The country is now facing a moment of truth. The communal situation is so ugly as to demand of all well-meaning Indians that they discard all their webs of self-deception and examine with our past and present condition in a mood of humility and self-criticism. We address this appeal to the NIC in the knowledge that its contents may be unpalatable to some, but in trust that the members of this august body, as patriots, will respect the sincerity of our fellow-Indians who wish to raise voices against this cancer which is destroying our country.

Members of the NIC will appreciate that the legitimacy of any government rests upon the faith that common citizens have in its even-handedness. The administration must not merely satisfy itself that the Law is Blind, but, most crucially, be seen to be non-partisan by all well-meaning citizens. If you accept this, then kindly consider the following points very seriously:

1. The Army is today the only organ of state considered genuinely neutral by the population of areas affected by communal violence. For the rest, the police, the paramilitary forces, and for one reason or another, are felt to be biased and prone to corruption and communal motivation. This is highly dangerous, because the Army is not meant to function as a police force; using it as such will destroy its morale, and worse still, will expose it to communalisation. Since it is the shadow of political leaders who have created this problem, or at least allowed it to fester, it is time that they tackled it themselves-socially, politically and morally, rather than run to the Army for help. We would also like to stress the need for an active secularist education programme in the Police, para-military, and Armed Forces.

2. Since senior political leaders and officials are convinced that infiltration across the border has become a serious dimension of the communal situation in the Punjab, it is this rather than the political crisis that must be entrusted to the Army and BSF.

3. Communalism must be understood, first and foremost, not in its Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim variants and manifestations, but in the abstract, as a state of mind and as a method of politics. It is rooted both in the power-hungry delusions and fantasies of certain obscurantist intellectuals, and in their common hatred of democracy. Communists use the most inoffensive and sectarian possible interpretation of their respective religious traditions to mobilise a mass following. You will, we hope, recognise that every religious tradition is capable of both an inoffensive as well as a humanist rendering. But since communalism is not identical with religion but rather an attempt to make political communities out of religious ones, it ends up having much less to do with religion and much more to do with power.

4. During the national movement, neither the Indian National Congress, which was in the forefront of patriotic aspirations, nor any other nationalist groups or parties, could successfully combat communalism. This weakness led to the wresting of state power in a vast part of the country by the communalist Muslim League, which began disintegrating at the first opportunity of democratic expression based on adult-franchise, and to the infiltration into the ranks of the Congress of obscurantist and communal elements of all hues. Why did all this happen, and what have been the consequences of this massive failure in nationalist tradition? Both sympathisers and critics of the Congress must search for serious answers to these questions.

5. Something went wrong long ago with the very concept of Indian nationalism. Sectarian definitions of Indians persisted through the decades, so that today, it appears automatic that while Sikh extremism and Muslim obscurantism are anti-national, Hindu communalism is synonymous with nationalism. Those who talk of Khalistan or Pakistan are traitors, but those who demand Hindu Rashtra are patriots. But Hindu communalism is not the philosophy of all Hindus, and never was, nor is Khalistan or Pakistan the slogan of all Sikhs or all Muslims. Why then, is Hindu communalism allowed to gain currency as a nationalist ideology when in fact it spreads hatred and contempt against millions of Indian citizens? The obscurantists who wish even to speak for all Hindus must realise, once and for all that Hindu Rashtra and Akhand Bharat are mutually exclusive categories; each cuts at the root of the other, and no amount of clever rationalisation can negate this fact. Hindu Rashtra is a prescription for several more partitions of India. Even the Left is not blameless in this regard. Examples of this are numerous, but we wish to point out a few striking instances. Thus, certain Congress leaders, whilst in power in the Punjab used religious and communal sentiment to embarrass the Akalis, (themselves an explicitly communal, though politically moderate current). The case of some horses being touted as the descendants of the steed of Guru Gobind Singh is laughable. But we must not forget that separatist extremism has been, to begin with, a negligible entity and did not receive encouragement from responsible leaders, for their own pragmatic reasons. Years ago, a certain Chief Minister of Maharashtra enacted a ridiculous drama over the question of recovering the fictitious “Sword of Chhatrapati Shivaji” from the British Museum. The Bombay Shiva Sena acquired popularity from righteous indignation to the betrayal of leadership while the MNS has at least made some bones of trying to recover a spiritually significant object. The case of Ram Janmabhumi and the image of Parvati is a lesson of how easy it is to manipulate people by occulating them with emotive symbols and ideas.

6. There is hardly a single political current in the country that has not made covert or overt use of casteist and communal sentiment in the pursuit of power. Even the Left is not blameless in this regard. Examples of this are numerous, but we wish to point out a few striking instances. Thus, certain Congress leaders, whilst in power in the Punjab used religious and communal sentiment to embarrass the Akalis, (themselves an explicitly communal, though politically moderate current). The case of some horses being touted as the descendants of the steed of Guru Gobind Singh is laughable. But we must not forget that separatist extremism has been, to begin with, a negligible entity and did not receive encouragement from responsible leaders, for their own pragmatic reasons. Years ago, a certain Chief Minister of Maharashtra enacted a ridiculous drama over the question of recovering the fictitious “Sword of Chhatrapati Shivaji” from the British Museum. The Bombay Shiva Sena acquired popularity from righteous indignation to the betrayal of leadership while the MNS has at least made some bones of trying to recover a spiritually significant object. The case of Ram Janmabhumi and the image of Parvati is a lesson of how easy it is to manipulate people by occulating them with emotive symbols and ideas.

7. Secular intellectuals who have resisted the tide of communal propaganda have been regularly intimidated and harrassed. Thus, the well known historian Professor Irfan Habib has been the victim of violence at the hands of communal elements in AMU. Professor Ganda Singh, who, years ago, interpreted Guru Teg Bahadur’s martyrdom as the consequence of a revenue dispute rather than a desire to protect Kashmiri Pandits was threatened publicly at a seminar in Chandigarh by scores of armed Nihangs. Professor PV Rane was his job at Marathwada University because he interpreted the reign of Shivaji and his successor Maratha rulers in more rational and less eulogistic manner than the Maratha chauvinists would have liked. Thus, communists decide what kind of history suits them and what doesn’t and room for rational debate and research fades away. Politicians see fit to let this happen.

8. As regards the latest controversy about Muslim personal law, we request the NIC to consider that the new legislation proposed by the Government may be ultra vires the Constitution, because it disables a section of the citizenry by denying them the right of personal protection. Since women are not obliged to appear under Sec. 125, Cr. P.C., we fail to see why they must be forbidden from doing so if they so choose. However, it is also clear that for Hindu communalist organisations to leap into the fray proves not their concern for women, (since they never bother about the legal and social plight of Hindu women),
but rather, their instinctive proclivity to portray Islam as fundamentally barbaric. We advise the Government to treat this as a women’s question rather than a ‘minority’ one, and simultaneously to introduce legislation providing for stringent punishments for the culprits of ‘dowry deaths’, (who happen to be mostly Hindu). In this way we will be able to erode the base of all communists. In no event should the bill on Muslim women be passed without a wide-ranging public debate, which will enable secular and liberal elements to mobilise against it.

9. The NIC should rally all secular forces and demand, of the various religious leaders, to know why any religious traditions should be considered immune from rational, humanistic criticism. Can religious leaders seriously claim, in the name of God, that their own religion is all good and the others all bad? Why do they permit communists to propagate bloodlust and matyrdom as religious ideals? Why do not all religious leaders get together and denounce communal propaganda? Who has encouraged the writing of bloodthirsty slogans on walls in Ayodhya? If one people is so sacred to both Hindus and Muslims, why did they not think of using it as a symbol of love and friendship?

Furthermore, how can the Government allow the judiciary to take political decisions in matters of historical controversy? Since the various leaders are being so self-indulgent, we suggest that the Government take over the Masjid/Mandir and declare it a national monument. Rational individuals could also ask historians to state if any place on earth can seriously be identified as the birthplace of Lord Rama 900,000 years ago, as is being claimed. They might also consider, as a matter of interest, the plight of the Sikhs in Sri Lanka. At Bokh Gaya, the most sacred spot in the world for Buddhists, once stood to the ground in the Brahmanical reaction more than a millennium ago. The molly-coddling of religious leaders must end, and the Government must stand forth as a genuinely secular force.

10. Responsibility for the current crisis in the Punjab must be shared by various different parties as well as religious leaders. The Akalis must ask themselves whether or not they have deliberately used religion as a means of obtaining power, and whether or not there has been any misuse of religious influence and financial power by the SGPC. Politics has an ethical dimension we readily admit, but that religion is the sole source of the ethics is questionable. What barbarities have not been committed in the name of religion?

May we ask the Akalis to consider themselves fit to lead all of us and not merely those of us who are Sikhs? Of the Punjabi Hindus we ask just one question: were you not lying when some of you said that Hindi was your mother-tongue? Turning to the Government, even a scanty reading of the history of Sikh politics over the past 8 years will show that the Central Government misled the powers under the Gurudwaras Act and meddling in SPC affairs in Delhi in order to support a favoured candidate. The Government, too, stands guilty of mixing religion and politics.

11. Coming to the question of the events of November ’84, we trust the NIC needs no reminding that they have had a crucial bearing on the intensification of extremist Sikh communalism. You must also be aware that large numbers of citizens are convinced that the massacres in Delhi, Bokaro, and other places were not spontaneous but instigated and led by identifiable politicians. Moreover, there have been several documented instances of criminal atony on the part of the police and even cases of police abetment of criminal acts. Information about this was gathered by Ved Marwah (now Police Commissioner, Delhi), but was stalled by a stop-order and not made public. We suggest that the NIC gain access to his information. Whatever the truth, we find it appalling that prosecutions for murder, loot and arson are minimal, and that in all probability, the wholesale murder of thousands of innocent citizens will go unpunished. In India it has become a time-honoured tradition that perpetrators of communal outrage and brutalities are, beyond the reach of the law, and is having disastrous effects on our society. Murderers gain confidence, the police becomes cynical and even develops criminal tendencies, honest officers become apathetic, common people develop a deep sense of insecurity, and communal politicians have a field day. What is truly alarming is that even certain high-ranking officials of the administration now need to resort to communal language in order to cover up their negligence/helplessness. To treat the massacres of November 1984 (or, for that matter any other planned massacre such as Bhiwandi 1982), as a non-event, is a blatant dereliction of duty. To justify such dereliction in communal verbiage is nothing short of the grossest anti-national and anti-social behaviour.

We must also express to the NIC our deep concern over the blatantly communal manner in which the Mishra Commission was constituted, and is functioning. Firstly, to investigate merely the allegation of conspiracy, leaves completely unattended the far more grievous problem of identiifying and punishing the guilty. Secondly, to agree to even a _perfunctory_ judicial procedure as part of an agreement with the Akali Dal is a breathtakingly communal step. Do not all citizens of Delhi have rights under the Constitution of India? Just because a resident of Delhi happens to wear a turban do his rights become the property of the Akali Dal?

Does this not strengthen communal, political claims and separatist sentiments? Third, the Mishra Commission has, while excluding from its deliberations the very organisations

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**SRI LANKA:**

**Political Solution Urged**

Two groups of prominent citizens, one representing India and the other Sri Lanka, expressed on Wednesday, the view that solutions to the ethnic problem in Sri Lanka would have to be found politically and within the framework of a unified Sri Lanka. The messengers between the two groups at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in Bangalore exchanged views on how both the participants could assist in the effort to restore peace in Sri Lanka and move forward to a just and equitable solution of the strife problem.

The Indian group consisted of Dr. R. R. Diwakar, Chairman, Gandhi Peace Foundation, C. Subramaniam, former Union Minister P. S. Kailasam, former Supreme Court Judge, Thomas Abraham, former Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka; Rajmohan Gandhi, Resident Editor, Indian Express; N. K. Ramachandran, Executive Secretary, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay and S. V. Venkataraman, former member of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bangalore.

The group from Sri Lanka comprised Godfrey Gunatilleke, Director, Marga Institute; Charles Abeysekera, President for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality; Sirisena Gunasekara, formerly of the Ceylon Civil Service; A. M. S. Sarabdeen, formerly of the Ceylon Civil Service; Mervyn de Silva, Editor, Lanka Guardian; M. A. M. Hussain former Member of the Sri Lanka Judiciary and P. Devara, Director, Congress Labour Bureau. The Sri Lanka group expressed their support for a negotiated solution.

The meeting was unanimous in the agreement that a military solution was neither feasible nor desirable, but that the problem should be solved politically. The first step to such a solution would be a cessation of violence by both sides and the restoration of mutual confidence so as to enable the resumption of negotiations.

The members noted that the Government of Sri Lanka had agreed to the creation of provincial councils. The devolution of power to the provincial councils to the maximum possible was vital if satisfactory progress was to be made towards a peaceful solution, felt the members. It was also essential for the democratic Government to devise ways to enable all sections of the community to participate effectively in the political and national life.

Speaking to newsmen after the meeting, C. Subramaniam said that it was the intention of the groups to persuade both the Sri Lankan and Indian Governments to find an early solution. Strengthening public opinion was essential to the success of the mission. The mission felt the Sri Lankans. Chairura Abeysekara noted that the larger portion of the population in Sri Lanka wished to have a peaceful solution within the framework of a united Sri Lanka. —Bangalore Staff Reporter of The Hindu

(April 18, 1986)
which first raised the question of culpability in the ‘riots’, (that is the PUCL and the PUDR), has chosen to allow a lawyer representing the Arya Samaj to participate, along with 3 totally fictitious organisations whose aim seems to be nothing but the production of bogu evidence purporting to show the ‘importance’ and nature of the events, and the intimidation of witnesses. Finally, the hon’ble judge has seen fit to function in camera. If massacres can be committed in broad daylight, why should legal proceedings be acted out in secret? We express our deep sense of shame and indignation at these features of the judicial inquiry. We feel that its functioning is destroying the basis of state legitimacy (viz., faith in its even-handedness) by broadcasting the message that victims of communal outrages have neither constitutional nor even human rights in India.

It is thus fanning the flames of communalism in the Punjab and elsewhere. If a section of Indian citizens feel that they are deprived of justice under their own Constitution merely because they happen to be Sikhs, then the judicial officers responsible for provoking such sentiments must hang their heads in shame. This farce must end at once and either, the Government Institute a new commission or else Justice Mishra be instructed to alter his shamelessly communal and partisan behaviour, which is a terrible slur on the great and dignified traditions of the Indian judiciary.

13. A society whose very intelligentsia — teachers, lawyers, judges, journalists, politicians, administrative personnel, etc., can become infected with communal reflexes and can speculate upon the phenomenon of retaliatory murder as a solution to communal crises, is doomed. We write this in the hope that there are still among us persons who see themselves as Indians, first and foremost, persons who look upon all of our cultural and philosophical traditions with an appreciative, yet critical and rational outlook. The pall of self-righteousness must lift and genuine self-criticism begin. To forget the roots of inhumanity in our own souls and to constantly portray the ‘Other’ as the incarnation of all evil has been a habit with the Indian Intelligentsia. (of all communities) for the better part of this century. If we cannot even stop deceiving ourselves about our (thoroughly fictitious) chaste consciences, then very soon we will have no country left to talk about.

14. We suggest that the NIC become an active body, working regularly on an emergency basis to recommend policy to the Government. Perhaps it could be extended and its powers enhanced. The communal question must be tackled on a war footing. The NIC should ask all patriotic Indians to join hands in a gigantic endeavour to stem the rot. Here are some steps for immediate consideration:
(a) The NIC issue an appeal to all secular, democratic and socialist parties, groups, and individuals to render full support to the Punjab Government to combat terrorism — administratively as well as politically and morally. Specific means of rendering such support to be worked out.
(b) All political parties be asked to refrain from any type of activity which might exacerbate the situation. The government to act swiftly to ban all communal propaganda, and not make the mistake of treating Hindu communalism as a variant of nationalism. Legal proceedings begun against communists, in case they are found inciting hatred and violence amongst citizens. Mass media be used to educate the public that all types of communalism are anti-national.

(c) The Government take immediate steps to arrest and curtail the activities of various criminal elements known to have participated in communal outrages. Unless curbed, these elements will utilise the first available opportunity to recreate the scenes of November ’84, which will be the death-knell of the country’s unity. We cannot emphasise this enough.
(d) Immediate steps be taken to uphold the sanctity of judicial proceedings and the Mishra Commission be told to halt the whitewashing of criminal deeds. The Delhi police be revamped (as per the information gathered by Ved Marwah) and asked to proceed seriously against the criminals responsible for the events of November ’84.

Firmness of political will is crucial today to save the country from disintegration. This will must be grounded on genuine secular credentials. The Constitution declares India a secular, democratic Republic. The communal spectacle today makes this a hollow declaration. If the National Integration Council and the Government of India decide to struggle for these ideals in good faith, they will deserve the everlasting gratitude of the Indian people.

(Drafted by the Sampradayikta Virodhi Andolan)

We have written and signed this statement solely as Indian citizens

Govindi Joshi
Radhika Chopra
Dilip Simeon
B.N. Ray
Salim Kidwai
Bhagwan Josh
Saranjan Sinha
Ujjwal Kumar Singh
Jishnu Shankar
Manjula Singh
Shailendra Prasad Thakur
Indu Shekhar
N.B. In response to comments from some friends we wish to clarify that our main objection to the Mishra Commission is that its proceedings are “in camera”, but that they are in bad faith.

S.V.A.

COMMUNICATION

New Version
to
Old Hat

A s somebody who has strayed into the profession of liaising with the Central Government on matters pertaining to licensing, it has been very rewarding to read articles by H.K. Paranjape and R.C. Dutt, both in Mainstream (April 5 and 12, 1986). They have presented, very lucidly, the rationale behind Industrial Licensing procedures adopted by free India.

Not many people involved with Licensing procedures, at the form-filling end, care about the WHY’s of it. And why should they? Each time there is shift in policy, which is directly correlated to a shift in political thinking and will, we have a plethora of notifications following the Policy Statement, where our bureaucrats have a ball with words.

We are a verbose nation. No group of educated Indians ever indulges in a “civilised conversation” as understood by the English people. We are all demagogues who love monologues. If ever an Indian has a death wish it is to drown in words. I suspect this is why a few of our ancient rishis propagated the Maun Vruth — Vow of Silence. Only then did we listen to anything, including them.

What I would like to submit before I drown, is that we have excellent frameworks for planning development. It is all there in the Policy and Plan documents since 1947. Current commentaries on why we must be different or be status quoist are mere quibbling. When you have a good thing you implement it or just