and of India, can consign to oblivion a man like Tipu Sultan, a true martyr, whom they have held up as a hero while the British regarded him as their most redoubtable opponent. The integrity of history textbooks needs to be protected against all such

ignorant and partisan onslaughts on them as the one that the Minister of Higher Education in Karnataka has been reported to have undertaken.

Signed by:

Professor R.S. Sharma (former Chairman, ICHR and President, Indian History Congress), Professor A.R. Kulkarni (former President, Indian History Congress), Professor D.N. Jha (former President, Indian History Congress), Professor Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (former President, Indian History Congress), Professor J.V. Naik (General President of the Indian History Congress), Professor V. Ramakrishna (former Secretary, ICHR), Professor Shireen Moosvi (former Secretary, Indian History Congress), Professor M.G.S. Narayanan (former Secretary, Indian History Congress, and Chairman, ICHR), Professor Ramakrishna Chatterjee (former Secretary, Indian History Congress), Professor B.P. Sahu (Secretary, Indian History Congress), Professor Kesavan Veluthat (Mangalore), Professor Rajan Gurukkal (Kottayam), Professor Aditya Mukherjee (JNU, Delhi), Professor K.K.N. Kurup (former Vice Chancellor, Calicut University), Professor K.M. Shrimali (former Secretary, Indian History Congress), Professor Suraj Bhan (Rohtak), Professor Irfan Habib (former President, Indian History Congress, and Chairman, ICHR), Professor Arjun Dev (Delhi), Professor Iqtidar Alam Khan (former President, Indian History Congress), Dr. Biswamoy Pati (Delhi), Dr. S.C. Mishra (Delhi), Professor Suvira Jaiswal (Hyderabad), Professor R. Gopinath (Delhi), Dr. R.P. Bahuguna (Delhi), Professor R.C. Thakran (Delhi), Professor G.P. Sharma (Delhi), Dr. Amar Farooqui (Delhi), Professor R.P. Rana (Delhi), Professor H.C. Satyarthi (Bihar), Professor S.R. Singh (former President, Indian History Congress), Dr. Ishrat Alam (Delhi), Professor K.L. Tuteja (Kurukshetra), Dr. Nalini Taneja (Delhi)

15 November 2006

Letter to the President of India on M.F. Husain

We, the undersigned, write to you to suggest that the arts and the nation would be made proud if the contribution of the distinguished artist, Maqbool Fida Husain, is recognized in the form of the highest award of the land: India's Bharat Ratna.

M.F. Husain has received national and international recognition in abundance; it remains for him to join the constellation of Bharat Ratna awardees – Satyajit Ray, M.S. Subbalakshmi, Ravi Shankar, Bismillah Khan, Lata Mangeshkar – to become one of the most treasured artists of this country. A large number of artists, art historians and critics, as well as spectators in the general public, believe that M.F. Husain, the 91-year-old painter and filmmaker, most fully belongs in this constellation.

The Indian civilization, in all its diversity, has been Husain's basic inspirational project. Since the year of Independence, through the Nehruvian decades and thereon, cognizant of all the challenges involved in nation-building, Husain has been steadfast in maintaining a most affirmative relationship with the Indian people's consciousness of their national identity. Through him, we have learned to address a whole gamut of issues pertaining to the interactive dynamic of modernity with the country's many-layered art and culture.

We believe that he has made a signal contribution in reworking the aesthetic traditions of India including especially the tradition of iconographic innovation. He is among those few modern artists who have focused on mythological and

epic narratives, and, for over half a century, he has painted themes from the epics in literally thousands of paintings and drawings. This alone speaks of his passion for these narratives and, further, of his understanding that their literary, performing and visual form has changed through the centuries, and therefore carries the mandate for new articulations within the contemporary.

Equally important, these series of Husain paintings have been shown in urban and rural sites through unique modes of public dissemination. And it speaks of the generous comprehension of this project by viewers all over India, viewers who cut across barriers of class and culture, that they have been received with the affectionate regard and playful participation they require.

Posterity will certainly name Husain as one of the most prominent post-Independence artists to shape the contemporary in the spirit of a living and changing tradition. More than any other modern artist in India, he has understood how a syncretic civilization and the dynamics of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious nation have together prompted these interpretations and empowered the community of artists to evolve a uniquely modern language consistent with the complexity of these civilizational narratives.

Indeed, Husain is such an iconic figure that we could use the very iconography of Maqbool Fida Husain, of the person himself, to forward ideas about Indian visual culture in the framework of a dynamic public sphere. Already, his life and work are beginning to serve as an allegory for the changing modalities of the secular in modern India – and the challenges that the narrative of the nation holds for many of us. This is the opportune, and crucial, time to honour him for his dedication and courage to the cultural renaissance of his beloved country.

Signed by:

Vivan Sundaram, Ashok Vajpeyi, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Krishen Khanna, Ram Rahman, M.K. Raina, Geeta Kapur, Arpita Singh, A. Ramachandaran, Aditi De, Akbar Padamsee, Alaknanda Patel, Amit Judge, Amiya Bagchi, Aneesh Pradhan, Anil Chandra, Anuradha Kapur, Arun Vadhera, Ashutosh Gowariker, Astad Deboo, Atul Bhalla, Atul Tiwari, Aziz Mirza, Bal Chabda, Balkrishan Doshi, Bharati Kher, Bhaskar Chandavarkar, C.P. Chandrasekhar, D.N. Jha, Dadi Pudumjee, Dadiba Pundole, Dolly Narang, E. Alkazi, Gayatri Sinha, Geeta Mehra, Gitanjali Shree, Indira Chandrasekhar, Indra Primit Roy, Irfan Habib, Javeed Alam, Jayati Ghosh, Jitish Kallat, Jogen Chowdhury, Jyotindra Jain, K. Bikram Singh, K.G. Subramanyan, K.T. Ravindran, Kedar Nath Singh, Kekoo Gandhi, Khorsheed Gandhi, Krishen Baldev Vaid, Kumar Shahani, Kundan Shah, Laxma Gaud, Madangopal Singh, Madhu Prasad, Madhukar Upadhyaya, Malini Bhattacharya, Mani Kaul, Maya Rao, Mira Nair, Mihir Bhattacharya, Mrinalini Mukherjee, Muzaffar Ali, Nadira Babbar, Nagji Patel, Nalini Malani, Namwar Singh, Navjot Altaf, Neelam Man Singh, Nilima Sheikh, Paramjit Singh, Paritosh Sen, Parthiv Shah, Prabhat Patnaik, Prasanna, Pushpamala N., Rafeeq Elias, Raj Babbar, Raj Rewal, Rajeev Bhargava, Rajendra Yadav, Rajinder Arora, Rajiv Sethi, Ram Kumar, Ramgopal Bajaj, Ranbir Kaleka, Reese Saini Kallat, Renu Modi, Saeed Mirza, Sangita Jindal, Sashi Kumar, Sasidharan Nair M., Shashi Tharoor, Sheba Chhachhi, Shireen Gandhi, Shireen Moosvi, Shubha Mudgal, Shyam Benegal, Sohail Hashmi, Subodh Gupta, Sudhir Chandra, Sudhir Mishra, Sudhir Patwardhan, Sukumar Muralidharan, Suresh B.V., Teesta Setalvad, Tyeb Mehta, U.R. Ananthamurthy, Veer Munshi, Vidya Shah, Vijay Bagodi, Virendra Saini, Zarina Hashmi

20 December 2006

Gujarat Genocide 2002 – four years later

Victim survivors of the Gujarat genocide, especially those committed to their struggle for justice, have been reduced to a life of everyday terror and harassment. Five years later, residents of Shaikh Mohalla in Sardarpura village of Mehsana district, Gulberg Society in Ahmedabad, Ode village in Anand district and other areas live as internally displaced refugees without bare civic rights like ration cards, BPL cards, electricity and water. Victims of the Ode massacre still look in vain for their lost ones' missing bodies and repeated inquiries with the police face a cold response.

Discriminatory justice and development

While criminals responsible for mass crimes have been granted bail by the high and low judiciary in Gujarat, 84 accused of the Godhra mass arson wilt in jail having been refused bail for four years.

Victim survivors of the Pandharwada massacre who located the mass grave are in vain trying to get a CBI probe into the scandalous dumping of the remains of Pandharwada and other massacres in the Paanam river off Lunawada town (despite the existence of a large graveyard), but instead face intimidation and threat of arrest from the police. Of the 413 officially declared missing persons, bodies of 228 are still not discovered, pointing to large-scale illegal dumping of bodies. The NHRC has been appealed to, to conduct an all-Gujarat inquiry into this.

The Modi government is trying to use fraudulent BPL card holdings (ostensibly given to minority victims of the genocide) as a pre-election sop to grant cheap housing. In fact the BPL

lists need to be scrutinised and examined. Ghettoisation and segregation in Gujarat have reached unprecedented levels with even the jails being communalised in the state.

The bitter reality of Gujarat is not simply the functioning of the Gujarat government but the ambivalent position of the opposition in the state, the dominant partner in the UPA coalition at the centre. The promise of CBI inquiry into the major carnage cases was pre-election hype that has not materialised into a real promise. Even today, while the state government continues with a regime of low intensity terror all over the state, the centre's UPA is a mute opposition and spectator.

Compensation

In 2002 the then NDA government had given a Rs 200 crore rehabilitation package to Gujarat. In March 2003, one year later, the cynical and callous state of Gujarat returned about Rs 116 crores, claiming that no more relief needed to be done. The state of Gujarat has paid compensation of only Rs. 1.5 lakhs (Rs. 90,000 in cash and Rs. 60,000 in Narmada Bonds) as compensation to the next of kin of those killed in the rioting. This amount is totally inadequate and arbitrary, and amounts to a failure on the part of the state to fulfil its constitutional obligation of compensation. Significantly, the Hon'ble Delhi High Court had in 1996 (six years earlier) directed the payment of compensation of Rs. 2 lakhs and interest from 1984 (aggregating to Rs. 3.5 lakhs) to those killed in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. On that basis and allowing even for a 7% annual rate of inflation from 1996 to 2002, the amount of compensation would be required to be approximately Rs 3.00 lakhs (40% increase on 2 lakhs) and interest on this amount from 2002 to 2007 at 8% per annum, an additional Rs. 1 lakh = 4.00 lakhs! Compensation for injuries/disabilities sustained should be pro rata to this amount, that is, Rs 7 lakhs per loss of life.

Let down by the Centre

After announcing a rehab package of Rs 7 lakh per loss of life in 2002, the centre appears to have had a re-think. The same man, MOS (Home) Sriprakash Jaiswal, who made the initial announcement of the package, in a reply to an unstarred question (number 2486) in the Lok Sabha on December 12, surprised everyone by saying that ‘the centre has not taken a final decision’ on the package.

Regarding destruction of houses/homes

The position regarding compensation of houses is even worse. The state of Gujarat had fixed an arbitrary and irrational ceiling of Rs. 50,000 as compensation for destruction of houses, and in most cases has paid only a pittance. The Women’s Parliamentary Committee, in its August 2002 Report, had recorded that it had been informed that 18924 houses had been partially damaged (11,199 urban and 7095 rural) and for which Rs. 15.55 crores had been paid as compensation. This works out to an average of only Rs. 870 per house! In fact the Committee noted that a number of persons/recipients had shown them cheques of as little as Rs. 40 to Rs. 200!

Amounts paid so far (i) to relatives of those killed (ii) to those whose houses were destroyed and damaged – is totally inadequate, and at times even illusory. Moreover, no compensation has been provided to women who were raped/molested/attacked, although the Respondents Home Dept. had informed the Women’s Parliamentary Committee in August 2002 that there had been 185 attacks on women and at least 11 cases of rape. In fact rape/molestation was far more pervasive – but a number of the victims were killed/burnt, and others have been unwilling to file complaints with the police, having regard to their partisan and callous responses. I reiterate that constitutional obligations require that at least a compensation of Rs 3 lakhs and interest from 2002 (Rs. 1.5 lakhs) should be paid to the relatives of those killed.

That amounts pro rata be paid for disabilities and serious injuries. Women who were raped and molested should be given compensation equal to that awarded for persons who were killed. The ceiling amount for house compensation should be raised to 1.5 lakhs in the rural areas and 3 lakhs in the urban areas, and compensation based on fair assessment of data and records, including the *panchnamas* contemporaneously recorded, be paid along with interest from 2002.

The National Human Rights Commission, after considering the responses of the Government of Gujarat to its preliminary reports/findings, concluded in its Report/Proceedings of 31 May 2002, 'there was a comprehensive failure of the State to protect the Constitutional rights of the people of Gujarat'.

Statement issued by Sahmat and Citizens for Justice and Peace

9 February 2007

Protect academic autonomy of ICHR from bureaucratic take-over

The Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) was established as an autonomous organisation to promote historical research in the country. Its Rules particularly enjoin that the Government of India should appoint an 'eminent historian' to be its Chairman. However, it has become a practice of the government, especially the Ministry of Human Resource Development, to treat it as a subordinate department of its own. The latest and most serious example of this attitude is the present appointment of an Additional Secretary of the Ministry as Chairman of the ICHR. It was known from the beginning that the three-year term of Professor D.N. Tripathi as Chairman, ICHR, was to end on 4 February 2007.

The government has apparently deliberately withheld the appointment of his successor so that a bureaucrat may then take over the organisation during the interregnum. Since such a person is not answerable either to the Council or its committees, he inevitably treats it as a personal fief, a situation that is most inimical to the academic activities of the organisation.

While deploring the action of the government in deliberately creating such an interregnum, we are firmly of the opinion that a historian of stature should immediately be appointed Chairman, and no action should be taken by the official temporarily made Chairman to disturb either the present administrative arrangements at the ICHR or the programmes undertaken by the Council.

Signed by:

R.S. Sharma, Irfan Habib, D.N. Jha, Suraj Bhan, Arjun Dev, Rajan Gurukkal, V. Ramakrishna, B.P. Sahu, R.P. Bahuguna, R.C. Thakran, R. Gopinath, Shireen Moosvi, Kesavan Veluthat, Archana Prasad, Biswamoy Pati, Amar Farooqui, R.P. Rana, Ramakrishna Chatterjee, Suvira Jaiswal, H.C. Satyarthi

14 May 2007

In support of Fine Arts Faculty, Baroda

We, the undersigned, wish to voice our strong protest and condemnation of the continuing assault on academic and other forms of freedom of expression by members of the Sangh Parivar. In recent years, senior artists such as M.F. Husain have been targets of both violence and innumerable scurrilous lawsuits whose intent is to browbeat and intimidate freedom of expression within the Sovereign Republic of India. Citizens' right to legal redress is being misused to harass citizens; court proceedings are being used to punitively target whoever the Hindu right deems convenient in order to obtain cheap attention for its nefarious goals.

The recent attack on a graduate student at the prestigious Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University, Baroda, is the latest instance of this bludgeoning of public rights of expression. This was done with full state collusion. On Thursday, May 10, 2007, Mr. Neeraj Jain, a known BJP activist, along with a group of Vishwa Hindu Parishad members, entered the premises of the Fine Arts Faculty where students' artworks were on display as part of the process of annual student evaluation. They used violence against Mr. Chandramohan, a Master's candidate, and the police arrested him. Mr. Chandramohan has been in jail since then. The charge levelled against him is that of hurting religious sentiments.

Students in the Department of Art History at the University then mounted a 'protest exhibition' that attempted to show historical and pre-modern masterpieces from the history of art which could, in today's charged atmosphere, be deemed 'offensive'. The intention of the show was to question misconceptions about 'art', 'tradition', 'obscenity' and

'transgression'. On May 11, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University marched into the Department accompanied by four Syndicate members and ordered Prof. Shivaji Panikkar, the acting Dean, to shut down the exhibition. When Prof. Panikkar refused, the pro-VC had the exhibition brought down, and sealed the archive of the Art History Department. Prof. Panikkar, a highly respected academic with internationally recognized credentials, has since been suspended from his position and there is a demand to name him as co-accused in the case along with Mr. Chandramohan.

These kinds of attacks on academics and artists not only represent the erosion of democratic freedoms, essential to the establishment of a vigorous and open society, but also destroy the very basis on which universities are founded. Let us make no mistake, the attack here is not merely on a particular artwork or form of expression, but on the very spirit of open-minded inquiry that is at the heart of the university's functioning. It is clear that since the rise of the Hindu right in the last decade and a half, India is descending into a dark prison for the imagination. And that, in states where the Hindu right or its allies are in power, state and police officials openly collude with their lumpen party mobs.

We, artists and art-related professionals, members of university faculties and administrations, and Indian citizens foremost, find this loutish behaviour intolerable. From these 'narrow domestic walls', these 'dreary desert sands of dead habit', as Tagore put it, may the people of India awake.

We appeal to all secular parties/organisations and individuals to raise their voice against the misuse of the police, judicial system and the state machinery to muzzle freedom of expression through coercion and intimidation.

Signed by artists and academics

6 July 2007

Condemn the assault on Professor Shivaji Panikkar in Ahmedabad

Sahmat strongly condemns the assault on art historian Shivaji Panikkar which took place in Ahmedabad today. Professor Panikkar was assaulted in his car when he was on his way to preside as a chief guest at a film festival, and the windows of his car were smashed. Recently suspended from the Faculty of Fine Arts at the MS University in Baroda after a jury review was disrupted by BJP leader Niraj Jain, Professor Panikkar had been threatened with 'dire consequences' by Mr. Jain, for protecting the rights of his students and the integrity of the academic proceedings of his department. Today's attack is obviously orchestrated by the Sangh Parivar and seeks to continue their attempt to impose their politically motivated cultural agenda by fear and terror.

We call on the authorities to immediately proceed against the attackers. Meanwhile, the functioning of the Department of Art at MS University continues to be stalled, with the still incomplete results from the last session disrupted by the BJP. The admissions process is also stalled, and the students are on an indefinite strike calling for reinstatement of Professor Panikkar. Since the University authorities do not seem to be keen on resolving this situation, we call on the Governor of Gujarat to take action in his capacity as Visitor to MS University, to restore this world-famous Department to its normal functioning.

9 August 2007

Attack on Taslima Nasreen in Hyderabad

Sahmat strongly condemns the violent attack on Bangladeshi novelist Taslima Nasreen in Hyderabad on August 8, 2007, at the launch of a Telugu translation of her latest book, *Shodh*.

It is reported that around 20 MIM workers, led by MLAs Afsar Khan, Ahmad Pasha and Mozum Khan, stormed the Press Club premises and raised slogans against the author. They attacked her with bouquets, flower pots and virtually anything they could lay their hands on, at the concluding session of the book release.

Taslima Nasreen has been a target of attack from fundamentalist forces both in India and Bangladesh.

We appeal to democratic-minded people in India to join in the condemnation of such attacks and isolate those who preach intolerance and violence.

21 September 2007

Midday journalists held guilty of contempt of court

The Delhi High Court's decision to sentence the journalists of *Midday* newspaper to four months' imprisonment after holding them guilty of contempt of court, raises very serious questions.

The story for which the Court has found them guilty was regarding the professional misconduct of former Chief Justice of India, Y.K. Sabharwal. The Constitution of India provides for a fundamental right of expression to all citizens of the country, which is applicable to the media as well. The High Court's decision to sentence the journalists for contempt has to be viewed in this perspective. Anybody who has held a public office is accountable, no matter how powerful the individual may be.

Doubts on several judgements given by former Chief Justice Y.K. Sabharwal have been raised by eminent jurists, who have demanded a thorough probe so that the truth can be brought before the people of the country. This demand should be supported by all democratic-minded people in the country.

Some of the judgements given by Mr Sabharwal have affected lakhs of people, one such instance being the order on sealing of shops and commercial establishments in residential areas in Delhi.

For a healthy functioning of democratic institutions, any assault on freedom of expression should be resisted.

23 November 2007

On Taslima Nasreen's 'externment'

We strongly protest the recent rioting in Kolkata by Muslim fundamentalist and other forces against the Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen, and her subsequent 'externment' from that city.

As creative and thinking people we are convinced that an enlightened and democratic state should have the capacity to ensure the right of liberty and freedom of speech to all individuals, especially artists, writers, musicians, thespians, film-makers.

In a civilized and modern world, while one may or may not agree with the views or works of any particular thinker, writer, painter, dramatist or film-maker, we should stand united to defend his or her right to express the same in an unfettered manner without violence, threat or hindrance from fundamentalist forces and frenzied mobs openly exhibiting extreme intolerance, ignorance and bigotry.

We are happy that Shri Biman Bose has revised his statement asking Ms Taslima Nasreen to leave West Bengal if her presence disturbs peace in that state. It still remains a matter of great anxiety that Ms Nasreen has left Kolkata for Jaipur and now New Delhi.

What is particularly frightening is the fact that this is not the first time in recent history that such a situation has been created by sectarian forces and the reaction of the state has been identical. We have had to face almost exactly the same situation in regard to the veteran painter M.F. Husain who has had to stay away from India due to the threats of extremist Hindu groups.

We welcome the call for giving Taslima Nasreen Indian

citizenship in the face of extreme fundamentalism in her country. However, we would like to underline the unabashed duplicity exhibited by the Hindu fundamentalist forces in this matter when they continue to viciously persecute M.F. Husain. As Gandhiji said, Truth, after all, is indivisible.

Signed by:

Ram Rahman, Amiya Bagchi, S. Kalidas, Siddharth Varadarajan, Indira Chandrasekhar, M.K. Raina, Parthiv Shah, Prabhat Patnaik, Chanchal Chauhan, M.M.P. Singh, Vishnu Nagar, Sohail Hashmi, D.N. Jha, Vishnu Khare, Rajendra Yadav, Ibbar Rabbi, Javeed Alam, Utsa Patnaik, Anil Bhatti, Ruchira Gupta, Sabina Sehgal, Shikha Trivedi, Vipra Srivastava, Yogesh Puri, Jaiprakash N.D., Barnita Bagchi, Zakia Zaheer, Rana Barua, Subodh Gupta, C.P. Chandrasekhar, Saleem Kidwai, Bharati Kher, Partho Dutta, Astad Deboo, Kishwar Desai, Arjun Dev, Anuradha Marwah, Asad Zaidi, D.N. Verma, Jayati Ghosh, Venkatesh Athreya, Rimli Bhattacharya, Aijaz Ahmad, Rajat Tandon, Shamsul Islam, Urmila Bhardekar, Nirmalangshu Mukherjee, Radha Kumar, C.K. Raju, Rajeev Dhavan, Anil Sadgopal, Harshavardhan Swaminathan, Amitava Ghosh, N.K. Sharma, Kasim Sait, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, Jivi Sethi, Biswajit Roy Chowdhury, Shabana Azmi, Reva K. Singh, Smita Gupta, Praveen Jha, Rasna Bhushan, K.M. Shrimali, Madangopal Singh, Prasanna, Subhashini Ali, Vishwamohan Jha

13 February 2008

Demand to extend Taslima Nasreen's visa

It is a matter of great anxiety that the exiled Bengali writer Taslima Nasreen is still being kept in an undisclosed place by the Government of India. It is learnt that she is not allowed any visitors and cannot move freely. Her visa expires on the 18th of February, after which she is liable to be deported. While we may or may not agree with the views or the work of Taslima Nasreen, we believe that her right to freedom of speech and expression is inviolable. We demand that her visa be extended with immediate effect and she be provided a congenial atmosphere to live and work.

16 February 2008

Message to World Social Forum, Pakistan

We, the undersigned, welcome the initiative of the World Social Forum, Pakistan, in organising a Public Assembly at Karachi in order to mobilise people against the continued occupation of Palestine and Iraq. The cause cuts across all borders. Never since Vietnam has US-led aggression on such a scale taken place against Asian peoples as is now being undertaken: under the agency of Israel in Palestine, and the armies of the US and UK in Iraq, and the NATO in Afghanistan.

It is extremely unfortunate that the Government of India has remained unconcerned with the presence of NATO forces so near India's own frontiers and with the brutal US occupation of Iraq, branded as unlawful by our own Parliament. On Palestine, the traditional independent policy of free India has been altered to one of an open military collaboration with Israel, in which we not only help finance Israel by buying its military ware, but also put its spy-satellite into space. The people of India need to be urgently aroused to the dangers of our country being used as a tool in the US strategy of world domination.

It is incumbent upon people all over the world to enhance their vigilance and cooperation in the common struggle against imperialism. We hope that the initiative of holding the Public Assembly at Karachi will be widely supported, and as widely emulated in India and throughout the world.

Signed, among others, by:

Irfan Habib, Shireen Moosvi, Amiya Bagchi, D.N. Jha, Biswamoy Pati, Nandita Rao, Suvira Jaiswal, Iqtidar Alam Khan, Shamshad,

Prabhat Patnaik, Indira Chandrasekhar, Virendra Saini, C.P. Chandrasekhar, Madhu Prasad, Saeed Mirza, Utsa Patnaik, Sohail Hashmi, Arjun Dev, Ram Rahman, Madangopal Singh, Parthiv Shah, M.K. Raina, Amar Farooqui

26 February 2008

ABVP attack History Department

The assault of ABVP activists on the Department of History of Delhi University, the manhandling of Professor S.Z.H. Jafri, Head of the Department, and other acts of violence and vandalism committed by them must shock the entire academic community of the country. It is to be underlined that the article objected to by the ABVP was included in the 'Reading Materials' two years ago, and the raising of the issue only now seems prima-facie motivated, and designed to lend a communal colour to the question. While everyone is entitled to have his own opinion on the rationale or appropriateness of a particular part of the Reading Materials, such criticism should have been made in a civilized manner and addressed to the proper authorities. If there were any students involved in the assault, they should consider if their action has brought honour to their alma matter, one of the premier educational institutions of the country. We hope that the authorities in charge of law and order and of discipline at Delhi University will take all the necessary measures to ensure that the guilty are punished.

Signed by:

R.S. Sharma, Shireen Moosvi, Aditya Mukherjee, Irfan Habib, Biswamoy Pati, R. Gopinath, G.P. Sharma, H.C. Satyarthi, Najaf Haider, Javeed Alam, Utsa Patnaik, M.K. Raina, Shakti Kak, Lata Singh, S. Kalidas, Badri Raina, D.N.Jha, V. Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna Chatterjee, K.M. Shrimali, Arjun Dev, S.C. Mishra, R.P. Bahuguna, Amar Farooqui, Ishrat Alam, Sohail Hashmi, Prabhat Patnaik, Jayati Ghosh, Madangopal Singh, Mihir Bhattacharya, A. Murali, Amiya Bagchi, B.P. Sahu, Suraj Bhan, Iqtidar Alam Khan, Suvira Jaiswal, R.C. Thakran, R.P. Rana, Nalini Taneja, Malini Bhattacharya, C.P. Chandrasekhar, Ram Rahman, Madhu Prasad, Suranjan Das, Archana Prasad, Vishwamohan Jha

11 March 2008

Attack on Sundarayya Vijnana Kendram in Hyderabad

We, the undersigned academics, artists and concerned citizens, strongly condemn the attack on the night of 10th March 2008 on Sundarayya Vijnana Kendram in Hyderabad by miscreants led by the RSS and BJP. These miscreants tried to burn the portrait of Putchalapalli Sundarayya and the thousands of books housed in the Kendram. They also attacked the staff that resisted the burning of the Kendram.

The Sundarayya Vijnana Kendram, a renowned library, cultural and research centre, has been striving for the last two decades to preserve the composite cultural heritage of the Indian civilization. It has the largest and rare collections of Telugu, English and Urdu books, as also journals and manuscripts. Its involvement in community service is enormous. Its service to the global community of scholars in facilitating research into Indian history, culture and heritage is well acknowledged.

The attack on such a renowned cultural centre is totally unacceptable. It is against all norms of civil society. We are concerned about the increasing acts of cultural policing and fascist attacks, and call upon the civil society to reject the politics of intolerance, hate and vandalism.

Signed by:

Teesta Setalvad, Javed Anand, Ruchira Gupta, Anurag Chaturvedi, K.N. Panikkar, Parthiv Shah, Sohail Hashmi, Arjun Dev, Prabir Purkayastha, Chanchal Chauhan, Aditya Mukherjee, Prabhat Patnaik, Malini Bhattacharya, Madangopal Singh, Utsa Patnaik, Amar Farooqui, C.P. Chandrasekhar, Archana Prasad, Mihir

Bhattacharya, N.K. Sharma, Jayati Ghosh, Badri Raina, D.N. Jha, Madhu Prasad, Indira Chandrasekhar, M.M.P. Singh, Irfan Habib, Shireen Moosvi, Amit Sengupta, Dinesh Abrol, M.K. Raina, Vikas Rawal, Ram Rahman, Sessa Reddy, Javeed Alam, Manjari Katju, Atlury Murali, Sasheej Hegde, D. Narasimha Reddy, Gali Arunkumar, G. Sudarshan Reddy, Purendra Prasad, K. Chakradhara Rao, Pillalamarri Ramulu, K. Balagopal, G. Haragopal, Kodandarami Reddy, L. Pratap Reddy, Aribandi Prasad Rao, K. Chinnaya Suri, N. Venugopal Rao

2 May 2008

Withdraw FIR against journalists in Ahmedabad

The registration of a criminal case by the Gujarat police against the *Times of India* journalists at Ahmedabad is a highly condemnable and deplorable act. It is aimed at throttling freedom of expression of the media, which needs to be strongly opposed by all democratic-minded people in the country.

The approach of the Gujarat police has not been impartial at all, which is apparent from its role in the 2002 riots resulting in the murder of more than 1000 innocent citizens in the state. It has faced severe indictments from the Supreme Court and the National Human Rights Commission.

The latest unexplainable act of booking journalists in a case of sedition, criminal conspiracy and common intent proves that there is no room for any differing views in that state. The journalists booked in the case had merely written about the Police Commissioner of Ahmedabad, on the basis of their investigation.

An FIR on such flimsy grounds exposes the hypocrisy of the Sangh Parivar leadership and the administration run by it, on the vital issue of defence of freedom of expression. We demand that the FIR against the journalists be immediately withdrawn.

9 May 2008

Delhi High Court dismisses cases against M.F. Husain

The artists' community welcomes the Delhi High Court ruling dismissing three criminal cases against the painter M.F. Husain for the supposed crime of obscenity. The Court has, in our perception, upheld the right to artistic creation and decisively quashed efforts at censorship through street violence and orchestrated legal action by politically motivated groups. The Court has, importantly, held that there was no intent on the part of the artist to cause offence. Obscenity, in this reading, is in the eyes of the viewer. And a difference in perspective cannot be the basis of criminal charges.

We note that despite an earlier ruling from the higher judiciary holding the criminal charges against India's greatest living painter thoroughly unfounded, the campaign of victimization against him for artistic productions dating back a quarter century or more, has shown no signs of abating. This has compelled the 92-year-old artist to seek refuge in a distant country, rather than risk the possibility of arrest on the orders of some over-zealous police official.

We note that the police in Mumbai went so far, on a recent occasion, as to order the sealing of residential premises owned by Husain, for failure to respond to judicial summons in one such case. The possibility that an old and distinguished artist could be subject to the ignominy of summary arrest and prolonged detention was very real.

Despite the ruling of the Delhi High Court, we observe with concern that, because of procedural complications, four cases are still pending against the artist in the Sessions Court

at Patiala House in Delhi, on virtually identical charges. We call upon the judicial authorities concerned to recognize the value of the precedent set by the Delhi High Court ruling, and to deal with all pending complaints against Husain accordingly. We call upon the Union Home Ministry to heed the principles laid down in the Delhi High Court ruling – that differences in perspective cannot be the basis of criminal complaints – and to intervene accordingly in the pending cases.

Having been active in the defence of Husain for many years, through public meetings, petitions, symposia and appeals to constitutional authorities like the President and the Home Minister, we feel our stand that Husain's art is a part of a long-standing, evolving tradition of Indian iconography has been vindicated.

20 August 2008

M.F. Husain kept out of India Art Summit show

We are surprised and unhappy at the decision of the organizers of the first India Art Summit to exclude the works of M.F. Husain from the displays of all the participating galleries from across India. The Art Summit and three-day art fair, which open at the Trade Fair venue in Delhi on the 22nd, is also supported by the Ministry of Culture.

While the organizers may have made this decision out of fear of attacks or protests against the work of Husain, by giving in to such threats by extremist political groups they are playing into the hands of these forces. It is the duty of the state and the police to protect our institutions and citizens against threats of violence, and surely the Trade Fair authorities and the Delhi police are capable of confronting any such threat. An earlier exhibit by Husain continued at the India International Centre last December under just such assurances by the Delhi police.

For the artists' community, Husain is the reigning father-figure, commanding enormous respect. In fact, Husain has been single-handedly responsible for putting Indian art on the world map and equally responsible for creating the world market boom in Indian art, without which such a Summit and fair would not be taking place in Delhi at this moment. It is therefore deeply ironical that his work is being excluded by dictat.

We request the organizers to rethink this decision. In solidarity with Husain, Sahmat will show images of his work on all three days of the Summit outside its office at 8 Vithalbhair

Patel House, Rafi Marg. We invite all the citizens of Delhi and all artists to come and view his work at Sahmat.

Signed, among others, by:

Ram Rahman, M.K. Raina, Madangopal Singh, Sohail Hashmi, Parthiv Shah, Vivan Sundaram, Indira Chandrasekhar, Geeta Kapur, K. Bikram Singh

25 August 2008

Attack on Sahmat exhibition

Sahmat had organized an exhibition of reproductions of eminent artist M.F. Husain's works on 22, 23 and 24 August 2008, to coincide with the three-day Art Fair at the India Art Summit, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, at which galleries had been advised not to show the artist's work. The exhibition had on display, apart from reproductions of Husain's paintings, eight photographs of Husain by Parthiv Shah, two photographs of Husain painting a hoarding by Madan Mahatta, and three photographs from Husain's *Mughal-e-Azam* series from the Village Art Gallery, Delhi.

On Sunday, 24 August, at around 3.30 pm, the exhibition, which was being held in a *shamiana* outside the Sahmat office, was attacked and vandalised by 8 to 10 miscreants. The television channel ETV, whose crew was present, has recorded the entire episode. The vandals ran away from the scene after destroying the framed photographs and prints, a television set and DVD player (on which Husain's films were being screened), and furniture. The artist Arpana Caur, and Anil Chandra and Santosh Sharma, Sahmat members, were witnesses to the episode.

In protest against the attack on Sahmat and the vandalism, the exhibition has been extended, in 'as-is' vandalised condition, for a day – till the evening of 25 August.

A meeting to protest against this cowardly attack, and the attempt on the part of rightwing forces to impose a narrow, majoritarian view of our culture, was held on Monday, 25 August, at 11 am, outside the Sahmat office at 8 Vithalbhair Patel House, Rafi Marg.

Those present at the protest meeting, and those who sent messages of solidarity, include:

Abhijeet Tamhane, Aditi Magaldas, Aditi Raina, Ajay Srivastava, Akila Jayaraman, Albeena Shakil, Ali Abbas Yakutpura, Aman Farooqi, Amar Farooqi, Anant Raina, Anil Chandra, Anjali Raina, Anup Karar, Arpana Caur, Asad Zaidi, Ashalata, Ashok Kumari, Ashok Rao, Aziz Ahmed Khan, Badri Raina, Bani Joshi, Brinda Karat, C.P. Chandrasekhar, Chanchal Chauhan, Dadi Pudumjee, Danish Ali, Dayanand Singh, Dhires, Faizan Farooqi, Gautam Navlakha, Geeta Kapur, Geetanjali Shree, Hannan Mollah, Inder Salim, Indira Chandrasekhar, Irfan Habib, Jatin Das, Jauhar Kanungo, Javed Malick, Javed Naqvi, Jayati Ghosh, K. Bikram Singh, Kalpana Sahni, Kamakumar Hirawat, Kanishka Prasad, Kanti Mohan, Kumi Chandra, Lima Kanungo, M.K. Raina, M.M.P. Singh, Madangopal Singh, Madhu Prasad, Maimoona Mollah, Manjira Datta, Martand Khosla, Mithilesh Srivastav, N.D. Jayaprakash, N.K. Sharma, N.S. Arjun, Nalini Taneja, Nandita Narayan, Nandita Rao, Naslima Shahana, Neeraj Malick, Nilotpal Basu, Nina Rao, P. Madhu, P.K. Shukla, Parth Tiwari, Parthiv Shah, Prabhat Patnaik, Preeti Bawa, Pushpamala N., Qausar Hashmi, Radhika Menon, Rahul Verma, Raj Chauhan, Rajendra Prasad, Rajendra Usapkar, Rajinder Arora, Rajinder Sharma, Rajiv Jha, Rajni B. Arora, Ram Nivas Tyagi, Ram Rahman, Riyaz Ahmed Bhat, Romi Khosla, S. Kalidas, S.M. Mishra, Saeed Akhtar Mirza, Sahba Farooqi, Sahba Husain, Sahiram, Samar S. Jodha, Sania Hashmi, Santosh Sharma, Sashi Kumar, Shabi Ahmad, Shakeel Ahmed, Shamim Farooqi, Shamshad, Shamsul Islam, Shankar Chandra, Shanta Chopra, Sheena Bhalla, Shireen Moosvi, Shruti Singhi, Shubha Mudgal, Sitaram Yechury, Sohail Hashmi, Sravan Kumar, Subhashini Ali, Sudha Sundararaman, Sudhir Chandra, Sudhir Suman, Sukumar Muraleedharan, Suneet Chopra, T.S. Johar, Utsa Patnaik, Uzma Mollah, V. Srinivasa Rao, Vandana Sharma, Veer Munshi, Vidya Shah, Vijay S. Jodha, Vijender Sharma, Vivan Sundaram

12 September 2008

Competitive ethnic chauvinism in Mumbai

We are alarmed at the damage to cultural freedom and the larger repercussions – in terms of intolerance and lawlessness – arising from the unseemly competition between different elements of the Thackeray clan for the mantle of Mumbai's most extreme exponent of ethnic and linguistic chauvinism.

The traditions of cultural creativity and freedom that Mumbai is rightly proud of, are gravely threatened in this cynical game of competitive extremism.

We condemn the witch-hunt and the crass campaign of social ostracism launched by Raj Thackeray and his party, the Maharashtra Navanirman Sena, against the actor Amitabh Bachchan for statements made by his wife, Jaya Bachchan. If mob fury can be unleashed (though admittedly only symbolically) against a celebrity couple just because one of them insists on speaking in the language of the state she represents in politics, one wonders what fate Raj Thackeray and his followers have reserved for the millions of migrants from the Hindi-speaking area who contribute richly to the daily life of India's greatest metropolis.

We appreciate the fact that Raj Thackeray has since seen the wisdom of toning down his rhetoric and scaling back his campaign. But this, we fear, has less to do with doing what is right and reasonable, than with doing what is opportune.

That the game of ethnic chauvinism, once launched with such virulence, admits little scope for moderation, is borne out by the manner in which the Shiv Sena founder Bal

Thackeray – whose baneful though politically profitable legacy is what the whole fight today seems to be about – has chosen to enter the fray.

Asserting his presumptive rule that anybody who comes to Mumbai for a career should leave behind all other loyalties and partake of what he deems the unique and indivisible Marathi culture of the city, the elder Thackeray recently castigated the Hindi film star Shahrukh Khan, for referring to his antecedents in Delhi.

Celebrities may, by virtue of their status, enjoy immunity from these periodic outbursts of hate and intolerance, but the ensuing climate embodies a very real threat to the millions of Mumbaikars who, despite their cultural differences, contribute to the vitality of India's greatest metropolis.

We deplore the reaction of several members of Mumbai's film community to the statement by actor Shabana Azmi that Muslims suffer from a degree of institutional discrimination in India. Surely, there is little in what she said that would seem exceptionable to people in an industry that believes in chronicling life in this vast country in all its complexities.

That extremism is not the exclusive preserve of any one party is proven by the recent edict by a member of the Muslim clergy against actor Salman Khan, for his participation in the Ganesh Chaturthi festivities.

We call upon the authorities and, in particular, civil society in Mumbai, to call an immediate halt to this cynical game. Stoking imagined grievances may be a convenient way for politicians and celebrities to keep themselves in the media spotlight, but the climate of intolerance this creates will have severe consequences for those without the armour of wealth and status, who, alas, all too often lack the protection of the law too.

16 September 2008

Violence against Christians in Orissa and Karnataka, and BJP demand for a new law on terrorism

With the shock and trauma of the serial bombings in Delhi yet to wear off, we are distressed to see the manner in which elements of the saffron brigade are seeking to make political capital out of a national tragedy by pushing for a special law on terrorism. We are struck by the irony that the saffron brigade is concurrently orchestrating a mass campaign of bigotry and lawlessness that began in Orissa and has now spread to Karnataka and even threatens hitherto tolerant and peaceful Kerala.

We are convinced that the people and the state authorities in Kerala will swiftly contain the threat to the peace in their state. But with the mob frenzy in Orissa and Karnataka being abetted by conniving state governments, we fear that the turmoil and suffering inflicted on the Christian communities may yet escalate.

We are convinced that the approach to terrorism that the Hindutva parties have been advocating is wrong-headed and susceptible to gross abuses. At the same time, we believe that the lawlessness the Hindutva formations foment and the impunity they enjoy in their campaign of violence against religious minorities creates fertile breeding ground for terrorism. We condemn the terrorism of the mob just as strongly as we condemn the terrorism of the bomb.

Before making the case for a new law on terrorism, the BJP and its friends need to learn respect for the law as it now stands. Since the governments in Orissa and Karnataka have

shown that they are on the side of lawlessness, we urge civil society in these states to stand firm against the outbreak of religious bigotry and, where necessary, impart the necessary lessons to the Hindutva forces in honouring the law of the land.

25 September 2008

Appeal to defend Jamia's secular character

We applaud the Vice Chancellor of the Jamia Millia Islamia, Professor Mushirul Hasan, and the entire academic community of the university, for their calmness and courage in what is proving to be a testing and traumatic time.

We fully endorse the decision by the Vice Chancellor, to provide the university students who have been swept up in the terrorism dragnet, with a competent legal defence. This decision has to be recognized as a sign of abiding commitment to the basic rule of natural justice: that a person is innocent until proven guilty.

We appeal to all democratic and secular individuals and organizations to support all the steps of the University administration and the faculty to maintain and strengthen the secular character of this premier institution.

We condemn the vituperative attacks that have been launched against Professor Mushirul Hasan by spokesmen of the BJP and its affiliates.

Signed, among others, by:

Ram Rahman, M.K. Raina, Vivan Sundaram, Indira Chandrasekhar, Utsa Patnaik, Madangopal Singh, Irfan Habib, Badri Raina, Suvira Jaiswal, Atlury Murali, C.P. Chandrasekhar, Madhu Prasad, Rajen Prasad, R.S. Sharma, Biswamoy Pati, V.N. Jha, D.N. Jha, Arjun Dev, Anil Chandra, Shireen Moosvi, Jayati Ghosh, Lata Singh, Saeed Mirza, Sohail Hashmi, Jabri Mal Parekh, Chanchal Chauhan, M.M.P. Singh, Lima Kanungo, R.L. Shukla, Mihir Bhattacharya, H.C. Satyarathi, Ramakrishna Chatterjee, V. Ramakrishna, Girish Mishra, Manmohan, Parthiv Shah, Prabhat Patnaik, S. Kalidas, Veer Munshi, Rajan Gurukkal, Iqtidar Alam, N. Rajendran

7 November 2008

ABVP vandalism and violence at Delhi University

Sahmat strongly condemns the vandalism of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) at Delhi University's Arts Faculty on 6th November 2008, when a seminar on 'Communalism, Fascism and Democracy: Rhetoric and Reality' was underway. As is their wont, the activists of the ABVP indulged in a violent and most uncivilised protest. If allowed to go unchecked, such protests will undermine democratic functioning in a premier educational institution.

Debate, disagreement and protest are an integral part of a democratic society. But the violence is totally unacceptable. The Delhi University authorities, the police and the administration should ensure exemplary punishment to the miscreants so that such incidents do not recur.

22 November 2008

Anti-Husain campaign linked to Malegaon blast

We would like to bring to your attention the reports in the Delhi press today, that a doctor is being investigated for possible connections with the alleged conspirators in the Malegaon blast cases in Maharashtra. The doctor, Ram Pratap Singh, is the same man who had filed cases against painter M.F. Husain in the Delhi courts in 2006. In the report in the *Indian Express*, he is mentioned as attending meetings with B.L. Sharma 'Prem'. 'Prem' is the same man brought by Raghu Vyas to attack the Academy of Fine Arts in Delhi, run by eminent painter Arpana Caur, ten years ago (on 23 February 1998). Ajeet Caur was injured in that melee and painter Jatin Das was also attacked.

We at Sahmat have been trying to alert the general public to the fact that the campaign against Husain is being run at a very high level in the Hindutva groups, has an extremely serious dimension and is well-coordinated. The website of the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti, www.hindujagruti.org, which has led the vicious campaign against Husain, and also spread completely distorted interpretations and titles of his work, is run by the Sanatan Sanstha, also alleged to have links with the Nanded blasts. We urge the investigative authorities to investigate these websites which are spreading hate speech against artists, other individuals and communities.

We feel this is an extremely alarming development and should be a wake-up call for us to be more much more vigilant to threats from extremist groups.

26 November 2008

Letter to Minister of Information and Broadcasting regarding screening of Husain's film at International Film Festival 2008 being cancelled

Dear Minister,

We are deeply shocked at the decision to cancel the screening of a documentary made by the eminent Indian painter M.F. Husain, after it had been scheduled for November 25 at the ongoing International Film Festival of India in Goa. We are also profoundly alarmed at the wider implications of this act of blatant censorship imposed on artistic production.

You are surely aware of the background to this decision by the Directorate of Film Festivals. On November 22, the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti (HJS) and an affiliated body that calls itself the Sanatan Sanstha, petitioned the Chief Minister of Goa and the Director of the Film Festival, urging that the screening be cancelled since it involved a person who had allegedly caused offence to the 'religious and national sentiments of crores of Hindus and Indians [sic]'.

Almost at the same time, activists of the same two bodies carried out a series of protests in the city of Mumbai, in the vicinity of the Films Division office. As the website of the HJS puts it, they made a 'representation with a warning' to the Films Division officials, about the plan to screen the Husain documentary.

Then, in the narration on the HJS website, the official at Mumbai had ‘a long discussion with the Chief Officers in the Film Division’, ‘tried to contact the officers in Goa and New Dehli [sic] again and again and finally told the delegation at 3.30 in the evening that the screening of the above mentioned film was cancelled’.

The craven and unprincipled capitulation by the Film Festival organizers has been portrayed by the HJS as ‘one more feather’ in its cap. (See <http://www.hindujagruti.org/news/5830.html>). At the same time, the official response has been to either feign ignorance or pretend that the issue is of little consequence. The Chief Minister of Goa has reportedly said that he had no knowledge of the entire process and the Director of the Film Festival has taken the position that the screening was being ‘deferred’.

Frankly, we are appalled at this abject failure of principle and the thorough abdication of responsibility by officials entrusted with safeguarding the autonomy of cultural and artistic production.

The HJS and its affiliated organization, Sanatan Sanstha, are, as you would know, under investigation by the police and intelligence agencies for their possible complicity in a number of terrorist actions in the country. Indeed, the option of declaring them ‘unlawful’ organizations is reportedly under active consideration.

You would also be aware that the HJS has for years been the central switch-board for a number of cases against M.F. Husain, lodged on the grounds of ‘obscenity’, ‘causing ill-will on grounds of religion’ and ‘incitement’. This entire range of charges was considered by the Delhi High Court and, in a historic verdict of May 8, held to be completely without substance. The Delhi High Court finding was upheld by the Supreme Court. However, the HJS and its associates have managed to effectively mobilize a sufficient number of complainants scattered all over the country, and the Supreme

Court is yet to decide on a petition requesting that all cases be brought within its jurisdiction.

You would appreciate, then, that the continuing harassment of one of India's greatest living artists is a consequence of technical procedures involved in the administration of justice, and, most importantly, the failure of administrative authorities to stand up to the coercive strategies of bodies that are currently under investigation for terrorism offences.

We urge you to reflect upon the consequences that this would have, for the faith that the common man places in the system of administration he lives under. We urge you, moreover, to reflect upon the consequences for artistic production in this country. Husain's documentary was produced in 1967 and has been widely recognized and awarded by the most discerning judges. It is a sad day for creative activity everywhere when work of such calibre is deprived of an audience because of the power of the mob.

In the interests of cultural freedom, we urge you to rescind the ban on Husain and allow his documentary to be screened at the ongoing Film Festival.

Yours,
Vivan Sundaram, Ram Rahman

29 November 2008

On the loss of Sabina Sehgal in terrorist attack in Mumbai

The Sahmat family is deeply shocked and saddened by the news of the passing of Sabina Sehgal Saikia in the horrible attack on the Taj Hotel in Mumbai. While the scale of the loss of lives and injuries is numbing, Sabina's loss is more personal for the arts community, of which she was such a vibrant member.

A steadfast supporter of Sahmat, Sabina was a driving force and inspiration behind the Artists Against Communalism events in Delhi in 1991 and in Shivaji Park in Mumbai in 1992. She travelled with us to the cities where the Anhad Garje – Sahmat's Sufi-Bhakti programme was held in the immediate aftermath of the Babri Masjid Demolition in January – March 1993. Muktnaad in Ayodhya in 1993 which was held under very difficult circumstances, was another event where some of the greatest classical musicians and dancers of India performed in defence of our secular traditions, almost all under Sabina's initiative. None could refuse Sabina, she was such a beloved enthusiast of all these artists.

Sabina was the founder secretary of SpicMacay and learnt classical music with Ustads Zahiruddin Dagar and Faiyazuddin Dagar. As a journalist with the *Times of India*, Sabina was closely involved with the arts initiatives of the newspaper too. Later, her interest in food led her to become a leading writer on food and cuisine, and she only recently released her cookbook of rice recipes from all over India.

We express our deepest condolences to her family. She will be sorely missed, but the memory of her lively personality will live in our hearts.

Sahmat Publications

1989–2008

Books – Hindi

Ped (children's book), poem by Safdar Hashmi, illustrated by Mickey Patel, 1989 (Bengali and Malayalam, 1994), Rs 50

Gadbad Ghotala (children's book), poem by Safdar Hashmi, illustrated by B.V. Suresh, 1989 (Bengali and Malayalam, 1994), Rs 50

Holi (children's book), poem by Safdar Hashmi, illustrated by Mohandas N.N., 1989, Rs 50

Baag ki Sair (children's book), poem by Safdar Hashmi, illustrated by Vasudevan Akkitham, 1989, Rs 50

Bansuriwala (children's book), poem by Safdar Hashmi, illustrated by Arpita Singh, 1989, Rs 50

Natak ki Duniya (children's plays), by Safdar Hashmi, 1989, Rs 70

Duniya Sabki (children's poems), by Safdar Hashmi, 1989, Rs 50

Moteram ka Satyagrah (play), 1989, Rs 50

Sare Mausam Acchhey (children's book), poem by Safdar Hashmi, illustrated by Nilima Sheikh, 1990, Rs 50

Kitaben (children's book), poem by Safdar Hashmi, illustrated by Surendran Nair, 1990, Rs 50

Chowk Chowk Par Gali Gali Mein - I (street plays), 1990, Rs 60

Chowk Chowk Par Gali Gali Mein - II (street plays), 1990, Rs 60

Yeh Samay 1: Sampradayikta aur Sanskriti ke Sawal, 1993, Rs 20

Yeh Aisa Samay Hai (A collection of poems), 1994, Rs 150

- Apni Zabaan* (A collection of poems), 1994, Rs 30
- Aaj ka Path* (A collection of story), 1994, Rs 150
- Yeh Samay 2: Arya: Mithak aur Yatharth*, by Romila Thapar, 1995, Rs 20
- Yeh Samay 3: Sanskriti, Chetana, Vichardhara*, by K.N. Panikkar, 1995, Rs 20
- Yeh Samay 4: Adhunik Bharat ka Uday*, by Ravinder Kumar, 1995, Rs 20
- Yeh Samay 5: Hamare Daur mein Phasiwad*, by Aijaz Ahmad, 1995, Rs 20
- Yeh Samay 6: Bharatiya Arthik Vikas ke Ayam*, by Prabhat Patnaik and C.P. Chandrasekhar, 1995, Rs 20
- Panchwa Chirag* (story of Safdar Hashmi as told by his mother), by Q.A. Hashmi, 1995, Rs 60
- Bapu ka Aitihāsik Mukadma* (children's book), written by Mulk Raj Anand, illustrated by Shamsad, 1995 (Bengali, 1995), Rs 50
- Bapu* (children's book), written by Umashankar Joshi, illustrated by Madhvi Parekh, 1995 (Bengali, 1995), Rs 50
- Champa* (children's book), written and illustrated by Haku Shah, 1995 (Bengali, Gujarati, 1995), Rs 50
- Bharatiya Itihas mein Madhya Kal*, 1999, Rs 50
- Muktanaad* (monthly journal), 1999–2004, Rs 30/issue
- Sampradayik Rajniti*, by Ram Puniyani, 2001, Rs 60
- Yeh Samay 7: Sindhu Sabhyata ke Aryakaran ki Koshish*, 2001, Rs 20
- Yeh Samay 8: Vivek par Hamla*, 2002, Rs 20
- Yeh Samay 9: Itihas ka Punarlekhan aur Sangh Parivar*, 2002, Rs 20
- Yeh Samay 10: Vo Premchand se Darte Hain*, 2002, Rs 30

Das Baras, I and II (A collection of poems, marking the 10th anniversary of the Babri Masjid demolition), 2002, Rs 240

Gandhi, Ek Punarvichar, 2004, Rs 50

Dhundhle Padchinh (on the Dandi March), by Madhukar Upadhyaya, 2005, Rs 150

Idgah, story by Premchand, illustrated by Jehangir Jani, 2005, Rs 60

Munshi Premchand, ed. Rajendra Sharma, 2005, Rs 60

Muktanaad (bi-annual journal), 2005 onwards, yearly subscription: Rs 80

Yeh Samay 11: Parampara, Alochana aur Hindi Navjagran, 2006, Rs 30

Yeh Samay 12: Gujarat: Bhoolne ke Virudh, 2006, Rs 30

Yeh Samay 13: Hamare Daur ka Samrajyavad, by Aijaz Ahmad, 2006, Rs 30

Akbar, ed. Rajendra Sharma, 2007, Rs 60

Golwalkar Ya Bhagat Singh, ed. Rajendra Sharma, 2007, Rs 60

Akbar, ed. Rajendra Sharma, 2007, Rs 60

1857: Ajab Saal Tha Vo Ajab Saal Tha Vo, ed. Rajendra Sharma, 2007, Rs 60

Sitara Gir Padega (on the 1857 Revolt), written by Madhukar Upadhyaya, illustrated by Sanjay Sharma, 2007, Rs 150

Bhookh, ed. Rajendra Sharma, 2008, Rs 60

Bahas, ed. Rajendra Sharma, 2008, Rs 100

Soorat Badalni Chahiye (poems), 2008, Rs 40

Phootegi Phir Bhor (poems), 2008, Rs 25

Books – English

Red Flower (children's book), poem by Safdar Hashmi, illustrated by Mona Rai, 1989, Rs 50

Right to Perform (essays on theatre and culture), by Safdar Hashmi, 1989, Rs 150

Safdar (catalogue of protest), 1989, Rs 10

Artists Alert (exhibition catalogue), 1989, Rs 20

Images and Words (exhibition catalogue), 1992, Rs 25

Muktnaad/Hum Sab Ayodhya (on the 'Ram Katha' panel controversy), 1993, Rs 75

Punchline (cartoons against communalism), 1994, Rs 50

Sahmat as Represented in the Press, 1991–1994, 1994, Rs 105

Addressing Gandhi, 1995, Rs 900

Resources against Communalism and Religious Fundamentalism, 1996, Rs 25

Red the Earth, 1997, Rs 20 (2007, Rs. 50)

Gift for India (exhibition catalogue), 1997, Rs 500

Secularism Alert, 1999, Rs 10

Indian People in the Struggle for Freedom, 1999, Rs 70

Investigative Journalism or Slander?: Do You Have More Questions, Mr. Shourie?, 2000, Rs 10

A Modest Proposal and Other Rhymes for the Times (poems), by Badri Raina, 2000, Rs 35

The Saffron Agenda in Education: An Expose, 2001, Rs 40

Against Communalisation of Education, 2001, Rs 75

Communal Politics: A Primer, by Ram Puniyani, 2001, Rs 120

Drawing the Battle Lines, 2002, Rs 150

- Saffronised and Substandard* (a critique of the new NCERT textbooks), 2002, Rs 75
- The Assault on History*, 2002, Rs 60
- Communalism, Civil Society and the State*, 2002, Rs 120
- The Republic Besmirched: 6 December 1992*, 2002, Rs 60
- Plagiarised and Communalised*, 2003, Rs 80
- Making of India* (exhibition catalogue), 2004, Rs 50
- Against Communalisation of Archaeology*, 2004, Rs 20
- Barbarians at the Gate*, 2004, Rs 20
- Gandhi Reconsidered: Towards a Secular and Modern India*, 2004, Rs 80
- The Savarkar Controversy*, 2004, Rs 50
- Economic Agenda*, 2004, Rs 50
- The Republic of Hunger*, 2004, Rs 20
- Debating Education*, 2005, Rs 30
- Debating Education II: Commercialisation of Education*, 2005, Rs 30
- Debating Education III: The Reservation Issue*, 2006, Rs 30
- Iconography Now*, 2006, Rs 150
- Red the Earth*, 2006, Rs 50
- Harassing Husain*, 2007, Rs 20
- Justice Now*, 2007, Rs 60
- M.F. Husain ... Petitioner*, 2008, Rs 100
- 20 Years of Sahmat*, 2008, Rs 250

Books – Urdu

Firqaparasti aur Tehzeeb ke Sawal, 1993, Rs 10

Ped (children's book), poem by Safdar Hashmi, illustrated by Mickey Patel, 1994, Rs 50

Gadbad Ghotala (children's book), poem by Safdar Hashmi, illustrated by B.V. Suresh, 1994, Rs 50

Panchwa Chirag (story of Safdar Hashmi as told by his mother), by Q.A. Hashmi, 1995, Rs 150

Audio-cassettes / Video-cassettes / CDs

Safdar (video and CD), 1989, Rs 200

Anhad Garje (audio and video), 1993, Rs 200

Manasbana (audio), 1995, Rs 80

Zikeyaar (audio), 1997, Rs 25

Jung-e-Azadi (CD), 1997, Rs 150

Aaj ke Naam (video), 1997, Rs 150

Anhad Garje (audio CD), 2007, Rs 300

Anhad Garje (VCD), 2008, Rs 500

Cards

Images and Words's (set of 4 cards) 1991, Rs 20

Postcards for Gandhi (set of 100 cards), 1995, Rs 200

Premchand (set of 25 cards), 2005, Rs 125

Artists' cards (set of 50 cards), 2008, Rs 300

Calendars

Artists' Stamps, 1997, Rs 25

Premchand, 2005, Rs 100

Gandhi/Dandi March, 2006, Rs 30

Che Guevara, 2007, Rs 30

1857 Year Planner, Rs 30

Making History Our Own, 2008, Rs 30

Street Theatre Day, 2009, Rs 50

20 Years Sahmat Journal, 2009, Rs 200

Posters

Ham Sab Ayodhya , Jallianwala Bagh, Dastak, Udham Singh, Ten years of SAHMAT, Peace, Bhagat Singh, Manas Bana, Delhi 1857: designed by Ram Rahman

1857 Pledge, Gandhi Death Anniversary (2 posters), Dandi March, Anhad Garje, Safdar (2 posters), Vigilant, Anti-war poster: designed by Parthiv Shah

Anti-war poster: designed by Shamshad

Gandhi (2 posters): designed by Vivan Sundaram

1857, by J. Swaminathan

Premchand: designed by Ishtihaar

10 Years of Sahmat: designed by Rummana Husain

National Street Theatre Day (20 posters): designed by Ram Rahman, Parthiv Shah and Ishtihaar

In Defence of Our Secular Tradition : With works by M.F. Husain, Vivan Sundaram, Manu Parekh, Manjit Bawa, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Akbar Padamsee, Gopi Gajwani, Haku Shah, Shamshad, Micky Patel, Orijit Sen, Arpita Singh, Nalini Malani, Vasudevan Akkitham, Abul Kalam Azad, Surendran Nair, Alex Mathew, N.N. Rimzon, Ajay Kumar