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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The Demolition of Babri Masjid and The Post-modernist Challenge to History: A Lacanian Answer

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| ABSTRACT

On the fateful day of December 6, 1992, a mob of Hindu nationalists demolished the Babri Masjid, leading to riots and violence against Muslims all over India. This event culminated after rigorous propaganda by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and R.S.S (both fascist organization). The movement gathered so much heat that India was entirely encompassed by the myth of Rama. The main reason behind this movement was to reclaim the site of Babri Masjid as the birthplace of Rama. In this article, without referring to the legitimacy of their claim, I have tried to read this movement against the background of the advent of postmodernism and its challenge to History. In this article, I tried to do this through Lacanian psychoanalysis. Here, I have used Lacanian real in order to understand the postmodern condition. I have taken the postmodern condition here as reaching the limit of phallogocentric language. For me, the postmodern condition is a crisis of the phallic signifier. From this perspective, I have encountered the absence of metanarratives. I wanted to show that even if the basic facts of History are obliterated through the advent of post-truth and conspiracy theories, there is still reason for History to be alive; still, there is reason for us to be optimistic about if we take the lessons of psychoanalysis seriously. I wanted to show here how present Historians are trying to battle this challenge by referring to crude positivistic empiricism as fundamentally useless, and by accepting the narrative nature of History, we can transform History into a radical discipline and open its windows to the various theoretical innovations that are taking in other disciplines.

| KEYWORDS

Postmodernist Challenge, Hindutva, Babri Masjid Demolition, Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Post-truth

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### 1. Introduction

The demolition of Babri Masjid created a revolution in a very perverted sense. A revolution was in human regression, an overturning of whatever still counted as good in humanity. But it also created a revolution in Indian Historiography, how we study History, and even how History studies us. Mostly, we are aware of the post-modernist challenge to history. We treat it as a menace and then fall back upon our 'instinct' to 'do History'. Thinking about History is an idle pastime; we cannot afford that. But Babri Masjid created fear among Historians; they shuddered in fear and kept close to them the empirical 'facts', 'the evidences.' It was a reaction. In this article, I will study this reaction. Keith Jenkins, though fighting a forceful battle for the post-modernists, had a difficult time with the 'facts.' Though he said that facts must conform to the discourse, he renamed them with 'historical traces' or 'traces of the past.' (Jenkins, 2003). These traces form the precise building blocks of history. Precisely the proven facts, the chronology, not the serious critical questions. For example, Buddha existed, Akbar existed, Gandhi existed, and there

were years of important events. But what happens if these facts are obliterated? What happens if History becomes a part of the economy of the Simulacra? So, the stakes get higher. The historians who are now vilified understood the implications. They understood if they could not save the simple facts, there would not be any History; everything would become mythology, where Goliath would gobble down every unwarranted fact, every unpleasant fact, and David would be too weak, too weak to raise a single finger. But they misunderstood this problem; they misrecognized the stakes. The knot that they tried to hide constitutes the very heart of History. Let us now move to some place far away – to psychoanalysis. For Freud, 'Screen Memories' constituted a nodal point; after this, Freud made the discoveries that made Psychoanalysis a discipline independent of psychology. Two things Freud found – the incest taboo and the disjunction between the real empirical events and the events that happened in the psyche. Without getting into details, Freud found that many of the stories that the patients told him were not at all true, but they thought that they had happened in real life (Freud, 2001). What is important here is not the content of the discourse but the form. For us, this is very important. When ordinary subjects forget the real existence of one of the most important events in their lives, it directly puts a question to our face: How far is the content of history protected? The simple facts or the simple chronology? Then again, we come to the basic dichotomy between the facts and the discourse. We know that discourse can influence the facts and sometimes hide them, but can the discourse dissolve them? Here, the facts lose their sheer facticity? This is very important as the facts become a plaything in the economy of the Simulacra; they lose their erstwhile thrust in the process. But here we encounter another important point. What about Archaeology? This discipline is mostly a science, and it uses all the armors that modern science uses. Even if we accept that it can be influenced by the discourse, is it possible for the discourse to obliterate it entirely? This is where the challenge of post-modernism lies. The process begins by first creating a 'Buffer zone.' (Keen, 2003). This zone holds the precarious position between truth and untruth. When the Ramjanmabhumi movement gathered steam, we found the empirical evidence slowly getting jumbled up. Even serious archaeologists were confused. It happened because something was disjointed, as if the entire building of Babri Masjid had adopted a position of no position, which is certainly a paradox where it was beyond the reach of Truth. Historians still regard it as a result of the Irrational mob, the power of Hate, and the Hate mongering of a certain party. But there are far deeper layers of this movement, too. Study closely two slogans during this movement.

*Tel Lagao Dabur Ka, Nam Mitao Babar Ka*

*Translation: Use the oil of Dabur, erase the name of Babar*

The implications are explicit. Even if we disregard the capitalist-fascist clique that it exposes, what is it precisely that this slogan wants? It wants to erase History or, to be blunt, the History of minorities. The Babri Masjid, also known as Masjid - i - Janamsthan, is among the many temples in Ayodhya that claim to be the Birthplace of Rama. The mythology of Rama is part of the intellectual history of our subcontinent, and like all mythologies, it cannot be pinpointed to be the 'real'. Like signifiers, it is a constant, elusive discourse, constantly moving away from reality. But notice here the popular slogan.

*Mandir Wahi Banayenge*

*Translation: We will build the temple there*

But why 'Wahi' (there)? That is the fundamental question. This is the post-modern condition, where subjects are constantly becoming aware of the disjunction between the signifiers and the world, the disjunction between History and Reality. Science, as Lacan said in 'Science and Truth', deals with the real, but by opening the split condition of the subjects, it shudders away from it (Lacan, 2007). Lacanian real is a very important concept that helps us understand our present state of knowledge. For Lacan, real is an impasse, that which does not stop not writing itself. This reality stands at the very center of our symbolic order, the relationship between a man and a woman, the relationship between the phallic signifier and its beyond (Chattopadhyay, 2018).

We will never get to the bottom of the relationship between speaking beings we sexuate as women. Here, we get into a serious muddle. This is even what specifies what we call human beings. Regarding this point, there is no chance that it will ever succeed – in other words, that we will have the formula, something that can be scientifically

written. Hence, there is a proliferation of symptoms because everything is linked to this. This is why Freud was right to speak of what he called sexuality. Let me put it like this: for the speaking being, sexuality is hopeless (Lacan, nd).

The same is true with History. History as a discipline works by distorting reality and facts. In this sense, every Historian is a Distorian; without this distortion, there is no History. This is also because history is also a phallogocentric (phallus and logos) discourse, and it is afraid of its beyond, where it is no longer history (Lacan, n.d). The Karsevaks, fueled by their ideology, wanted to build the mandir, but where? There where Babri masjid was, there where they could reclaim their manhood. This last point is the most important one. They wanted to legitimize the Mythology of Rama; thus, a fictional character became a real character. Mythology murdered the facts. They rebelled against the displacing nature of the signifier and forced the signifier to conform to reality. This fetishization of reality is common to both the schools who are saving History and who are allegedly killing it. But Can History at this stage be rooted in reality? Also, why is this becoming a question of manhood? Saussure showed us that there is an unbreachable gap between reality and the language. Many theorists and philosophers drew on this point. They emphasized that language even forms what aspects of reality we can gather and conceive. However, the signifiers are related to each other in a chain, and this entire chain is founded upon the phallic signifier (Lacan, n.d). In simple words, phallic signifiers found our language, how we will use this language, and even how this language will create our reality. But this phallic signifier also holds a very precarious position, for it always encounters its beyond. The Lacanian real, the disjunction between the phallus and its beyond, is impinging on our symbolic order. Lacan said:

*The real is the difference between what works and what doesn't work. What works is the world. The real is what doesn't work. The world goes on; it goes round – that's its function as a world. To perceive that there is no such thing as a world – namely, that there are things that only imbeciles believe to be in the world – it suffices to note that there are things that make it such that the world is revolting, so to speak. This is what analysts deal with, such that, despite what one may think, they are confronted with the real far more than even scientists are. (Lacan, nd)*

This impingement is not only creating sexual anxiety among people, for we see the resurgence of hyper-masculinity and hyper-femininity, but it has serious social implications. With the death of reality and any criteria to bring it back, empiricism has become the next fetish. Both the schools, the Left and the Right, are trying to legitimize their claims through the reference to reality. This reference is, by nature, a failed attempt to regain the phallus that was overturned by the post-modern culture. Thus, when the theorists defined the neo-liberal Hindutva as reclaiming masculinity, they were not wrong. However, their readings must be against the background of Freudo-Lacanian Psychoanalysis and Structural and Post-structural linguistics. From this view, the so-called Left is not exempted from it. On the contrary, in every sense, they are also guilty of the same crime. But what could they have done? What Freud taught us is that beyond the content of the narrative, the letters must be studied closely. With every passing day, History is dissolving itself, and there is no way back to the old days of Historicizing. What I am prescribing here is exorcising rather than Historicizing. As Derrida showed, every discourse is founded on what it cannot answer, yet without it, it cannot exist. In simple words, every discourse is a haunted discourse, and we must study the ghosts in order to understand the discourse (Lacan, n.d). Therefore, historians can utilize this psychoanalytic approach, which lets the discourse move the way it wants to move but intervenes where weak spots are found. This is a very dialectical approach to understanding History, where we do not refer to the reality of the events. On the contrary, the focus is on the letters of the narrative. In this case, let us take another example.

*Ayodha To Jhanki Hain, Kashi Mathura Abhi Baki Hain*

*Translation: Ayodha is just the trailer, Kashi and Mathura are still left.*

Now, if read against the background of what we formulated above, there is a clear implication of the reconstruction of temples and the overturning of Islamic architecture. But there is another implication, too. The historicization of Gods radically pins the Gods in reality, giving them a historical reality. Therefore, it is wrong to think that this ideology is afraid of empiricism; on the contrary, it is giving a new dynamic to empirical reality by symbolizing what before this was beyond symbolization – Gods. If we read Savarkar's 'Hindutva', the very first page shows what his intentions are, aligning the signifier with the signified.

*The very fact that a thing is indicated by a dozen names in a dozen human tongues disarms the suspicion that there is an invariable connection or natural concomitance between the sound and the meaning it conveys. Yet, as the association of the word with the thing it signifies grows stronger and lasts long, so does the channel that connects the two states of consciousness tend to allow an easy flow of thoughts from one to the other until, at last, it seems almost impossible to separate them. And when, in addition to this, a number of secondary thoughts or feelings that are generally roused by the thing get mystically entwined with the word that signifies it, the name seems to matter as much as the thing itself. (Savarkar, n.d)*

Here, we can refer to how Savarkar defined the term 'Hindu'; for long, he was 'treading on the solid ground of recorded facts', but now he cannot refrain himself 'from making an occasional excursion into the borderland of conjecture.' (Ibid, 23). This 'borderland of conjecture' is where the term 'Hindu' pushed itself so hard on History that Historical facts were altered to the point of oblivion.

*If the epithet Sindhu dates its antiquity in the glimmering twilight of history, then the word Hindu dates its antiquity from a period so remoter than the first that even mythology fails to penetrate – to trace it to its source. (Ibid, 25)*

Openly defying the logic of History, just a single metaphor (Hindu) changed the entire signifying structure of History, creating a whole new dimension of History. But what we can understand from this is that this alignment of signifier and signified, the same historicization was a common factor in this ideology. All this we can understand from the study simply of the discourse. For Savarkar, too, Islam was always radically Different. The phallic logic of Imperialism produced this aberration, and it became an ideology of reclaiming manhood, of reconstructing History so that there remain no humiliating traces of the past. It became a matter of perpetrating the same aggression on the aggressor (Nandy, n.d). However, the problem is certainly that by following this logic, the commingling of the two religions is forgotten. The facts that substantiate this part of history are lost. Thus, we need to examine history from a different angle. The earlier fact-centric historical understanding must now be removed, and the narrative structure of history and the ideology behind it must now be considered the most important aspect. However, even following this method, we must be aware not only of the limitations that affect the history book we are criticizing but also of the ghosts that are affecting our method. Without this self-critical criticism and the constant flux of criticism, we all will delve into windowless monads of ideologies. This is a very significant thing, for psychoanalysis taught us that we must go beyond the confines of the 'Demand' and 'Need' in order to reach knowledge about something (Musil, 1990). For the uninitiated ones, in Lacanian terms, whenever we visit a therapist, we hold him or her as somebody 'who knows'; against him or her, we are on the unknown or whose problems will be resolved. However, this creates a problem in an analytic situation, as the analyst imposes his or her knowledge on the patient. The patient even accepts this because it gives meaning to his life and his symptoms. However, this is no solution because the other's desire has been imposed on the patient. But a true analyst will be a Socratic dialectician who will know 'I know nothing' and constantly move the dialogue forward, making interventions so that the patient can accept his alienated condition and leap toward subjectivizing the other's desire (Lacan, n.d). This acceptance of the desire of the other is a religious thinking where we accept the discourse as infallible. With the advent of Post-modern culture, which Lacan termed as the 'triumph of the religion':

*But you will see that humanity will be cured of psychoanalysis. By drowning the symptom in meaning, in religious meaning naturally, people will manage to repress it (Lacan, n.d).*

Here, we find in history the death of metanarratives, the death of facticity of facts, and even the whole of this discipline, which has come to a stop. As a reaction to it, the 'religious thinking in History or ideologically fueled positions are taking irrational statures. People are afraid to accept the fallibility of every discourse, and it is becoming easy for them to accept the 'demands' of the discourses to the detriment of facts and history. The only way that this can be fought is to focus on the narrative structure of History, focus on the Language of History, and take into serious consideration the lessons that psychoanalysis taught us.

## **2. Conclusion**

We can perfectly observe here that the old methods of History are obsolete when encountering the postmodernist challenge. This becomes conspicuous when we are studying the History of India, where there are multitudes of identities, and all are in flux, constantly assimilating or diverging from one another. Here, I have shown that by focusing on the narrative structure of History, we can open History to the various innovations that are taking place in other disciplines, and this can end the so-called 'backward nature' of History. This can humble the ideologically motivated histories and pave the way for understanding the concept of 'Anekantavada' (the existence of various ideas), which is the very cornerstone of Indian spiritualism.

### **2.1 Limitations and Further Research**

The main limitation of this article is the absence of archival materials. New light can be shed on this topic if the ASI reports can be read and the method I have followed above can be applied. It will help us understand what I have termed a 'buffer zone.' The judgment of the Supreme Court must also be studied closely to understand the culmination of the ideology. I would direct the readers of this article to study the slogans and the propaganda that preceded the demolition. New lights can also be thrown upon the socio-religious contexts, which can open new dimensions in our understanding of this event.

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