

India torn by religious strife

By Amitabh Pal
Municipal Editor

We have enough religion in us to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another.

A truism that's being proven again in my native land, India, where Hindus and Muslims are killing each other in a bout of religious frenzy after the destruction of a mosque last week by Hindu fundamentalists in order to build a temple.

As I sit here 10,000 miles away I silently mourn for the country. And worry for my family, who live just 50 miles from the structure in dispute. Not only that, the worst violence is taking place in Bombay where my brother goes to college.

My family lives in a village near Ayodhya, the North Indian holy town that is the epicenter of the turmoil and which I have visited several times. It serves as a spiritual nerve center for my clan. Many of my relatives own temples there.

For the uninitiated, the structure in contention is a mosque-cum-temple that exists on what devout Hindus claim is the spot where Lord Rama, a semi-mythological God revered by many Hindus, was born. The temple marking the birth was destroyed in the 16th century by a Muslim ruler and rebuilt as a mosque. In the 1940s, Hindu idols appeared "miraculously" at the mosque, causing the government to close off the structure to both Hindus and Muslims.

The gates were opened for Hindu worshippers in 1986 by a court order leading to the peculiar situation of Hindu worship ceremonies being performed inside a mosque. But this wasn't enough for Hindu militants, who claimed that even having the outer structure of a mosque was sacrilegious to the memory of Lord Rama. So they launched a campaign to destroy the shell of the mosque and build a lavish temple.

They finally succeeded last week by breaching the security cordon around the structure and in the process ignited religious madness all over the country.

To an American it may seem irrational for people to get so worked up about a structure to the point where they can kill someone without thinking. The dispute here is not about the edifice per se. It is about larger issues like religious pride. The structure has become a symbol for fanatics on both sides about the superiority of their religion.

So, here I am learning of at least a thousand people killed in the past few

COMMENTARY

days of rioting. As for home, there is of course no news from there since it is inaccessible by telephone and it takes at least ten days for a letter to reach here.

So I can't help worrying about everybody's welfare. Contradictory and often irrational thoughts cloud my mind. Will my village be as peaceful as it has always been? Or has it too erupted in a frenzy of violence because it is so near the vortex of the dispute? The village has a large Muslim population and at the same time is a hotbed of fundamentalist Hindu activity. Portents of trouble. On the other hand, it has been very peaceful during past religious disturbances.

Conversely, my brother studies in Bombay, a city which is usually peaceful in such situations but has been rocked by the worst violence in the country this time. At least 200 people have been killed there. A Chapel Hill friend of mine was telling me about an American aid worker who had to be smuggled out of the city in an ambulance. More reasons for worry.

But the issue here is not my family, although I am concerned about their welfare. I have much larger worries about the country. The political cause of the riots is comprehensible even to Americans. Self-seeking politicians seeking to divide ethnic groups to reap political benefits. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

But then, what is the solution? Unfortunately, there are no short-term fixes. The British, while ruling India, set up a deliberate divide-and-rule policy to make it easier to subjugate the people. They encouraged Muslim separatism and propped up religious orthodoxies of both faiths. The result was the partition of India into India and Pakistan and a bitter hatred between adherents of both religions.

The only solution to this deep-rooted hatred is education and improved economic prospects. Education always seems to have a charming effect of broadening people's minds and erasing intolerance.

Similarly, one of the causes of the riots is the existence of millions of unemployed youth with time on their hands who are easy prey for demagogues seeking to incite religious hatred. Only improved job opportunities can channel their energies in a constructive way.

Until then, India will be cursed with repeated spasms of self-destruction.

Time and tide

50 years ago

Fifty years ago this week E. F. Gore had finished a ten-day leave and returned to action aboard the flagship of the fleet. Gore had seen action in African battles up and down the Dark Continent coastline.

The county tax lists had been named and were about to secure supplies to carry out their duties in filing of taxes during January. Civilians were restricted from making long-distance telephone calls during the holiday season except in the case of an emergency; trucks were going from farm to farm in a campaign for scrap iron.

40 years ago

Forty years ago this week preparations for the work to be done at Sunny Point had been completed and work was to begin on a full scale soon. At the peak of construction it was estimated that some 2,500 workers would be employed on the job. Some 50 miles of railroad was to be laid and also to be built were three huge wharves, each capable of docking three large freighters. Construction was scheduled to be completed in late 1954.

The life of an elderly Southport man was saved by the quick action of the wife of an Air Force sergeant. The shack of aged "Uncle Bob" Eason on Long Beach was destroyed by fire, but he was rescued from the blaze.

30 years ago

Thirty years ago this week there was a front-page story in the *Pilot* telling of the local support being provided Dr. M. H. Rourke in his candidacy for membership on the board of directors of Lions International. Robert W. Swain of Southport had accepted appointment as assistant county extension agent in Columbus County.

The boys who had played on Southport's state championship eight-man football team now were turning their talents to basketball, and the Dolphins were planning to compete in the Holiday Cage Classic at Hallsboro. Students and servicemen were heading home for Christmas and the *Pilot* was filled with news and notices of parties, programs and special celebrations.

20 years ago

On the front page of the *Pilot* for December 20, 1972, there was a spectacular photo of the weather tower standing at the southwest corner of the Garrison. It was taken from the end of the city pier at night, and showed the Christmas lights on this structure. The state board of elections had declared Arthur Knox the winner in the balloting for register of deeds after a protest had been filed by Durwood Clark following the general election. The official tally was Knox 4,247 and Clark 4,237, a difference of only ten votes.

The editor had written a piece about "The Decline of Whittling"; the Junior Woman's Club of Southport had celebrated the tenth anniversary of its founding; and the advertising section was filled with Christmas greetings.

15 years ago

A story on the front page of the *Pilot* for December 21, 1977, announced that Odell Williamson, developer of Ocean Isle Beach, would seek the Democratic nomination for state Senate. He declared that the basis for his announcement was the "gentleman's agreement" on rotation of this office between Bladen, Columbus and Brunswick counties.

Mrs. Lorraine Bellamy had been installed as president of the Southport Woman's Club; club champions at Oak Island Golf Club were Kay Brannon for the women and Jim Riddle for the men; and Julie Ann Smith of Leland had received the Good Citizen Award from the Brunswick Town Chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution.

10 years ago

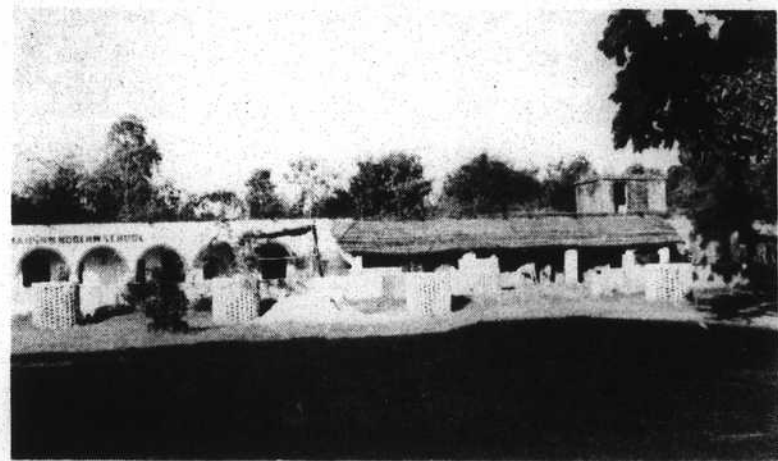
South Brunswick bands received a prominent display in the *Pilot* for December 12, 1982, with eight-column spreads showing the beginners band as well as the high school organization. A separate photo showed director Steve Skillman in action. Two Brunswick County players were making the trip with the Carolina football squad to El Paso, Texas, to play in the Sun Bowl. They were J. K. Somers from South Brunswick and Michael Bryant from West Brunswick.

A schedule of courses to be offered at Brunswick Tech during the spring semester ranged all the way from cake decorating to training for a private pilot's license; there had been only one morning thus far that year when the temperature had been below freezing; and a live manger scene on the lawn at Southport Baptist Church was a new local addition to Christmas observances. We had a photo of this unusual attraction.

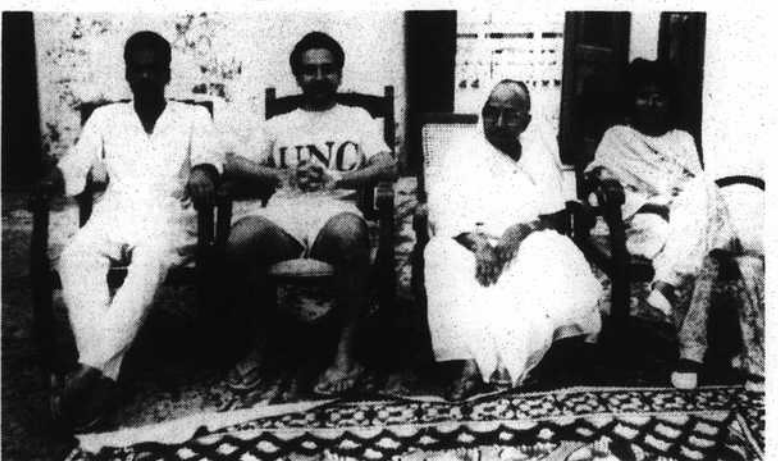
5 years ago

Telephones had been installed on Bald Head Island and were working. We had a photo of developer Kent Mitchell in the *Pilot* for December 16, 1987, making his first call. May Moore had been elevated to the position of mayor by her fellow members of the Yaupon Beach town board, the second woman ever to hold that office.

Wendy Gay Williams of Leland had won the title of Miss Brunswick County at the pageant held the previous Saturday evening at Shallotte; Helen Laugisch, Brunswick County teacher of the year, had received a check for \$1,000 as a part of that award; and Dr. Thomas O. Savidge, a cardiologist and internal medicine specialist, had joined the staff at Doshier Memorial Hospital.



This is the school in Mahson for which *Pilot* writer Amitabh Pal's mother is principal. Amit is shown at his home in Mahson with his



grandmother and two cousins. He's the one with the University of North Carolina T-shirt.

A 'plethora' of Christmas spirit

Is there more Christmas spirit abounding this holiday season or is it just me?

There's a briskness in the air most days that sets the stage for the season. It's hard for me, coming from the cold north which just last week got more than a foot of snow, to get in the mood for Christmas when it's 70 degrees here.

Shoppers and shopkeepers are a happy, friendly bunch. I was in line at 8 a.m. the Friday after Thanksgiving waiting for Penney's to open and no one pushed and shoved to be the first through the door. Everyone chatted amicably and wondered what discounts awaited them in the gold ornaments the store was handing out to hearty, early rising customers.

Even the clerk who was frazzled by 9 a.m. and who I frustrated even further when she failed to give me the ten-percent discount on top of the 40-percent discount on a pair of pants, then forgot to ring up a shirt I wanted and told me the \$5-off coupon I got in my ornament couldn't be used on that purchase, smiled when I thanked her after she finally got through ringing up my sale.

There's a plethora (I just love that word) of Christmas shows on television. I got to see the first few minutes of the "The Grinch" before the husband moaned and regained control of the remote control. Luckily I got it and my all-time favorite Christmas movie about the kid with the round, wire-rimmed glasses and the Red Rider BB gun on tape for private viewing later with a cup of hot chocolate and cookies.

I got my first load of presents shipped to my mom and have just a few more to buy or put the

Marybeth Bianchi



finishing touches on.

As the husband pulled the last of Bianchi's special homemade holiday kielbasa out of the smoker on Sunday, I searched through my recipe file for the cookies I'll be baking this weekend and made a long list of ingredients I'll need. So far there are nine different varieties on my list. Whether or not I'll get them all baked is something else, but I'll sure try.

I must admit I'm not usually in such a good holiday mood. I don't have a freshly cut and decorated tree in my living room; just a tiny fake one with itsy-bitsy ornaments setting atop the television. And I didn't even put lights on my ficus trees to create a quasi-holiday mood indoors.

But still, get a cozy fire burning in the woodstove sending the spicy scent of potpourri through the house, some Christmas music on the stereo and it's not hard to get in the mood.

Now, if I can just keep it going through the dreaded Christmas card-signing marathon. It's the only time of year I communicate with most friends and family members, and I feel obligated to do more than just sign my name to the cards. I hate those engraved cards and the standardized computer-generated letters some people send out, but it is torture signing dozens of cards and writing nearly the same newsy update on those going to close friends and relatives. I just have to remind myself how much it means to me when others take time out of their busy lives to send me their holiday wishes.

When you think about it, isn't that what the Christmas season is all about? It's not spending lots of money on presents meant to impress, but taking the time to remember others in big and small ways and sharing holiday joy by whatever means you can.

Those four weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas are probably the most selfless weeks anybody lives through. Few people, at least among the grown-ups, think about what they want for themselves. Their minds are focused on buying and doing for others.

It would undoubtedly be impossible for everyone to carry on that way throughout the entire year, but at least there is a short time when sharing happiness and joy are foremost in our thoughts. It's a start.

Merry Christmas.

How can we help you?

In Case of Emergency
DIAL 911

Town Halls

Southport.....457-7900
Boiling Spring Lakes 845-2614
Caswell Beach.....278-5471
Yaupon Beach.....278-5024
Long Beach.....278-5011

Government

Congressman Charles G. Rose, III
2230 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-2731
Rep. E. David Redwine
Rm. 632 Legislative Building
General Assembly
Raleigh, N.C. 27611
(919) 733-5787
Sen. R.C. Soles
Rm. 2009 Legislative Building
General Assembly
Raleigh, N.C. 27611
(919) 733-5963

Southport-Fort Fisher Toll-Ferry Schedule

WINTER SCHEDULE
(Currently in Effect)

| | |
|------------|-------------|
| Southport | Fort Fisher |
| 8:00 a.m. | 8:50 a.m. |
| 9:40 a.m. | 10:30 a.m. |
| 11:20 a.m. | 12:10 p.m. |
| 1:00 p.m. | 1:50 p.m. |
| 2:40 p.m. | 3:30 p.m. |
| 4:20 p.m. | 5:10 p.m. |
| 6:00 p.m. | 6:50 p.m. |

Annual Subscription Rates

| In Brunswick County | Elsewhere in North Carolina | Outside North Carolina |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Subscription.....\$6.50 | Subscription.....\$6.50 | Subscription.....\$6.50 |
| N.C. Sales Tax......32 | N.C. Sales Tax......32 | Postage.....12.50 |
| Postage.....3.98 | Postage.....9.58 | Total.....\$19.00* |
| Total.....\$10.87 | Total.....\$16.47 | |
| Senior Citizens....\$8.77 | Senior Citizens....\$14.47 | Senior Citizens....\$17.00 |

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