

RELIGION IN MODERN INDIA WITH REFERENCE TO RAMAYAN



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Foreword

The role of religion in society has once again come to the fore with the Hindu nationalist winning electoral battles twice with a thumping majority in 2014 and 2019. They won the elections in many states as well despite the rising unemployment, inflation and poor management of the economy. Their victory is in part attributed to the religious symbols and their religious appeal to the Hindus. This begets the question why is religion salient in politics? Is religion more important to human beings than the daily livelihood issues? Has the influence of religion declined or increased in the Indian society? Is it necessary to be in conflict with another religion to adhere with one's religion?

In order to partially answer these questions, Dr. Uday Mehta, as scholar par excellence of religion and society has compiled four essays which we have previously published, in this volume. These four essays by very eminent scholars give deep insights into the role and relevance of religions to the Indian society.

Indian society is characterized by religious pluralism unlike the Western Nations-states and Western Nations-societies. Indian societies always welcomed religious influence from various parts of the world through layers of migrations. The last two essays in this volume by Prof. Nagin Das Sanghavi and Prof. Ram Puniyani bring about the rich diversity in the various versions of Ramayanas as these epic stories were told and retold over generations and in various social and geographical locations. Even though the versions of Ramayana are diverse and there are many variations in its narrations, they still bring out the morality of the community and in its versions of ideal humans. These various versions need not divide us unless one version seeks hegemonies and displaces all other versions, as the Hindu nationalist want to do.

Dr. A.R. Desai and Dr. Uday Mehta's essays explore the various roles religion can have in human lives, society as well as in politics.

I am sure, although these essays were written few years ago, but they still give deep insights and appear still to be relevant today. The readers will benefit from these essays. I have always enjoyed a deep intellectual and emotional relationship with Dr. Uday Mehta. Dr. Uday Mehta has been my philosopher and guide and I have learned a lot from his scholarship and expertise in sociology of religion. I have read all his writings voraciously. I am thankful to him for compiling this volume.

Irfan Engineer

Preface

India has witnessed a new wave of religious revivalism especially since last few decades. What is being projected as Hinduism in recent years is a novel concept based on crude amalgam of various contradictory set of beliefs.

Recent campaign for the construction of Ram Mandir after the demolition of the Babri Masjid is a one big step forward in this direction.

Similarly also one witnessed a new enthusiasm for the worship and adoration of Rama Lalla, its celebration all over the country. We have no reservation about the adoration or the worship of the Lord Rama in this country or ever at larger plane in the World. Rama adoration was witnessed since fairly long period. It has been a part of over national religious legacy. But over reservation is only its use for the political propaganda, as a weapon to win the political power.

Hence in this small booklet, an attempt is made to trace the roots of the Ramayana, and Rama, on the basis of the archaeological findings by the eminent archaeologists in this country. The objective is to provide the impartial appraisal of the origin of the Rama Worship, his place of birth, his stay at various places during his exile locating by them objectively as per the excavation made during the last decade of the precious country.

Hope this booklet would enable us to develop more objective impartial view of our history and the Ramayana.

Dr. Uday Mehta

Role of religion in Society

- *A.R. Desai*

Exploration in the area of religion is relatively less developed so far. Extensive researches in this field however have become very urgently necessary for a number of reasons.

1. Indian rulers, since independence, though wedded to secularism, broadly adhere to a viewpoint that the mainstream culture of India society is permitted essentially with the ethos of Hindu religion, which is believed to be basically spiritual and therefore morally superior to the western culture, which is supposed to be materialistic and based on competitive individualism and greed and lust for worldly goods.

They also convey the message, through subtle sophisticated ideological propaganda and practices that amidst many religions which are followed in India, the religion preached and adhered to in practice by the Hindus, particularly upper section of Hindus, embody the essence of spiritual, religious-moral and social value of what is characterized as true Hinduism. The rulers also convey through rapidly expanding mass-media, particularly radio and T.V. that Hinduism, embodies the high spiritual, moral and religious value and project ethos comprising qualities such as tolerance, non-violence and profound spirit of love for entire mankind. According to them, this makes Hinduism superior to all other book-religions.

Indian rulers, and the dominant Hindu intelligentsia, wedded to the path of development pursued in India, also claim that higher

Hindu cultural traditions, because of their basic breadth and catholicity, contain essential ingredients of secularism.

2. Indian rulers, the new encouraged and generated proprietary classes wedded to production for profit and market, and considered as progressive agent of modernization the various political parties and the educated intellectual strata, who are upholders of modernization of Indian society through mixed-economy, are trying with greater and greater zeal, to spread the idea that the mainstream of Indian culture, which is basically rooted in Hindu religion, with lesser influence from other religions, can along prevent disintegration of moral and ethical values of Indian society and sustain and integrate Indian people. There is an underlying assumption of the rulers that the Indian cultural heritage is spiritually and morally superior to the western cultural heritage. This assumption leads them to actively and consciously propagate and carry the blessings of this heritage to the outside world particularly to the people belonging to the advanced capitalist countries, particularly the U.S.A. which has taken the role of leadership in modernizing the entire world in its own image.

In fact, personnel managing the Indian state and various categories of religious leaders, including a new breed of preachers characterized as “Godmen, distinct type of spiritual leaders, have been visiting the West, to induct moral, spiritual and ethic-religious values to cure the immoral, waylaid, irreligious, materialistically obsessed, citizen of the western societies by disinfecting their sick

minds. These spiritual leaders of Hinduism are attempting to uplift the citizens of the West to live a higher, nobler, spiritual, cultural, moral life embodied and provided by the higher Hindu cultural ethos.

The orientation in India of locating cultural mainstream in Hinduism and zealous propagation of this value premise as levers for modernization by the state, and by newly emerging proprietary classes and intellectuals have posed serious and urgent problems needing proper assessment of the role of religions, particularly Hindu religion, in modernized Indian society.

The need for examining the role that the region plays in Indian society has become urgent for a number of other pertinent reasons. India is land of many religious groups. In that situation, a number of questions need answers.

- 1) What does it mean to say that cultural mainstream of Indian society is basically founded on Hinduism?
- 2) Can the mainstream culture in a secular state be the product of only one religion or ad hoc blending of many religions?
- 3) If Indian society is being shaped by secular and modern outlook, why the non-religious secular values are not considered capable of providing the mainstream culture to Indian people.
- 4) What is the need of religious practices and preaching in shaping the mainstream cultural tradition as bedrock for Indian secular society?
- 5) What differentiates “Secular” from “Sacred”?

- 6) In the overall social order, what aspects are called religious?
What are the distinguishing realms of life of people, which can be separated as religious from secular?
- 7) If Indian society is comprised of many religious groups, on what grounds are we to say that cultural ethos of one religion is superior to that of other religions?
- 8) What elements of any religion place it on a higher moral, spiritual and cultural pedestal than the elements of other religions to enable it to provide mainstream culture to be evolved for Indian society, which can unite all citizens?
- 9) For instance can the cultural mainstream of a society wedded to secularism, not transcend all religious tradition and evolve a humanist, this-worldly, secular cultural stream acceptable to all citizens irrespective of whether they are believers, agnostics, atheists or materialists?
- 10) Is the belief in the supernatural entity of force, essential for cultural unity of all citizens trying to shape a secular social order?
- 11) Why do different religions have different, even contradictory conceptions of supernatural? How can we establish that specific conceptions of supernatural of one are superior or more valid than those of others?
- 12) On what ground should specific concepts of supernatural force and entities of one religion be considered superior to that of the other? How can the expectations and functions of one

be considered superior to those of other? Who determines which categories and entities of supernatural world are determines which categories more ennobling than other?

- 13) Why supernatural force and entities are supposed to manifest themselves differently, with varied contradictory and even mutually warring forms? Why do they perform different, even hostile and mutually debilitating or even destructive functions? Why supernatural being and force belonging to one category demand contradictory even irreconcilable hostile behavioural patterns and practices from their adherents.

All these Questions have acquired importance in India as well as in other societies, evolving patterns of development, on specific lines of growth. Instead of a strongly held belief that religion will play a harmonizing and integrating role in modernizing processes of these societies, (in our case, India society) it is being experienced that with the passage of time, the religion has been generating more and more fratricidal internal conflicts, tearing apart the fabric of these societies. For instance, in India not only the believers of different religious paths have been involving themselves into ferocious battles over various minor features of religion but even among the followers of Hindu religion themselves fierce, and bitter, cultural, social, political and economic conflicts are seen erupting. These experiences contradict the assumption that religion and particularly Hindu religion is helping integration of citizens of independent India.

These developments revealing divisive and destructive function of religions, have posed a very pertinent question about the functions performed by any religion. Is it true that a religion performs function in a modernizing society, which only help to sub serve the interest of those class who are becoming dominant and considered as agent of development? Is it not true that the religion thereby operates as opium for the vast majority of citizens who constitute the underprivileged, poverty stricken majority.

In fact a very basic problem is posed with regard to Hindu religion, supposed to be the bedrock of cultural mainstream. The zest and aggressive attend to establish what is describe as fundamental essential feature of Hindus religion, in the form of “Hindutva”, need closer scrutiny. What is the hard core essence of Hindutva? Can Hindutva really function as an integrative force in modernizing the entire India society comprising of citizens observing many religious faiths? Will it not become ethos sub serving certain upper classes, and the state pursuing a specific path of development, operating on the axis of market and production for profit, and relying on certain proprietary classes as progressive agent of development and growth? It is becoming a basic ideological obstacle to those deprived classes and underprivileged majority of population, in their endeavours to evolve a more humane, non-exploitative, non-repressive social order? In Hinduism not becoming a valuable handmaiden for rulers and the newly emerging profit chasing proprietary classes and their beneficiaries to divert the people from locating the real causes and evolving correct strategy to counteract the force responsible for their present plight?

Urgent need to grasp the overarching impact of Hindu Religion on Indian Society

Religion in Indian society, particularly Hindu religion followed by overwhelming majority of Indian citizens has played and is playing a significant role in shaping various domains of India social life across the ages.

- a) It had influenced world outlook and philosophies.
- b) It had influenced arts, architecture and sculpture.
- c) It had influenced music and literature.
- d) It had influenced significantly, the economic life, political processes and premises underlying the justification of particular pattern of political power.
- e) It has strengthened or weakened certain patterns of social stratification and hierarchy.
- f) It has also played a crucial role in legitimizing patterns of family or domestic organization, by assigning specific detailed roles, and functions, and sanctioning specific positions to different members of this organization.
- g) It has played a role in originating, crystalline, justifying, or even modifying the unique stratificatory system characterized as caste system, which has its profound impact on the Hindu status system known as chaturvarna arrangement and ashram stages of individual

life which prevents the citizens of the Indian society from evolving social relationships based on equality for all.

- h) All religions, particularly Hindu religion, have influenced the pattern of educational system in India. Hindu religion evolved certain distinct norms for deciding who should be considered eligible for an access to education. It has also laid down rules regarding who should be debarred from having access to elementary or higher education. It decides which castes and groups are eligible for access to spiritual-religious, moral education. For instance, even after 40 years of Independence lower caste are not allowed to perform rituals, rites, ceremonies, *yagnas* or *kalhas* and act as *agnihotries*, priests or *pujaris* to perform *yagnas havans* or *pujas* and other ceremonies in temples or in households. They are still performed mainly by Brahmins.
- i) It is now increasingly recognized that a strong religious belief system has emerged, which is wielding powerful influence in Indian social history. Under the influence of this belief system, it is presumed that Indian society during pre-Muslim period had a glorious civilization and a unique profound spiritual ethos based on Hinduism. This ethos of Hinduism shaped the cultural mainstream in the country. During this glorious, spiritually elevating phase, people of India experienced a higher form of moral existence, based on the spirit of tolerance, brotherhood and harmony. According to this perspective the advent of Islam and Islamic rule resulted in the downfall of those glorious phases, tarnishing the Hindu heritage of

higher spiritual culture. According to a large number of scholars, Indian society and culture entered into dark ages, under the impact of Islamic rule. This belief system has affected characterizing of the stages of historical development of the country. History of Indian people is demarcated into four main parts.

1. The glorious Hindu period.
2. The inglorious dark middle ages under Muslim rule.
3. The period covered under British Rule called modern period. It is believed that during the period of British rule, Indian Society experienced contradictory impact on its culture and civilization – one negative, degrading it as a result of materialistic, selfish, individualistic, competitive value system introduced in Indian society by the British and also by adopting a superior racial and arrogant Christian spiritual values. It also deliberately utilized religious divisions prevalent in Indian society to make political use of religion to accentuate communal rift among different sections of the people pursuing different religious faiths. Under the progressive impact of British rule, however, the educated leaders of Hindus, influenced by western liberal value system, tried to reappraise and reform the degraded Hinduism to resurrect and restore the original Hindu cultural mainstream as a major ideological counterpart to the value system introduced by the British rulers to evolve their progressive nationalist ethos.
4. The fourth and the latest stage of historical development of Indian society begin after Independence. During this period the

nationalist leadership is attempting to establish a modern society founded on capitalist socio-economic premise and evolving a state structure based on bourgeois liberal philosophy, adopting secularism as guiding principle. However, the nationalist leadership considers that religion and particularly values embodied in Hindu religion as a cultural mainstream will bring about integration, both political and emotional among citizens of India.

- j) It is now being acknowledged that religion played a significant role in shaping the nature of nationalist movement. It also influenced the way in which independence was achieved. Moreover, it should be noted that the Indian independence was achieved by nationalist leaders by accepting vivisection of India on religious communal lines of Hindu and Muslim. It is claimed by number of serious scholars that the nationalist leaders, however, do not admit this fact.

This mode of securing independence on communal basis, though found to be painful by nationalist leadership, suggests how the nationalist leadership headed by Indian national congress consciously or unconsciously accepted that Hindu cultural tradition provided nationalist ethos to freedom movement, and even justification of vivisection of India on communal lines.

- k) The value assumptions underlying the constitution and policies pursued and practiced by the rulers, after Independence, to generate an acceptable ethos which can provide moral and spiritual basis for stability in Indian society, also indicate that the rulers, and cultural

building proprietary classes considered to be in the forefront of development and modernization of Indian society, believe that the religion, and particularly Hindu religion, and the cultural heritage emerging from that religion will provide the cultural mainstream for integrating Indian people on these assumption, the rulers and culture builders are actively fostering these Hindu value system, both directly and indirectly through various practices, on the premise that such cultural mainstream will strengthen national integration.

The above mentioned considerations necessitate systematic sociological explorations to understand the role of religion in Indian society. This is all the more necessary when Indian society is undergoing profound socio-economic, politico-cultural, and educational transformation, it should also be realized in all its depth that this transformation is being brought about by the State wedded to specific path of development relying on “Betting on the Rich” for modernizing it. The state aims to build a strong, prosperous Indian society, founded on an intelligent, literate, healthy and morally strong citizen. For realizing the objectives laid down in the constitution, the Rulers claim that they are secular but consider religion, particularly value system embodied in Hindu religion, as providing essential elements for evolving secular society.

The main Postulates of sociological approach to religion

1. Religion is phenomenon of human world-a segment of a larger human reality,
2. Religion emerged at a certain stage of human development on earth and will continue to survive till the function for which it was created, have not disappeared. Religion is a historic category.
3. Religion is man-made, not something which has emerged from the forces outside of nature and human society. Religion is a distinct type of natural phenomenon. Human beings have invented supernatural and created Gods. Supernatural and Gods have not created men. The various beliefs about the nature of supernatural have their origin in human society. They are the segment of cultural creations, sub serving certain social purpose and function as well as strengthening or weakening certain interests and strata in a society which has been going through certain stages of development.

As rightly pointed out by an eminent thinker the concept of supernatural and all its consequent beliefs of behavioural practices are rooted in social system and not as self-existing independent entities created by some non-natural consciousness or power outside and above nature. In fact, the sociological approach considers the entire realms of supernatural as the creation of men. It is created by human kind to grope to understand and interact with forces which they could not understand or control, and whose impact they felt basically affected human beings in various ways in this world.

As pointed out by eminent thinkers, ignorance of laws of nature and society with which mankind had to interact and face the consequences beneficial or otherwise and its helplessness to cope with them led to the idea of supernatural. Ignorance or confused or vague ideas about the social forces which shaped human intervention and human practice, led to fantastic reflection in the form of conception, wherein some supernatural entities were postulated as performing those functions during their struggle for existence by mankind on the planet earth.

Sociological approach considers that belief in supernatural, at certain stages of the long historical evolution, served to help explain and subserve certain functions necessary for mankind. It will disappear as and when the phenomenon of nature, and society, will be comprehended, understood and interventions shaped, without reference to supernatural and considered as a part of overall nature caused by rational and social forces. The meaning, practices and behaviours will be shaped by the comprehensions of laws of nature and society making the postulates of supernatural also redundant and irrational in fact as an obstacle to higher development of mankind.

Many human practices and behaviours in grappling natural forces are now carried on without any postulates of supernatural. Similarly vast segments of social practices and interventions, among human beings themselves, are based on understating of laws of society, without any need to refer to supernatural.

We will present in one of the volumes the various views projected by social scientist who have evolved various school of sociological approaches, to understand and explain how the belief in supernatural arose and various roles and functions which religion has been performing in various historical stages of development of society.

Why the choice of dialectical materialistic approach to study religion

For the purpose of exploring the role of religion – particularly the role of Hindu religion, in Indian society across ages and more particularly to explore its role in past – independent Indian society, we have adopted the Dialectical Materialistic approach, which, unlike evolutionary, or structural, functional, metaphysical, non – historical materialist or psychological approaches, provide a much more concretely historical explanation of the role of religion, by taking into account its contradictory functions. Dialectical materialistic approach does not consider religion, as it is mistakenly believed, as merely the “opium of the people”. The views that religion is “opium of the people”, was expressed in the writing of French, German, British and other European materialist thinkers and is still viewed as such even today by those who propound modern Rationalism or still stick to mechanical materialist philosophy.

Marx and Engels always emphasized the dual character of religion, as they pointed out clearly in their major formulation: “Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against the real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of

the heartless world just as it is the spirit of an un spiritual situation. It is the opium of the people. The formulation indicates that religion has, in a number of situations, protest potential. They viewed religion as performing a dual function.

The dialectical materialism, which Marx and Engels developed, while philosophically opposed to all idealist and theological approaches, where the existence of supernatural forces has been assumed, recognised, unlike the earlier materialist philosophies, the dual character of religious phenomenon, its role in legitimizing or stabilizing established class based social order, and, also under certain circumstances, playing critical protest and even revolutionary role. As Michael Lowy in his very penetrating study Marxism and liberation Theology points out.

“The well-known phrase ‘religion is the opium of the people’, is considered as the quintessence of the Marxist conception of religious phenomenon by most of its supporters and opponents. It should, however be noted that this statement is not specifically Marxist. The same phrase can be found in various contexts, in the writing of Kant, Herder, Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer and Henrich Heine.

“An attentive reading of the whole Marxist paragraph where this phrase appears shows that the author is more nuanced than usually believed. He takes into account the dual character of religion... while being a materialist and atheist and philosophically irreconcilable enemy of religion, Engels nevertheless grasped, like the young Marx, the dual character of the phenomenon; its role in legitimating established order, but

also according to social circumstances, its critical protest and even revolutionary role:.

We present this proposition to clear a misunderstanding which prevails about Marxism that it ignores to examine the protest potential of some of the religious movements.

In fact, a massive literature on religion, and its dual role, has emerged in the Marxist tradition, starting with Marx, Engels, to Michael Lowy, Paul N. Siegel and others which has highlighted the protest potential possessed by sections of people under the banner of religion. Fidel Castro's conversations with Brettos also add to this literature.

The need to study the social function of religion in modernizing Indian society therefore has become urgent because,

- (i) unlike most of the societies prevailing in the world, Indian society comprises of most varied, and largest number of religious groups, sections and denominations.
- (ii) All these groups and institution have certain sets of belief about supernatural, certain sets of complex organizational structure, body of rituals, large funds, some of them having enormous ramifications of organized propaganda.
- (iii) Large number of charitable, political, educational, and cultural activities and organizations of secular type are also sponsored and controlled by them.
- (iv) Press publications, radio, T.V., use of loudspeakers, festivals, *kathas*, and other media are used by various religious groups and associations including their secular

patrons to spread their religious beliefs and practices, to compete and undermine the beliefs and practices of others religious group.

- (v) A bitter strife arising from organized conversions and reconversions from one religion to another as well as a frenzied warfare against those who propagate non-religious, secular, humanist agnostic, atheistic, or materialist ideas and practices is carried on by various religious groups, backed by certain classes and directly or indirectly supported by the state.

Religion and religious bodes are consciously pressed in the services of political power games by various political parties and groups for election and other political activities.

Some crucial questions about the belief in supernatural, religious behavior and rituals.

1. How do supernatural beings, souls or forces convey their preferences for certain pattern of social as well as individual behaviour from their followers?
2. Why different supernatural forces and entities generate various cults, *sampradayas* or even hundreds of sub-cults, though the followers are supposed to worship or interact with only specific God or goddess?
3. Why all these multiple supernatural beings in the form of souls, beings and forces, demand simultaneously contradictory behaviours

for all who claim to follow the same religion, for example Hindu religion? How is the Hindu religion operating worldly interactions of groups and individuals in such amazingly meticulous and minute details and in such diverse and contradictory manner, that some of the eminent social scientist describes Hinduism as a way of life, rather than as a religion analogous to Christianity or Islam?

4. Categories of supernatural as conceived in Hindu Religion

We will briefly enumerate the categories of supernatural which shape the behaviour patterns not only of ordinary people but also event of most educated, upper and middle class Hindus of modern India, comprising traders, businessman, industrialist, rich farmers, bureaucrats, legislators, cabinet and state ministers, prime and chief ministers, even the Presidents of Indian state, the highest officer in state hierarchy claiming to forge a secular social order.

1. Dead ancestors, disembodied spirits, Got and Goddesses are believed to dwell in their territorial habitats *Pitrulok*, *Pretlok*, *Devlok*, *Vaikunth Dham*, and even in specific locations in some mountains and regions. They are sometimes conceived as hovering round the world, influencing human beings to act in a manner which will satisfy their unfulfilled desires. They also belong to various categories of deities such as those of fertility, various epidemics, rivers, forests, mountains, animals, insects, and birds.
2. Some supernatural forces or beings are sometimes viewed as the entire universe and the inner world of human beings.

3. Supernatural elements are envisaged in the profound sophisticated speculations about basic problems of life, such as the nature of ultimate reality, the emergences of life, or what happens after death of an individual, as well as in connection with search for ultimate reality, the emergence of life, or what happens after the death of an individual, as well as in connection with search for ultimate meaning of the entire universe. They also emerge from the concern about major problems which mankind has been, namely the problems of pain, hunger, poverty, inequality, disease, individual and social catastrophes, injustices and humiliations which individuals and groups experience in their day to day life.

When one takes note of the categories, types and number of supernatural elements, which are still having powerful influences in shaping the behaviour of Indian population, one is amazed at the expectations of behaviour patterns from human beings claiming to be Hindus, and the rewards and punishments they bestow or inflict on their believers.

Religious behaviour preached in Hindu Religion

We will briefly describe the religious behaviour, in terms of general categories indicated earlier as cultural units of religious behaviour.

Prayers: - Prayers done by followers of Hindu religion are of various categories and types and form formidable part of religious behavior of Hindus.

Prayers are offered to various deities at home as well as outside among Hindus.

At Home a Hindu is required to pray to the family gods or goddesses. The prayers are offered by the members of the family to the gods and goddesses installed in the niche of the home or while performing certain religious performance such as *katha* or *yagna* organized by the family. Every caste and sub caste, generally worship some special deity and maintains if possible caste or sub-caste abodes of their gods and goddesses where the special deities are installed. All members of caste or sub-caste are exhorted to regularly and more particularly on specific occasions to offer prayers to the deity, a god or a goddess or a specific pantheon of chosen gods and goddesses.

Prayers are also offered to a deity, god or goddess located in a street or a specific locality, villages and towns. The goddesses of these streets and *mohallas* are described as *Mohalla Mata* (street goddess) to whom the people residing in the locality offer prayers, particularly on certain occasions and days considered auspicious.

There are temples also installed in urban and rural areas, for specific gods and goddesses or pantheon of gods and goddesses with their retinue of attendant sub-gods and sub-goddesses, where members of the same community or certain categories of communities offer their prayers.

Prayers are offered to river goddesses, tank deities, forest deities, and even animals, and innumerable types of deities associated with insects and birds in different part of India.

Prayers are also offered to some or all gods and goddesses commonly accepted as part of certain sections or even entire Hindu believers.

We have highlighted the religious behaviour of the Hindus in the form of prayer and worship, because they are practiced on a wide scale even today when Indian society is being reshaped on a secular basis.

1. Prayers are even now offered as an important element in public meetings, or to pay homage to departed leaders, even deifying political leaders at places which are described as Samadhi. For instance a certain portion of the river bank of Jamuna at Delhi the capital of Indian union has been apportioned for Samadhi, in honour of only certain important privileged political leaders. These Samadhi have almost acquired the status of a place of pilgrimage and places to offer prayers for all dignitaries from abroad who visit India for political or other reason. They are also becoming places for visit by local dignitaries on certain days and occasions for offering prayers. A number of public functions, organized by the state, or other bodies, are also inaugurated with a programme of prayers to some deity. Even the literary, cultural, socio-economic or other functions organized by various groups also start with some invocation to certain gods or goddesses.
2. The content of prayers, the supernatural forces to which the prayers are offered, the time of prayers, the locations of prayers and choice of persons who should initiate the prayers and who should respond to it; the places and roads chosen for chanting prayers, or processional prayers, even the colour, the style and design of dress and other

items selected by those who lead or those who join the prayers, have acquired such day to day politically sensitive significance, that they have sometimes become tension points in the life of Indian community. In fact the phenomenon of prayers have become points of bitter struggles even among the followers of Hindu religion, belonging to various cults sub-cults, *sampradayas* and even among political parties in the country, who organize and choose the mode of mechanism of offerings through prayers.

It should be noted that among the followers of Hindu religion, even today certain categories of Hindus, belonging to certain castes, communities, or gender groups, are denied the right to enter certain “holy” places called temples, and offer prayers, or even *darshan* by entering the place. Contemporary Hindu society is turned into a warring group of these upper caste Hindus, who prevent the entry of the sections of Hindus, called depressed castes, viewed as human groups who pollute the sacredness of the god’s abodes.

The veritable fierce battle has been going on, even after forty years of achieving political freedom, on the right to enter temples, worship and offer prayers. These struggles around the right to enter and to pray in certain places have acquired stormy, political dimensions. In fact these struggles of the deprived sections even to enter a religious precinct and pray, express the protest potential of religion, against the use of religion by the section of Hindus, who use it to serve the privileges of upper castes, upper strata and even upper echelons of those who want to modernize Indian society on the basis

of “Betting on the rich,” Prayers and right to enter places to pray to the gods and goddesses residing in those places have become highly explosive political issues in contemporary Indian society.

3. **Sacrifices, Yagnas and Havana’s**: The Hindu religion has evolved a complicated prescription of behaviours in the forms of variety of sacrificial acts for its adherents. These acts differ from cults to cults, *sampradayas* to sub-sampradayas. These religious behavioural rituals range from sprinkling of some drops of water, scattering of leaves of particular plants and trees considered auspicious, offerings of goods of certain types of placate or prevent the wrath of various deities. These religious behavioural practices even take the form of offering of animals and even human sacrifices to the deities though becoming rare now.

Hindu religion is an aggregate of various sub-religions, cults or *sampradays* or *Mathas*, each one of these prescribing specific differences upon acts of sacrifices.

Each one of these cults or *sampradays* claims that it embodies the true knowledge of wishes of the supernatural. The content, the form, the location, and the value of scarifies prescribed by them according to each one of them embody the true essence of Hinduism.

Scarifies are offered to a verity of gods and goddesses. Hindu gods and goddesses acquire bizarre forms and their wishes and expectations, as formulated by their special spokesmen, take an almost kaleidoscopic, weird and inhuman content. The sacrifices are offered to “*Anna Devata*” (Food God), the gods and goddesses of

various diseases (*Balia Kaka, Sitala Mata*) etc. The rain god, the river goddesses, and plethora of other sacrifices are forms of religious behavioural patterns, which are performed to propitiate various categories of supernatural beings to disarm their wrath or win their favour.

A sociological analysis of religious behaviour characterized as prayers and sacrifices, evolved by those who claim to be followers of Hindu religion has acquired importance for many reasons.

1. They help us to comprehend the conceptions of citizens with regard to what cause diseases, floods and other devastating phenomena. Further, they also help to understand why in spite of growing awareness of scientific, natural explanation of such phenomena; the citizens still continue to have such religious practices even today on a fairly large scale even after forty years of independence?
2. They also can help us to get a clue to the social habits, style of living of the believers of Hinduism and ethical norms.
3. They also can help us to know their attitude to world and life.
4. They can help us to understand the relationship between caste practicing various kind of sacrifices, prayers, showing the hierarchical caste set up, and their approach to the human beings belonging to various castes. They also indicate how discriminatory wishes are attributed to supernatural beings.

5. The analysis of prayers and sacrifices may also provide clues to develop certain psychological and cultural traits of different social groups.
6. Prayers and sacrifices to particular deities have specific meaning, purpose and indicate specific human needs. They are based on belief in specific qualities, capacities and power of specific deities. These deities are born in the human consciousness of their followers reflecting certain stage in the socio-economic development of society. For instance, the deities of Vedic period, the deities found in Pauranic period, or the deities worshipped during British and post-Independence period are many a times different and even inimical. The new or the old ones acquire different status in different periods. The pantheons of gods and goddesses also change, and their status differs during different periods. In fact, Hindu mythology itself reflects the history of Hindu society in terms of symbolism and since society undergoes and transformation the pantheons of gods, goddesses and their retinues also undergoes change. Their significance is also changed.
7. The changing emphasis and values attached to prayers and sacrifices also reflects the inner conflicts, prevailing in various sections of Hindu society. Certain categories of prayers and sacrifices are considered inappropriate, harmful; and derogatory as well as sub serving certain established conservative forces, while others reflects higher human values, indicating the

endeavours to remove oppressive, restrictive, socio-cultural practices found in Hindu religion.

As indicated earlier, rituals play a very powerful role in the behaviour in any religion. In the life of Indian citizens pursuing Hindu religion, rituals play overbearing role in shaping their lives in fastidious manner. In fact the concept of purity and pollution, have been elaborated to such an extensive form that they have become almost live-active principle shaping the lives of Hindus in minutest details.

As indicated earlier rituals are the religious means by which the purity of the individual and social life are enforced and guaranteed in this world.

The Hindu religion has elaborated as well as prescribed complex and varied behaviour for individuals as well as different social groups. It encompasses all spheres of life. The rituals are complex because they are associated with numerous significant and insignificant activities of individual's and social groups. Rituals are crystallized into sets of practices for specific castes and even sub-caste groups reflecting the distinctive, discriminatory and hierarchy status within Hindu society. Performances of rituals are to be enforced by sanctions in the forms of social condemnation, threat of excommunication, boycott and even physical punishments by community or caste, or caste leaders.

The remarkable features of Hindu religion are the dominance of rituals in almost every detail of daily practices of individuals and groups.

Rituals are elaborated and performed when an individual or groups start any activity including the way in which food is consumed. For

instances an individual Brahmin starts consuming food by drawing a magic circle around the dish.

He also apportions cooked food to gods and goddesses. There are bath rituals, occupational rituals and rituals at the time of constructing a structure, either for personal use or for community purposes, popularly known as *Bhumi puja* or rituals while occupying a new residential premise. Rituals connected with sowing, harvesting, or for worshipping of the tools, machines or other instruments. Rituals in the form of fasting, or eating of certain types of food products, for auspicious days or before performing certain *puja*, *hawanas*, *yagnas*, rituals even when a child goes to school for the first time or passes an examination. In fact, Hinduism has evolved such overall encompassing categories of rituals, that they are being practiced with regards to almost every activity starting from morning to night, from month to month, year to year and almost from birth to death. Even the dead person is not left alone as specific ritual such as *shradha* ceremony is performed for the dead individual for certain number of days. *Shradha* ceremonies, at specific places or a specific days and periods are still practiced on a vast scale among Hindus.

As rightly pointed out by some eminent scholars, it is difficult to locate in the Hindu society, where religious observances end and secular practice begin.

The problem of rituals observances has acquired peculiar economic, political and cultural, educational overtones in the post-independent Indian society. While on the basis of constitution and the policies pursued by the state and administrative, machinery, predominantly manned by

upper castes or a small upper echelons of some of the backward castes, claim themselves to be secular, they are actively practicing, encouraging or even directly boosting religious rituals. Even they favour certain categories of rituals to others. It is interesting to note that the state and the upper strata of Hindu society, are increasingly trying to foist upper caste Hindu religious rituals as symbolizing the essence of Hinduism. Its implications need examination.

We will discuss the significance of these policies in post-independent India in a separate volume.

Hinduism as an institutional complex

As indicated earlier, the Hindu religion followed by overwhelming majority of Indian citizens, does not appear to be a well knit centrally coordinated church like information. It appears to be a conglomeration of numerous sub religious and religious cults or sampradayas or other categories of cult formation, acquiring distinct forms of religious organizations.

Some of these religious organizations function on an all India scale, some on the provincial and others on local basis. These organizations – maths, ashrams, temple complexes are places where their adherents flock to worship and pray to various deities as also to listen to religious discourses. It is interesting and even instructive to learn that the sampradayas and temples about the same god evolve different categories of pantheons attached to the principal god. For instances, sampradayas associated with Lord Krishna take on multiple forms, with emphasis on certain categories of associate members connected with Krishna. Vallabh

Sampradays, Radha Swami Sampradayas, Jagganath Sampradayas, Catania Sampradayas, “Swami Narayan Sampradaya, Vithal cult etc are all devoted to Krishna as the chief god. Sampradayas and cults with their institutional complex arise around secondary gods also included in pantheons, who acquire in course of time separate identity of their own. For instance the emergence of Ganesh cult and Hanuman cult and similar other ones in different parts of India indicate such categories of cults, in different periods and around different deities.

These religious organizations own property which is substantial almost rivaling in some wealth some of the richest individuals, corporations or multi-national companies. They maintain a permanent staff of priests, pujaris and a hierarchy of personal, reminding of staff and line offices of any big secular organization. The division of functions is very methodically worked out, allocating different tasks with precision of well oiled bureaucratic set up. They also have a special category in their staff consisting of priests and preachers who spread the doctrine of their respective religious and sub-religious cult among people. They have elaborate, distinct and detailed rituals of religious practices, for the followers of the cult or sampradayas, including mode of prayer, sartorial dresses, type and mode of eating and taboos against certain categories of dresses and food and other practices. Hindu society, is littered with religious organization as those headed by the descendants of Shankaracharya, Madhavacharya, Ramanuj, Vallabha, Sahajanand and other all considering themselves as belonging to Hindu religion. They all differ from others in subtle points of philosophy and details about rituals.

Their mode of collection of funds in the form of gifts, donations or other means is fascinating story of enrichment by these sampradayas who preach simplicity to followers, while accumulating vast treasures of wealth. The mode of payment to different categories of incumbents working in these sampradayas and temples also reveals the same types of exploitation and dependence and hierarchy as in other organizations.

It should be noted that some of the sub-religious cults have not been institutionalized into church type organizations. Their protagonists and preachers have not been integrated into regular organizations. They operate as peripatetic religious exhorters.

Categories of Religious intermediaries between supernatural and common Laity

This leads to other aspects of Hindu religion. It concerns the types of men, who are supposed to be exclusively performing and guiding the religious practices of the followers of particular sect. they perform special functions – and guide ritual behavior practices of Hindus.

Broadly they comprises of a few categories.

1. Religious heads of various *sampradayas* called *Archryas* such as Shankaracharyas, Madhavacharyas.
2. Mahan's who head or regulates the activities and funds of Maths – a distinct type of religious organization found in Hindu religion.
3. A massive army of *sadhus* and *sanyasis* though claiming to have renounced the world and shedding off duties and rights associated with earlier secular life wherein the person has been

born, either living in ashrams or living a semi-mobile existence, surviving, or thriving on the charities, hospitality or donations and gifts from the worldly human beings. They all belong to some religious groups have acquired unique aura, awe, reverence as well as has generated an undercurrent of fear among ordinary Hindus. It is believed that offending, disrespecting or not properly respecting them will result into some unfavourable consequences both in this world as well as in other world, whatever it may be, where the soul of the individual is to locate itself.

4. In Hindu religion which contains most elaborate, complicated and hierarchic specialized rituals and behavioural practices, an influential category of religion men has emerged called priests. These priestly groups exercise powerful influence over the life of Hindus, since most of the secular life processes are very deeply colored by religion; many of the normal activities before being undertaken require at least to be hallowed by religion through special rituals which priests of various kinds have specialized.

Priests are of various kinds. There are family priests, who serve the religious needs of the family, there are caste and sub-caste priests who cater to the requirement of castes and sub-caste. There are priests who refuse and consider it below their dignity to serve the needs of some of the polluted castes and for whom there are special priest groups having very low status. There are priests who cater to religious needs of certain rural or urban communities. There are priests who are attached to royal or princely sections of Hindu population, known as *Raj Purohits*. Some are

attached to temples. Hindu society abound in such categories of religious intermediaries, probably unparalleled anywhere. The intercourse between these holy men and priests belonging to various cults, maths, ashrams, *sampradayas*, as well as belonging to priestly class is based on their own conceptions of supernatural, their own version of the will and wishes of the supernatural as well as temper and evolution of moods of the supernatural elements. They shape religious ritual practices, to guide the behaviour and morals of ordinary lay followers. The source of income of intermediaries, their minors and bitter conflicts and struggles, their attitudes, approaches and demands from the followers and their active intervention in influencing economic, political, social, educational, cultural and familial and even sex life needs in depth explanations. In modern post – independent Indian society where the constitution and state actively endeavors to establish modern secular society founded on the declaration of equality of all citizens irrespective of the religion, the role of these categories of religious intermediaries have posed serious problems.

We will discuss the role played by them in a separate volume. However, in this first volume we will examine in detail a category of such intermediaries, known popularly as God men.

Significance of Temple in Indian Society

In Indian society temple have been and are playing a very crucial role in shaping the life of Hindus.

1. It not only functions as a place of worship and prayer for certain gods and goddesses or their pantheons, but as a centre and theatre of many activities of certain sections of Hindu community.

It affects not only the Hindus but all those who live in community. It affects not only the Hindus but all those who live in the proximity of that religious structure even though they may belong to other religious faiths. It affects even those who do not believe in any religion or existence of Supernatural.

2. Temples undertake many functions. They are associated with the education of Hindus. They maintain schools where children and youngsters of higher castes receive religious and even secular education. Temples also become Centers of religious discourses and *kathas*, where the legends of the Hindus and their gods, heroes and avatars are narrated. Temples also organize philanthropic and social welfare work. Temples become the repository of money, gold, silver and jewels, grains and clothes, offered by the believers. Around temples, one finds a body of people, who survive on the crumbs thrown to them by the faithful and by those who manage the affairs of the temples. The presence of clusters of individuals who survive by begging is a pathetic sight around every temple entrance.

The temples provide an arena where organized collective, social and religious functions such as festivals, religious processions, *rath yatras* of gods and goddesses belonging to various sects are carried on. They are acquiring a new politico-religious significance in post – Independent India. The temples are also center and sources of nurturing traditional literacy and artistic culture. Some of the big temples retain a retinue of singers,

dancers, musicians, craftsmen, artists and professionals engaged in specialized activities like sculpture, painting, cooking, gardening, floral and other decorations which serve the requirement of these abodes of gods and goddesses, as visualized by the followers of the particular deity for which the temple is built. The temples also act as Centers to propagate and strengthen certain ethical codes of conduct for individuals and believers of the faith, prescribed by the representatives and heads of *Sampradayas*.

The heads of the temple, temple complexes or chains of temples, constructed and operated by various *Sampradayas* or by followers of those *Sampradayas*: operate as inexorable moral critique, controller of behaviour, both sacred and secular of lives of the followers. Temples play and have played an important role in shaping the pattern and type of economic life at the level of production, distribution, and modes of consumption of the goods and services of the who follow the cults, for which temples are built and function. Temples operate as dispenser of justice not only for religious deviation and violations, but also for secular actions, considered as crime, or wrong by the ethical norms embodied in the *Sampradayas* to which that temple belongs. Temples have and are also playing today significant role in shaping political life as well as artistic and educational endeavours of the followers of Hindu faith.

Hence, a proper comprehensive understanding of temples and temple complexes as Centers and agency of certain *Sampradayas* which perform certain religious and this worldly functions of these *Sampradayas* and sub serve the interest of certain sections of Hindu society, has acquired significance. We need to understand the social role of the religious institutions in affecting the activities of Hindus. In fact, in the post – Independent Indian society, the role which temples play has acquired explosive political significance. To appreciate and properly or reactionary it is essential to keep in mind some of the crucial issues germane to this specific religious institution.

Did temples exist during all stages of historical development of Indian society? Did they exist during the long historical Palaeolithic and Neolithic phases of Indian people? Did they exist during the period of Indus Valley civilization? Did temples exist during Vedic periods? How is it that temples gain central importance in certain period of Indian history? What role they played in changing the focus of religious inquiries from profound philosophical reflections as found in Vedic period to detailed rituals of prayers and sacrifices and worship of idols of gods and goddesses and the rituals in temples to suit the needs and expectations of different gods and goddesses or their pantheons? Why Hindu religious bodies felt so acutely about creating specific edifices in the form of temples, and to multiply them, then their icons or idols were already being worshipped? Similarly, it is necessary to study the reasons for the types, sizes and numbers of edifices of temples, reasons for the desire for rebuilding and expanding them.

It should be recognized that there are thousands of temples of smaller or bigger sizes, scattered throughout India. They are found even outside India where followers of different *Sampradayas* have migrated. There are street temples, locality temples, caste temples, there are temples of varied size from small constructions to imposing one. There are temples which attract large population from various regional groups. There are certain temples which has acquired special halo attracting millions of Hindu devotees.

Further temple building has been a constantly expanding activity of Hindus after Independence, particularly those sections who are claiming to evolve a secular society. In fact kings, influential administrators, rich and powerful strata of Hindus, consider building of a temple of particular *Sampradayas*, with pomp and splendour, as a sign of their status and try to outdo similar structure built by others. This activity has been going on during British and more frenziedly during post-independent period.

In fact the issues of temple, temple, building, location where they should be built, the insistence on building a temple for specific god, at only certain places, where sacred structure of other religion has been existing for centuries, and that too when scores and scores of temples, for the same god actually exist in that area have acquired political overtones which have turned Indian union as a battlefield of communal hatred and violence. There is a diplomatic and discreet silence about how earlier Hindu temples were erected on the same place or the religious structures of other religions like Buddhist and others, after demolishing or converting them into, or subordinated or brought under the control of some Hindu myths or

sampradaya. This untold story unleashed some of the most brutal battles in various parts of the country.

Ramjanmabhumi dispute, the dispute among Buddhist and Hindus over *Bodhgaya* religious complex is the classic cases of this development. These conflicts are becoming sharper among (1) other religions and Hindus (2) between temple holders of the same god, which existed earlier and the powerful lobbies, who want to erect a special temple either by erasing other temples of some other's god's or by reducing their significance in the eyes of believers. For instance the attempt to give prominence to the new Ram temple being erected in Ayodhya, over already existing temples in Ayodhya has resulted into bitter conflicts among various controllers of ram temple. The enormous enthusiasm shown by the richer section of Hindus, encouraged, subsidized or supported by providing infrastructural facilities by various political parties and state, have augured ominous dimensions in post – independence India, particularly since seventies. The massive *yatras*, of regional and all India nature organized with specific symbols by even political parties and newly emerging religious organizations have acquired monstrous dimensions, generating an atmosphere of hatred for certain groups, clashes among various denominations and sects and even affecting the electoral and administrative secular process in the country in post – independence period, threatening even the limited democratic framework that has been erected after Independence.

How far this hysterical craze for multiplying Hindu temples, based on a deep hatred against other religionists and the religious ethos underlying that craze are compatible with creation of cultural mainstream which is

expected to bring about national integration on secular axis so vociferously propagated by those who claim that Hindu cultural mainstream, and the values underlying Hinduism will help national integration?

Can secularism of Indian society comprised of citizens belonging to various religious and non-religious professions be generated on the basis of cultural mainstream which is founded on logic of constructing temples, destroying mosques or other shrines, including smaller temples devoted to the same Hindu god, or pantheon of gods?

All these questions have acquired crucial significance in contemporary Indian society, whose rulers are claiming that they are establishing a secular social order but on the basis of the value premises embodying the essence of Hindu religion as the foundation of mainstream cultural.

We will discuss these issues in this series in a separate volume, dealing with the rise of new religion – revivalist, fundamentalist movements in the post-world war-II phase of Indian society.

After describing the central features of Hindu religion, in terms of its major premise about supernatural and various ritual behavioural practices, characterized as religious behavioural practices oriented to supernatural, we will not briefly refer to some problems connected with Hindu religion.

One of the most baffling problems in the concept of supernatural in Hinduism which takes on bizarre forms, ranging from various supernatural beings, souls, and forces even culminating in some theological philosophical version that Brahman is the ultimate reality wherein the

entire world itself is considered as an illusion. In contrast to this theory of world as an illusion, (Leela or Maya) the dominant concepts are based on other theories which consider supernatural as creator of material universe, regulator of that universe, and directing the activities of various categories of elements, inanimate, of this so-called created world.

The philosophical roots of religion in idealistic philosophy should be properly comprehended if the concept of supernatural, the core concept of religion, is to be grasped. "Idealism by giving primacy to consciousness, to idea over matter, furnishes the philosophical basis to religion. Such assumption underlying the idealist thinking has to accept the position that material universe was "Created" at some moment of some point of time, and at some point in space (except, of course, the most extreme idealist who flatly deny the reality of matter and consider it as total illusions").

The concept of 'Creation' and the 'Creator' is elevated as god, or supernatural force or being of some kind, and considered even as a governor and mentor of universe including the lives and destinies of humankind. The concept of consciousness or philosophically elevated concept of idea, become the basic premise, in the form of soul, the spirit the supernatural beings, or forces, in religion.

The emergence, persistence and coexistence of such varied, bizarre, contradictory concepts of supernatural elements – most primitive to most sophisticated ones – operating simultaneously and practiced concurrently, with fairly powerful influence in shaping the visions and practices of Hindus even in the last decade of twentieth century needs closer examination. These concepts are generating socio-economic and politico –

cultural currents which affect various sections of Hindu population differently. They also cause different and conflicting interactions among citizens of India, belonging to other faiths or pursuing rationalist, humanist, materialist, agnostic and atheist views.

1. How did such contradictory belief in supernatural emerge and persist in Indian society across ages? What socio-economic and politico-cultural forces led to and helped to continue such conceptions of supernatural during the long historical past of Indian society? What concepts of supernatural and practices germinated by them helped to support buttress or justify the iniquitous, exploitative, oppressive caste, class.

Gender biased system of social order and ethics and when? Also which concepts and practice of Hindu religion played the role of expressing the protect potential of oppressed and exploited castes, classes and gender to strive to establish a more humane and just social order?

2. How can ritual bathing in some select rivers considered holy and that too in only certain spots, and on certain occasions and days generate secular scientific temper and exhort spirit of revolt against unjust social order among millions of Hindus who are segregated, exploited, and oppressed, by the fellow believers belonging to upper and middle layers of castes and classes who themselves encourage, facilitate and support such holy baths? How taking of baths or attending to temples will generate critical approaches to face, confront and fight the system, which itself is responsible for their

exploitations and oppression? How can baths and prayers in temples enable the underprivileged to fight against leaders of the system who are trying to modernize Indian society, based on the path which relies on and strengthens the very majority of backward and depressed castes and classes?

The modern natural sciences have established beyond doubt that all rivers are natural having nothing holy or sacred about them. Further, when the directors of modernizations processes are themselves transforming these rivers as cesspools of stink and stench by erecting industrial and other structures for chasing profit, what scientific temper is generated by the sacred baths in these polluted rivers? It is interesting to note that these leaders who claim to be torch-bearers of scientific temper and secularism themselves believe in the sacredness and holy essence of some of the rivers and pompously participate in religious practices of taking a bath in holy rivers at certain places or throwing the ashes of the dead in them.

Similarly, how is the special spiritual genius of Hindus elevated if temples for the same gods and goddesses multiply faster than the populations of Hindus? How can they stimulate scientific and secular temper among the people? How does the massive outburst of temple constructions generate secularism? Does it generate the protest potential of the exploited and oppressed to struggle for human social order or does it work to divert their energies to futile, hostile, divisive trends among the followers? Do they really not help the exploitation and oppression of the lower castes and classes by

the upper and affluent sections by frittering away their energies in fratricidal conflicts thereby weakening their protest potential?

Questions are also asked about the capacity of *yagyas*, *havanas*, *yatras*, *kathas*, mass, prayers or craze for pilgrimages to temples and holy places to create a new ethos, which will generate a spirit of independent inquiry, self-reliance and sensitiveness to fight against prevailing harrowing, degrading and humiliating sufferings which the overwhelming majority of citizens experiences. How will such religious practices help the masses to resist revolt and abolish the system which exploits and oppresses them? How will they equip them to fight the castes and classes which perpetuate such a system? How will such practices help them to strive to evolve a new humane, non-exploitative, non-oppressive social order, which will embrace all citizens irrespective of their caste, class, religion, language, gender or race?

3. Does the recrudescence of this type of manifestations or religious practices and resurrection of avatars like Ram, Krishna, gods and goddesses like Durga, Kali, elephant headed Ganpati or Monkey god Hanuman, help evolve scientific temper? Are these manifestations not strengthen value system favourable to certain sections of populations who benefit from the path of development pursued by the state to divert the attention and divide and waylay the people from knowing the real socio-economic and politico-cultural causes of their plight?

All these manifestations of Hindu religiously in post independent India have raised many significant questions with regard to the role of Hindu religion in Indian society. In fact an honest search for assessing those trends in Hindu religion, which are pro-establishment, revivalist and supporting Brahmin chaturvarnya and iniquitous cultural and ethical values which justify and strengthen conservative pro-exploitative, pro-oppressive socio-economic order of value premises on which such systems are being built has become crucial, similarly search for the trends which help the protest potential of the masses by generating in them a sense of dignity as human beings, reveal to them the real cause of their plight and humiliation and prepare them to struggle against socio-political and economic forces which obstruct them from achieving a more humane, non-exploitative, non-oppressive socio-economic order enveloping all citizens of Indian union and has also very serious theoretical and practical significance.

Role of Hinduism in Modern Indian Society

- *Uday Mehta*

India has witnessed a massive upsurge of traditional as well as modern religion-mystical cults of God-Men, Swamis, Gurus, Shastries, Bapus and Bhagats particularly during the last three decades. Some of these cults operate at local, district or regional level, while some have established an extensive network at national as well as international levels. Along with the new cults, the hold of various traditional religious sects has acquired new dimension in recent years. Increasing politicization of religion in last few years has posted a serious dilemma with regards to role of religion in modern Indian Society.

It is not only in India but even in Western countries particularly even in industrially advanced nations like the U.S.A. the new along with traditional religious movements have gained an unprecedented momentum in recent years. The growing influence of religion in U.S.S.R. and China has been also widely reported. The powerful influence of the church in Polish Solidarity movements and Buddhist impact on Vietnamese liberation struggle has been also widely acknowledged. The dominant role of the church in overthrow of the authoritarian regime in Philippines and the Buddhist monks' hold in recent reactionary political upheaval in Ceylon could not be overstressed. Decisive influence of Islamic fundamentalism in Iranian revolution and several other Muslim countries has been sufficiently highlighted. While the emergence and significance of the liberation theology in Latin America would call for an independent appraisal.

The persistence and extension of religious influence in advanced Western Countries, in colonial and post-colonial nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and even in so called socialist societies have raised some basic questions with regard to the significant of religion in human society. Large number to the sociologists and anthropologists on the basis of their survey of primitive as well as modern societies have come to the firm conclusion that it is impossible to visualize any present or even future society devoid of presence of religion in some form or the other. They feel that the need for religion would be felt in all human societies, irrespective of their cultural or technological levels, or social-economic systems as religion fulfils some basic urges, emotional needs and provides sense of security to individuals. Several critics in this context have also pointed out the hollowness of the Marxist dictum of reducing the significance of religion as an opiate for the oppressed and exploited strata.

Marxist View

It is true that Vulgar Marxist appraisals have focused exclusively on the role of religion as opium for the poor and highlighting its reactionary significance for the toiling people. Nevertheless such dogmatic and objective approach evolved by Marx and Engels in their critique of religion.

A close perusal of the views expressed by Marx and Engels on religion as reflected in their various works, as their observations on the radical significance of the early Christianity, its peculiar origin and Jesus as messiah of the oppressed and in their writing on present war in Germany, highlighting Munzer's effective use of the poor peasants. Their works on Hegel's philosophy of Right, the Holy Family, Jewish question

and other reveal their deep concern for all relevant facts, their dynamic approach, examination and modification of their interpretations in the light of fresh appraisal and exposure to new situations, and the least dogmatic assertions as the dominant features of their perspective on religion.

Marx and Engels in all probability were influenced by Taylor's view in tracing the origin of religion in the primitive man's sense of awe and fear, in the face of an inexplicable nature, religion emerging as fantastic reflection in man's mind of those external forces that control their daily life. It was however Engels who first pointed out that "while both magic and religion have their origin in humanity's lack of control over the forces of nature, religion however also reflects humanity's lack of control over the social forces that resulted from class domination. "Marx and Engels in their concrete appraisal of the role of religion through the ages highlighted its contradictory functions, its positive as well as negative significance. While indicating that historically the primary function of religion world over had been to sanctify repressive institutions, they have also brought out the fact that rebellious movements, among the appraised in pre-bourgeois periods and even subsequently, the aims and aspirations of social agitations have also found needs and expectations of the insurgent masses.

Such observation also throw new light on Marx's dictum that religion is the opium of the masses, which is generally presumed to mean that religion is a drug which enable the toiling strata to bear their miseries by losing themselves in dreams that deprive them of the capacity to revolt. This is the conception of the Enlightenment philosophers and it is undoubtedly a good deal of what Marx meant, but it is not all that he

meant. Immediately preceding his famous sentence is the sentence 'religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Opium dream could rouse to protest and struggle, could stimulate as well as stupefy. Nevertheless, option is naves conductive could not be achieved at that time, as the struggle for it could only be an anticipation of the future, that the urge for it assumed the form of fantasy?

However, it should be pointed out that Engels thought that since the French revolution, religion has become incapable of serving any progressive class as the ideological vehicle of its aspirations. This has not come true as borne out by the heroic contribution of the liberation theology particularly in several Latin American countries in strengthening and extending the struggles of the oppressed and exploited against the ruling oligarchy, similarly the role of catholic Church in Polish liberation struggle and recent solidarity movement of independent trade union could not be brushed aside as reactionary by any stretch of imagination. It has been also reported that Buddhist theology made significant contribution in heroic Vietnamese liberation war against American imperialism.

In this context, it should also be noted that the persistence and spread of religious influence in so called socialist countries as well as advanced capitalist nations do not disprove the validity of the Marxist observation on religion. As indicated earlier it was Engels who first suggested that till men acquire control over social forces (which would not be possible in all class societies) religion in some or the other form would persist. In this sense, it is neither in U.S.A., not U.S.S.R., or for that

matter even in China or in other countries, so called working class states, toiling people have acquired command over social forces or exploitation and oppression of man by man has come to an end. This generates a climate of uncertainty and increasing insecurity leaving enough space for flourishing of religious influences.

Religion in Modern Indian Society

As indicated earlier, India is experiencing a new wave of religious revivalism especially since last three decades what is being projected as Hinduism in recent years is novel concept based on crude amalgam of various contradictory set of beliefs, rituals and practices.

As pointed out by Romila Thaper, “The New Hinduism which is being currently propagated by the *Sanghs*, *Parishads* and *Samaja* is an attempt to restructure the indigenous religions as a monolithic, uniform religion rather paralleling some of the features of Semitic religion, “Further” Hindu sects unlike Buddhism or Islam are characterised by distinct and independent origin connecting them to particular founder or test, Only at a later stage attempts were made to assimilate some of these sects into dominant sects, what has survived over the centuries is not a single, monolithic religion but a diversity of religious sects which today have been put together under a uniform name”.

Frequent reiteration by upper caste elites these days that Hinduism for last thousand years has passed through very severe persecution conveniently ignore the fact that in the history of late thousand years, “Hinduism has witnessed the establishment of the powerful Shankaracharya Maths, *ashramas* and similar institutions attempting to

providing all ecclesiastical structure to strengthen conservatism, the powerful Dashnamis and Bairagi religious orders, the popular cults of *Nathpanthis*, the extremely significant sects of the major *Bhakti* teachers as Tukaram, Namdeo, Villabhacharya, Chaitanya, Dadoo and kabir, not to mention Nanak. The establishment of the sects, accompanied by wealthy patronage does account for the prosperity of temples and institutions. The last thousand years have been most assertive thrust of the major 'Hindu' sects. As a matter of fact non-violence of Hinduism is the nineteenth century myth, largely invented as a response to requirement of nationalism stressing the spiritual superiority of Indian culture.

Romila Thaper has aptly coined the new term 'Syndicated Hinduism' for modern Hinduism. According to her 'Syndicated Hinduism' draws largely on Brahmanical texts, the *Gita* and *Vedantic* thought, accepts some aspects of the Dharma Sutras and attempts to represent a modern a reformed religion. It ends up inevitable as a garbled form of Brahmanism with a motley of 'Values' drawn from other sources, such as bringing in elements of individual salvation from the *Bhakti* tradition of some *puranic* rituals. Its contradictions are many. The call to unite under Hinduism as a political identity is anachronistic.

This new Hindu phenomena has acquired strength as a result of the widening of the social base of political Hinduism in the post-independence period. The backward castes or more appropriately 'the other backward classes' who benefited from the initial phase of agrarian reforms have now entered the social-religious spheres which were till recently preserves of the upper caste-Hindus and have developed stakes in them. This phenomenon

is also described as a process of political Sanskritization. Large scale mobilizations as the *Shatmata Yagna* and the Ram Janam Bhoomi Andolan, in all probability would not be possible without the actual involvement of this enlarged base, Moreover, the following observation deserves attention. “The closing of ranks between the upper castes and the backward castes in recent seeks external enemies in order to consolidate its somewhat uneasy solidarity. Hindu communalism directed against minorities and scheduled caste is one of the outcomes”.

Nineteenth Century Religio-Reform Movement and Modern Hinduism

The chauvinistic thrust of the new Hinduism becomes strikingly evident if one compares it with the dominant spirit of the religion reform movement of the nineteenth century and the Bhakti Movement of the medieval period in India.

The modernization process introduced by the British despite its distorted nature, encouraged a secular and rational outlook, scientific knowledge and technical skills, new ways of thinking and self-reliance. It was a process by which men began to break away from medieval customs and superstitions and the fatalism based on traditional beliefs in karma, Maya and transmigration of the soul and by which new occupations and new relations among men began to emerge.

As brought out by Late Damodaran “The 19th Century thinker, though could not completely free himself from the concept of the supernatural but he began to interpret karma creatively instead of totalistically. The concept of karma underwent a radical change. Fatalism

gave way to a new sense of strength and confidence. The new thinker asserted that caste distinctions, priest and animal sacrifices and customs like sati and child marriage were not ordained by God or karma, but were created by man's ignorance".

Raja Ram Mohan Roy inaugurated the modern age in India. He opposed the caste system, idol worship, religious separatism, child marriage and the practice of sati. He advocated remarriage of widow, inter-caste marriage, supported English education and fought for freedom of speech. He founded Brahmo-Samaj. The teachings of the Brahmo-Samaj are summarized as follows:

"The wide universe is the sacred temple of the Brahman of the supreme being. The pure heart is the place of pilgrimage. Truth is the one eternal scripture. Faith is the foundation of all religions, love is the desire is the only form of ascetic renunciation recognized and proclaimed by the members of the Brahmo-Samaj".

Further, "This universalism appears to be a synthesis of the best elements of the upanishadic teachings and the ideas of Islam and Christianity"

Ranade was also inspired by the teaching of the Brahmo-Samaj, proclaimed intense faith in individual freedom and human dignity. He instead that revival was impossible and that reform was the only alternative open to sensible people. The emphasis is of life to mundane existence. Freedom of individual was now interlinked with his social and political emancipation.

“In the middle ages” as so aptly argued by late Damodaran, “self-emancipation was interpreted as an escape from the idea of sansara i.e. from social life. The ultimate aim of like was top end cycle of births and deaths, to liberate the atman from the physical body and the material environment and to modern age the concept of self-realization assumed a new meaning. The self was no more abstracted from life. The self was the social life, the self was that could find the fullest being only in social life, self-realization as the realization of the identity of the individual self with the universal self, meant the identification of one self with the whole humanity. Man could realize himself only in other man, in the totality of human existence that is Brahman”. Vivekananda himself explained this truth as follows:

“The individual’s happiness is the happiness of the whole; apart from the whole, the individual’s existence is inconceivable. This is an eternal truth and is the bed-rock on which the universe is build”.

As a matter of facts freedom, democracy and human dignity were the values of the 19th Century. Old values of renunciation, denial and withdrawal began to give place to social action, concepts like karma and dharma assumed new meaning.

Nevertheless, while the fact of freedom of the distinct contribution made by the 19th century religion-reform movements is true, one should not overlook the fact that the Bengal renaissance as well as its counterpart of Maharashtra were essentially sponsored by upper caste elites who were initially exposed to western liberal ideas and value and had aspiration based on democratic and scientific spirit. Although they came in sharp

conflict with Sanatani orthodox Hindu religious protagonists, their impact was by and large confirmed to certain selected intellectual circles.

In sharp contrast to this elitist movement, it is argued that the movement led by Jotirao Phule through the Satyashodhak Samaj founded by him in 1873, should for the old social order sought by the former under the pretext of modernization.

As pointed out by Gail Omvedt, “Their identification was in the Hindu cultural system and as modern intellectuals concerned about the Hindu developed an ideology which sought to use a revitalised Hindu tradition as the spiritual and more centre around which the liberal modernism of the west could be created”. This is also bubbled as “Eastern Morals and Western Science”. Upper caste elites accepted the “Aryan Theory of race” which had implication of identifying them ethnically with their British conquerors rather than majority of their countrymen, which traced civilization in India from the Aryan conquest, and which provided a new pseudo-scientific justification for the caste hierarchy, and they developed an economic theory which looked to the capitalist development of India freed from the destructive bonds of British Imperialism. Hence, they opposed foreign exploitation without considering the exploitation of workers by native capitalist or peasants by landlords and lower bureaucracy.

It is further argued that the majority of Indians were dark-skinned non-Aryans. The majority of Indians were peasants and had no hope either in the near or distant future of becoming member of the bureaucratic elite or capitalist, large or small. The liberal modernization of

Hindu culture and the capitalist development of India did not conform to their interests. Peasants, tribals, workers, low caste, untouchables were all adversely affected by the colonial regime and responded like the upper caste elites, with both renaissance and rebellion, their ideology and organization remained in a more incident crude localized and in complete for. Nevertheless it may be said with Jotirao Phule the low caste, non-Aryans, peasants masses of India came to consciousness.

While taking note of the fact that Dayanand's version of Aryan culture was not racial as he stressed on acquisition of virtues of ideal vedic practices and rejected birth as determined of individual's status in society and similarly Vivekananda called for liberalization of women and ending of Brahmin superiority even as he bitterly attacked "westernized reformers". Gail Omvedt along with several other holds the view that those religious leaders sought to harmonise the early emphasis of liberal and conservative Brahmins. They argued that the Hindu nation must be considered holy; but insisted as well that social evils of the present day, including caste, were not ancient religious customs. They formulated a revivalist nationalism that was to have dangerous anti-Muslim aspects.

In dismissing totally the dominant religious traditions of India, it is further stated that, Phule accepted the assumption that something had to be put in its place 'even a revolutionary culture required a moral religious center. Hence he never rejected the idea of Dharma but rather attempted to establish a universalistic one. Sarvajanic Satya Dharma, it is suggested that expressed this concept completely: implying that the moral basis of society has to be centered on truth or rationality and it had to be one that

unified all men and women as equals. The world was regarded as good and holy in contrast to the vedantic projection of it's as an illusion.

Further the same author remarks that Phule's thinking does not show: Indian tendency to the reconciliation of opposites and is based upon the principle that an irreconcilable conflict of interest existed between the Brahmin elite and non-Brahmin masses. Secondly, Phule's theory of exploitation focuses on cultural and ethnic factors rather than economic and political ones. Although he displayed great concern for economic and political aspects of exploitation, Phule's ideology, in short was based on identification with peasant masses and on attachment to revolutionary values of equality and rationality such concern for the poor Kisans also reflected in his projection of Baliraja as a peasant God, drawing on the image of the common man and his focus on the plight of woman and untouchables.

The basic question that is posed in this context is about the appropriate center of a "national culture". "If the focus is on Sanskritic Hinduism, Vedic Culture, Vedantis Philosophy, Mahabharata and Ramayan stories, this implies bias in favour of the upper caste and towards indirect support of the caste system and geographically in favour of north India. If the emphasis is towards non-Vedic culture, towards traditions of religious cultural revolt running through Buddhism and the Bhakti cults, then the bias is socially in favour of the masses and geographically in favour of the outlying linguistic regions of Indians. In scholarship and nationalist thinking the bias up to now has been towards been towards a sankristic and therefore elite basis to Indian culture, but in

fact non-sanskritic traditions have as much claims to an all-Indian spread”.

Non-Brahmin movement or what was also popularized as self-respect movement in Tamil Nadu under the leadership of Periar had powerful emotional appeal for the masses. Periar preached a new secular form of marriage which would have no priest of any caste. Idol-breaking, removal of caste name plate (particularly those of Brahmins), propagating the eradication of superstitions beliefs and practices, burning the copies of Ramayana and the Puranas and demanding the expulsion of the Brahmin from Tami-Nadu, were his major programmers’ of anti-Brahminism. Periar’s popular method of communication and programmes adopted by him created the popular stream in the elite N.B.M. in Tamil-Nadu.

Both these protest movement against the Brahminic domination ad landlord, money-lenders exploitation of poor kisans in Maharashtra, later degenerated into castists and elitist movement utilising anti-Brahmin platform for sub serving the interest of vocal and affluent sections of backwards castes. In a sense they over a period started, articulating the aspirations and interests of the rich farmers and intermediate caste elites that had begun to emerge under the British patronage and the socio-economic changes brought about as a result of the British conquest in India. In the case of Tamil Nadu the movement was dominated by the elite right from its inception.

As a matter of fact the resent aggressive version of Syndicate Hinduism is jointly sponsored and articulated by the upper and backward castes. As observed earlier backward caste have acquired wider social and

political base as a result of first land reforms introduced after independence.

As we could see the major focus of particularly the nineteenth century religio-reform movement and even of much more radical pro-poor movement led by Phule including that of non-Brahmins movement in Tamil Nadu was on the Propagation of liberal values and rational outlook and were essentially directed against orthodox Brahminic rituals, undesirable customs as *Satee*, child-marriage, prohibition of widow-marriage, superstitions, monopoly of priesthood, against untouchability and for the spread of education among women, towards the improvement of women's plight and their rehabilitation against monolithic, aggressive, highly authoritarian new version of Hinduism as projected by the upper and backward caste in recent years.

The progressive liberal character of the nineteenth century religion-reform movement, though dominated by upper caste affluent section and despite its very limited impact could be seen in its reinterpretation of traditional religious deals, *Tatawam Asi*, self-realisation in terms of striving for collective happiness of Indian humanity late Damodaran while tracing the genesis of the post – independence resurgence of religious revivalism remarks, “Millions of people had hoped that political independence would lead to new social order which would abolish poverty, unemployment and human degradation and guarantee opportunities and freedom for every individual to build his personality, but all these hopes believed in practice.

The wide spread poverty and unemployment, exploitation and squalor, are leading to human degradation torment sensitive hearts.

Corruption, bribery and black markets have generated a “get rich-quicker” mentality and abominable” success ethics has begun to dominate society. Moral values are sacrificed at the after of the profits, rent and interest. The individual regards his own interest as something opposed to the interest of the people. This exaggerated pre occupation with one’s own person vitiates and distorts all human relations. It is only natural that under such conditions man is encountered with a sense of insignificance and powerlessness. He is subjected to feelings of isolation and abandonment. This situation has already produced a crisis of cultural and spiritual values leading to frustration and despair. People are left with a feeling of emptiness. The turmoil and the squalor, the anxieties and anguish the anarchy and the violence created by the capitalist path of development make life untenable and miserable”.

Vast bulk of toiling state, petty bourgeois and other gravitate towards religion out of sheer sense of helplessness and apathy, ruling classes by effectively playing on this sense of frustration and helplessness among the masses have whipped up religion propaganda which has already become instrumental in dividing and generating animosities among the different sections of Indian population on communal lines.

As a matter of fact since Independence the ruling classes in India as pointed out by Dr. A.R. Desai have evolved a dual policy which may appear contradictory but has proved extremely effective in perpetuating their rule and consolidating and expanding the capitalist development in this country. In economic, administrative and legal spheres they have evolved logical, rational, this worldly approach that could result in maximization of

economic gains to bourgeoisie. While in social and cultural sphere they have encouraged feudal institutions and traditional, religious values which has succeeded in stupefying, confusing masses and generating pessimistic, fatalistic outlook among them. With increasing political instability and aggravation of economic crisis as reflected in growing unemployment, widespread industrial sickness, increasing population of masses, rising inflation and the total bankruptcy of the ruling party and the state in resolving them, the dominant classes are desperately seeking to regain their credibility by increasingly relying on whipping up of religious sentiments in order to retain their hold over people in recent years.

In this context, it is interesting to note that material conditions created as a result of the introduction of modernization process by the British in the 19th century paved way for the emergence of religion-reform movement which in sense also articulated the aspiration of the rising bourgeois. Dependence and utter bankruptcy of the capitalist system in resolving any of the basic economic, political, social or cultural problems faced by the Indian society and the resultant crisis of the legitimacy have created conditions giving rise to new aggressive, religious fundamentalism particularly since last decade.

As pointed out, earlier the modern version of Hinduism itself is based on concoction and distortion of earlier historical traditions and unfortunate identification of nationalism with Hinduism since the 19th century (an outcome of peculiar historical situation). It has sufficient room for future distortion. Hinduism as popularly projected today is downright reactionary

formation and rules out any possibility for the emergence of any form of any liberation theology within its fold.

Buddhism in its formative stage was certainly far more liberal and progressive with dialectical orientation compared to later Vedic or Upanishads traditions. Under the circumstances, Dr. Ambedkar's protest against Hinduism took form of call to his followers to unblock conversions to neo-Buddhism.

It is also suggested that focusing on dynamic elements of earlier Buddhism, certain sects of medieval Bhakti movements, radical aspects of Satyashodhak Samaj and other non-Brahmin movement one can evolve liberation theology which may prove quite effective in mobilising the oppressed and exploited classes and ultimately might pave way for just and egalitarian social order free from all forms of exploitation.

Unfortunately the entire history of social movements based on caste and sectarian loyalties drawing inspiration from some of the above traditions does not leave much room for such optimism.

In this context it is worthwhile to draw a contrast between the dominant Hindu religious traditions and early Christianity. Jesus Christ was literacy a messiah of poor and oppressed and he upheld their cause and ultimately was criticized for this 'crime'. Heroic martyrdom of Jesus for the Proletarians of his time leaves enough scope for the future inspiration. Secondly, the missionary traditions in the church of working with the poor, coupled with peculiar oppressive and suffocating conditions in most of the Latin American countries could give birth to liberation theology. In India, conditions are quite different in terms of nature of

capitalist development, political set up, astute leadership of bourgeois, even in terms of history and traditions of the country. It is not surprising that one of the main architects of Indian theology of liberation had to admit that as far as India is concerned, liberation theology is likely to be in low key in the years ahead, due to specific conditions obtaining here. As he further remarks, “the parties of revolutions have been tamed and absorbed into the bourgeois politics of power and expediency to a point where they scarcely differ from the parties of order. Gandhism is today a spent force, being no more than a convenient ritual. The prospects of fresh revolutionary energies springing up from the subterranean consciousness of the masses are not bright. The power of the establishment to neutralize dissent knows no bounds.”

Ramayanas

- *Nagin Das Sanghavi*

Valmiki whose Ramayan is the oldest and still the most Authentic text on the legends and stories of Rama exuding Robust self-confidence jubilantly proclaims that “so long as Mountains stand and rivers flow on this earth, this *katha* of Rama will flourish amongst masses.” (Part I Chapter 2 Stanzas 36-37)

But what exactly is this Katha of Rama or Ramayan as it is usually named?

If Ramayan implies a collection of legends and stories About Rama and his family, then there is nothing specifically Hindu about it nor is it confined to India alone. Over a vast Span of Asia stretching from the borders of Afghanistan to the eastern shores of Japan, there is no language and no nation that does not claim to have its own collection of legends and Stories related to Rama or what can be called Ramayan of their own. A collection of all such epics and poems, dramas, Stories and folk literature from various countries will fill up a huge multi-lingual library. As Tulsidas mentions in his Ramcharitmanas, there are thousands of millions of Ramayanas. (Ludden.Making India Hindu) this ocean of Ramayan literature can be classified into three groups-books Written in the now unused languages like Sanskrit, Pali and Ardhamagadhi, Ramayans written in modern India Vernaculars in various regions of India and the literature in non-Indian languages.

Valmiki is traditionally rated as Adikavi-the first poet of classical Sanskrit literature- a claim rejected by modern scholarship, but his

Ramayan (200 B C) is certainly the first narration of the life and exploits of Rama. The Vedic literature from the *Samhitas* to the *Sutras* does not mention Rama either as a hero or as a divinity though there are a few obscure references to his family of *Ikshavakus* and to some of the characters of Ramayan. In fact prior to Valmiki, Rama, unlike Krishna is a totally unknown figure and we have no way of knowing from where Valmiki collected his source material. But scholars have postulated the existence of legends and stories of Rama among the folk literature.

Apart from Valmiki, the earliest mention of the story of Rama is found in Mahabharat where *Ramopakhyan* is narrated in answer to the anguished inquiry from Yudhishtir as to any one else has suffered as much agony as he is undergoing for upholding moral values. Sixteen out of eighteen Puranas (written between 6th to 12th century A D) narrate the story of Ramayan- the most extensively in Padma purana with several additions and interpolations in Valmiki's volume was undergoing continuous revision, some of these additions and distortions got incorporated in the original text and has now become ingrained in Hindu psyche. Ten heads and twenty arms of Ravana are first mentioned in *Vayu Purana* and it is *Skanda Purana* that makes Hanuman the son of shiva as well as his incarnation and it is here that life long celibacy of Hanuman is mentioned for the first time. Valmiki never mentions Hanuman as a *brahmavhari* and in fact his house is described as teeming with beautiful women. (Strijanshobhit) Bharat gifts him with 32 women and he accepts the gifts. Shiva purana makes Rama a devotee of Shiva and mentions the temple of Rameshwaram built by him. There is no such thing in Valmiki.

Bhavishya purana declared that Sita that was abducted was only her shadow and the purpose of the fire ordeal of Sita was to burn the shadow off so that Rama gets united with the real one. Mahabagwat purana makes Sita a daughter of Mandodari. There are endless such additions and distortions in the Puranas; but then puranas were never very highly rated by Vedic pandits among the Hindus.

Hindus have a flourishing tradition of deifying human heroes and thereby creating more and more gods out of nothing; the process has been going on from the days of Rama to this very day when Saibaba and Santoshi Mata are being and Mahavir have suffered the same fate as Rama. In Valmiki and even in Mahabharat Rama is a rare specimen of human hero who chooses to suffer for upholding moral values and traditional virtues. But he graduates from human hero to godhood and is then transformed in to the Suprerme Brahma. This led to the writing of numerous sectarian Ramayanas, the best known and very highly rated one amongst them being Adhyatma Ramayan also known as Maharamayan or Arsharamayan or Gyanvashistha. The story is full of philosophical discussions who narrates Ramakatha and explains the esoteric significance of the incidents in the life of Rama. The story of earth assuming the form of a cow to complain against the atrocities of Ravan and Lakshman abstaining from food, sleep and sex for fourteen years are added to Rama story by Adhyatma Ramayan. Adbhuita Ramayan is highly influenced by Shaktatism and Sita gets more prominence here than Rama. Mandodari buried her foetus in the ground and Janaka unearthed Sita from the site. Sita warned Rama about a thousand headed Ravana and

when Rama failed to fight with him, it was Sita who killed him and she kills Rama and Shiva also. Anand Ramayan declares Sita to be an incarnation of Padmalakshmi and Ravan carried her off in childhood but she was later on abandoned by him. The protecting circle around Sita drawn by Lakshman is mentioned here for the first time and sita was suspected when she could draw an exact painting of Ravan. Sita had delivered only one child luv but it was a rishi who lost him, made another child out of kush grass and called him kush. It was a Bhushandi Ramayan borrowing the story from Padma puran and describing in great details the story of Rama having eaten the berries tasted by shabari.

The story of Rama, the characters and incidents of Ramayan proved to be a rich and ever attractive source for the creative writes of Sanskrit literature. So many dramas, poems and novels dealing with the theme of Rama have been produced by these masters with great literary gifts that an exhaustive list will of all of them would cover a volume. Smt. Juthika ghosh has prepared such a list Of nearly 10 plays about various episodes in the life of Rama, Bhavbhuti's Utterramacharita is hailed as the best by the critics and of nearly 20 short and long poems telling the story of Rama, are about 15 dramas all titles Raghavas and are known as Raghava dramas. They adopted the story but added numerous incidents and episodes, not found in the original Ramayan. The story of Ahalya converted from stone to human being by Rama the meeting between Sita and Rama prior to their marriage in the peace talk of Angad with Ravan are some of such additions that have now been ingrained in the belief system of Indian masses.

Over and above such extensive literary products, the devotion to Rama has produced a flood of *Stotras*, *bhajans* and *padas* and *stuties* that can hardly be compiled or even listed. *Tatvasamgraha Ramayan* and *Ramayan Tatvadarpan* of 17th century did acknowledge the debt of several earlier Ramayans and other books but does name them. Tulsidas has also mentioned that he has used several sources for his *Ramcharitmanas* but he too avoids naming them.

The tremendous popularity of Ramayan goaded if not forced the jains to produce their own version of Ramayan emphasizing the moral values and concepts peculiar to their own creed. Jains wrote in *Ardhamagashi*. The oldest of Jain Ramayans is *vasudev vahindi* of sanghdas but vimal Suri's *Paumchariyan* is far better known amongst such texts. Most of Jain Ramayanas describe the escapades of Lakshman and Hanuman and portray them as womanizers. Jains have a logical explanation of ten heads of Ravan as they were his faces reflected in his necklace of nine gems. *Vasudev Vahindi* makes Sita the first child born to Ravan and Mandodari who was abandoned because she was declared to be inauspicious. She was put in a box and floated in a river where she was found by Janak. The sin of killing Ravan was done by Lakshman and not Rama. Vimal suri changed the name of Rama to Padma (pauma) and Ravan is a staunch Jain but he was overcome by his passionate yearning for Sita and there was no fighting between Vali and Sugriva as Vali handed over his kingdom to his brother. *Utter Purana* written by Gunabhadra also describes sita as a daughter of Ravan. *Kathavali* of Bhadreshwar contains a story that was picked up by several later writers both Hindus and Jains. The sisters in laws of Sita

made her draw an exact replica of Ravan and that created jealousy and suspicious in the mind of Rama and resulted in final expulsion of Sita.

Trishashihisalaka Purushcharitra of Hemchandracharya mentions Dashrath as having fled Ayodhya out of fear of Ravan. There are several other Ramayans by Jain writers but they are of minor importance and are more or less copied from Paumachariya of Vimal suri. But it was left to Buddhist versions of Ramayan to take the Ramayan to all in pali which is the scriptural language for the Buddhists. In most of the Buddhist Ramayanas Sita is the daughter of Dashrath and Rama has married his own sister. Diggha Nikayya declares that Rama was exiled by Dasharath for such incestuous relationship. Shakyas are the children of this marriage and the shakya dynasty being the family of Buddha is highly rated by Buddhists.

Dasharath was the ruler of Kashi and has married 16000 queens in Dasharath jatak. Rama, Lakshman and Sita born of his different wives are thus sibings. Stray and indirect references to the episodes in the life of Rama are found in several Jatakas but detailed and exhaustive Ramayans in pali are few in numbers. Buddhacharit of Ashwaghosh contain the story of Ramayan that is more or less same as Valmki. Mahavibhash is not available in its original but as translated by yuan Chwang contained a summary of Ramayan. Anami Jatak as translated by Kang Seng Hui tells the story in a slightly modified form. The king accepted voluntary exile to keep up his vow of Ahimsa and his wife was abducted by a demon. Monkey king helps him find his wife and the story ends in happy reunion.

Dashrath Nidan as translated in Chinese also mentions Rama story in very brief outline.

It was the Buddhist version of Ramayan that was translated in various Asian languages with the spread of Buddhism but it is very surprising that Ramayan immediately became a popular story in whichever language it was translated. As Dr Brokington notes in his 'Righteous Rama' "the spread of Rama story was very much involved in this cultural diffusion to the extent of becoming a part of national tradition in several nations."

Chinese Ramayanas are mostly translations of pli Ramayans but Japanese Ramayans are borrowed from the Chinese stories and hence one more step away from the original story. Hobutsushu's collection of Japanese folklore narrates the story of Rama who insisted on retiring to forest rather than give up his vow of Ahimasa and his wife sita insists on going with him. She was abducted by a demon. Sambo Ikotoma mentions the killing of Shraavan by Dasharath who gets revived and the story ends in a happy mood. Tun Hwang manuscripts contains many references to Rama Katha where usually Sita is the daughter of Ravan who was abandoned by her parents. Rama-Lakshman are brothers and when Rama is exiled, Lakshman becomes the king. Ravan abducted Sita but Rama knew that soul of Ravan was in the head of a horse that was killed and Ravan died. When Rama went to fight a war, Sita was left by him into a Buddhist monastery with 500 monks and she delivered Lav there. But the child was lost by a Bhikkhu who made a child out of Kush grass. Sita was exiled when accused by a washman's family but Hanuman proved the purity of Sita leading to final reconciliation. Kholan Manuscripts has a different

Ramkatha. Dashrath has a son known as Sahasrabahu and his sons are named Rama and Lakshman. Sita the abandoned daughter of Ravan, was brought up by a Bhikhu and married Rama and for her protection there was a permanent circle drawn. Rama allied with Nanada and killed Sugriva and Nanda helped him to kill Ravan.

But it is in South East Asia that Ramayan is far more popular.

During Kohaba-Kankaria festival in Srilanka, the Ramayan is recited and discussed. This festival is the celebration for the birth of the third son of Sita. Rama accepted voluntary exile for 7 years and Sita was abducted during this prolonged absence. Vali befriended Rama, burnt Lanka and retrieved Sita but she was deserted by her suspicious husband. She delivered Lav in the ashram of Valmiki who lost Lav and made a child out of Kush grass. But Sita doubted this story and Valmiki in order to prove, created the third son.

U Aung wrote his Ramayatra based on the traditions prevailing in Manmyar (Burma) Dasgiri (Dashgriva) molests a female monk who commits suicide and is immediately reborn as Sita who commits suicide and is immediately reborn as Sita who deserted by Dasgiri. Lakhanna and Bhadar are brothers of Rama and it is Gambhi who helps Ravan in abduction of Sita. The story of Mahiravan-Gondadipa is also narrated here. Ramayan is very popular in Thailand with its capital city named as Ayuthia (Audhya) and several of its kings are named as Rama, Rama I collected all the available Ramayan literature and wrote Ramkien. Dramas and dances based on Ramayan story are very popular in Thailand. Anjana wife of Khadoum (Gautam) had two sons born out of her illicit relations

with sun and Indra. One of the sons betrayed her and she made both of them monkeys named Pali (Vali) and Sukhrip (Sugriva). Her daughter Savaha was fertilized by Indra who dropped his semen in her mouth and she gave birth to Hanuman. Pali defeated Tholukson (Dashkantha) and snatched his wife Nangmontha (Manddari) and had a son by her named Angad. Thotsaoth (Dashrath) was married to Kakeyasi and a part of his semen was taken by a crow and put in the body of Mantha who gave birth to a girl named Sida (Sita) who was abandoned and found by King Chonak. In Thailand Ramayanas Hanuman is very sexy philanderer. It was Rama who founded Ayuthia and ruled in Thailand for forty years. Ramayan in Laos is the story of Fra Lak (Lakshaman) and Fra Lam (Ramaa). Dasharatha had a beautiful daughter abducted by Ravan. Twin sons of Dasharath Lak and Lam fought with him to free their sister. Ravan escaped and founded Lanka but he stayed with Indra and seduced his queens one of whom was born to him as a daughter and stabbed Ravan. Ravan threw her away but when she got adult tried to marry her. But Janaka married him off to a shadow and gave Sita to Fra Lam. When Ravan abducted Sita, Lam searched for Sita and jointly constructed the bridge to Lanka. The epic of Ramkerati in Cambodia (ancient Kamboj) mentions all the characters of Ramayan in local dialect and a quaint humor with local flavor.

The oldest Ramayan of Indonesia is known as Kakawin by Shri Yogeshwar and is a faint copy of the poem Bhattikavya in Sanskrit language. The enmity between Shabri and Vishnu ended in the life of Rama and all the seven wives of Indrajit fought with Rama. Mandodari was the wife of Dashrath when Sita was born. Hikayat Shrirama is the Ramayan

epic of Malaya and is a mixture of Islamic beliefs and folklore. Dasharath was married to Mandudaki (Mandodari) but donated her to Ravan for officiating as a priest. Sita was born out the former's visit to Lanka. Rama and Sita were transformed as monkeys and Sita got pregnant during this time. Hanuman was born of Sita.

All such shocking versions of Ramayan would stun the orthodox but they signify the spread of Indian to the scholars of Ancient Indian History and Ramayan being the cultural motif and the torch bearer of Indian culture. One has to add that Ramayan is still the living tradition in all these regions.

Lastly we turn to the Ramayanas that were produced in various vernacular languages of India during the medieval epic but literary creations based on the story as depicted by valmiki with considerable additions and distortions of the original Ramayan. The oldest such Ramayan is kampan's Iramavatar in Tamil. For Kampan, Rama is the supreme Deity and the creator controller of the universe. He emphasizes the Ahalya story and lays great stress on the recitation of Ramayan. Hanuman could cross the ocean only because he endlessly recited the name of Rama. Pampa Ramayan in Kannada is the oldest Ramayan in that language and has been written by Nagachandra under his pseudo- name Abhnav Pampa. Sita had a twin brother who was abducted in childhood. This Ramayan describes in great details the escapades of lakshaman during the exile in forest he inadvertently kills an ascetic. Vali is not mentioned by name but there is a Maya-Sugriva killed by Rama. The other Ramayanas in Kannada are Yogendra Ramayan and Utter Ramayan but

Toran Ramayan of Kumar Valmiki is far more popular and respected. Ramcharit or Ramakathapattu, Tulsidas has metamorphosed not only the contents but even the format of Ramayan. The first two parts of Ramayan-Balkanda and Ayodhyakand takes up nearly two-thirds of his volume and he has deleted Uttarkand. Tulsi begins with the discussion between Shiva and Parvati but the threads are picked up by Kakbhushandi and again the narration is picked up by shiva. This may be due to the long interval of years that the Manas was being composed. Kashmiri Ramayan of Divakar bhatta is a very interesting in that it makes Mandodari bent upon destruction of Ravan. Lav-kush charit of the same language extols the exploits of Lav and Kush who killed Rama and all his three brothers.

Marathi has several Ramayanas the best known being Bhavartha Ramayan of Eknath, Mantr Ramayan of Moropant, Ramayan of Swami Ramdas, and Ramvijaya of Shridhar. Gujarati language is poor in this respect because Girdhar Ramayan is not of much value and a few stray incidents of Ramayan have been utilized by poets like bhalan and premanand.

Kanvash Ramayan and Ramayan Champu are well known in Malayali but Adhyatma Ramayan of Ezhuthachan is much more popular. Based on Adhyatma Ramayan it narrates the story of Valmiki being a bandit for the first time and depict Ravan as a great scholar of Mahyan Buddhism. The epic does not mention the war between Rama and Ravan.

Telugu language has three Ramayanas-Ramayan of Rangnath, Bhaskar Ramayan of Hulakki Ramayan and Mollo Ramayan. It tells the

story of goddess of sleep granting Two boons to Lakshman. He does not sleep for 14 years and his wife Urmilla sleeps for all the 14 years.

Ramayan tells the story of north Indian royalty but is far more popular in south Indian languages. The first vernacular Ramayan in north India is Krittibas Ramayan in Bangali and it added several new incidents and episodes in Valmiki's epic. Sita was afraid of Rama marrying another wife and Ravan is made a staunch devotee of shiva. Mahiravan, the son of Ravan abducted Rama and Lakshaman and prepared to sacrifice them to Devi. Sita drew the accurate portrait of Ravan and put it in her bedroom arousing suspicion and anger of Rama and Sita was exiled again. Chandracati presents the story in slightly different way. The portrait of Ravan was drawn on a fan and while sita was asleep the fan was put on her breasts making Rama wild with anger. There are three more Ramayanas in Bengali language. There are numerous but none is very noteworthy either as literature or for innovations

Hindi Ramayanas come much later and the earliest of them was by Vishnudas of Gwalior but the best is undoubtedly Ramacharitmanas of Tulsidas. This has now become the standard and the most authentic text for the orthodox Hindu audience. Tulsidas is a great poetic genius and there are many other literary productions by him. Ramacharitmanas took many years in the making.

Lord Ram : Through Different Prisms

Ram Puniyani

In 2004, in one of the less publicized incidents in Mumbai, one roving bookseller was roughed up by Sangh Parivar activists at a meeting to commemorate the birth anniversary of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. The charge against the bookseller was that he was selling books which were offensive to the Hindu gods. One of the books to which they objected strongly was Periyar Ramaswami's, 'True Ramayana'. As per the SP activists, this book insults Lord Ram and other revered figures of Hindu Pantheon.

It is not long ago that in the aftermath of Babri demolition Sahmat exhibition on different versions of Ramayana (Story of Ram) was attacked by the parivar goons as one of the panels based on Jataka (Buddhist version) showed Ram and Sita as brother and sister. Also the fellow travellers of Parivar politics, the Shiv Sainiks of Mumbai's mini Hitler Bal Thakeray, adopted their usual strong arm techniques to protest when Dr Ambedkar's book 'Riddles of Ram and Krishna' was published by the Maharashtra Government.

It is known that there are hundreds of versions of Ramayana, Buddhist, Jain, Brahminical (Valmiki). And again there are different interpretations of the prevalent Valmiki Ramayana, which are not to the liking of the currently offensive politics of Hindutva in whose service the vandals of Parivar break the exhibitions or rough up the booksellers. Here one is not going into the issue of liberal Hindus of SP variety who criticize

the fanatic Muslims on the ground that they become charged up whenever someone insults Prophet Mohammad, while as the Hindus are inherently Liberal they do not indulge in any violent protest.

Ram Katha (Story of Ram) has various versions and surprisingly one can see the correlation between the class-caste aspirations of the narration-interpretation. In post Brahminical Buddhist Dashrath Jataka Sita is projected both as sister and wife of Ram. As per this version Dashrath is king not of Ayodhya but of Varanasi. The marriage of sister and brother is part of the tradition of glorious Kshtriya clans who wanted to maintain their caste and clan purity. This Jataka tale shows Ram to be the follower of Buddha. Similarly, Jain versions of Ramayana's project Ram as the propagator of anti-Brahminical Jain values, especially as a follower of non-violence. What do both Buddhist and Jain version have in common is that in these Ravana is not shown as a villain but a great soul dedicated to quest of knowledge and is a spiritual soul, with majestic commands over passions, a sage and a responsible ruler. Popular and prevalent 'Women's Ramayana Songs' (of Telugu Brahmin Women), keep the women's concern as the central theme and present alternate perspective. These songs present Sita as finally victorious over Ram and in these Surpanakha succeeds in taking revenge over Ram.

In recent times, Jotiba Phule who stood more with the interests of Dalits and women, was amongst the first ones to interpret this mythological tale from the perspective of those subjugated by Brahminism. Phule's interpretation of the Ram story in a way, forms a partial base of the Ramayana interpretations by Ambedkar and Periyar also. Phule points out

that Brahmins were descendents of conquering Indo-Europeans who overturned the original egalitarian society and forbade the conquered from studying texts. His mythology is woven around King Bali, who could invoke the image of peasant community. Needless to say his murder by Lord Ram from behind is condemned and is seen as an act of subjugation of other castes by the upper castes. And Ram is seen as an Avatar of Vishnu out to conquer India from the rakshasas for establishing the hegemony of Brahminical values of caste and gender hierarchy.

Dr. Ambedkar and Periyar's commentaries are more an alternative reading of the Valmiki's text rather than a separate version. There is a good deal of overlap in the interpretation of both. Dr. Ambedkar focuses his attention on the issues pertaining to Ram's killing of Shambuk for violating the prevalent Brahminical norm where a low caste has no right to do penance, tapasya, like Phule he also castigates Lord Ram for murdering the popular folk king Bali. He questions Ram's act of taking Sita's *Agnipariksha* trial by fire and his attitude towards her. After defeating Ravana he tells Sita that he had done all this battle not to get her released but to restore his own honour, and his banishing her in response to the rumors about her chastity when she was pregnant comes for severest criticism from Ambedkar.

Periyar is basically taking the same line but in his interpretation the North Indian Brahminical onslaught South Indian low caste resistance become the central theme. Periyar the initiator of self-respect movement was the pioneer of secularization process in Tamil Nadu. In one of the movements, which is very less known, on the lines of Dr Ambedkar

burning Manusmriti, he planned to burn the photo of Ram as for him Ram symbolized the imposition of Brahminical norms on the South Indian low caste. This was a part of his campaign against Brahminical Hinduism, (which is the base of the current Hindutva onslaught), for assertion of Tamil, Dalit identity. According to him the Ramayana story was a thinly disguised historical account of how caste ridden, Sanskritic, upper caste North Indians led by Ram subjugated low caste South Indians. He identifies Ravana as the monarch of ancient Dravidians, who abducted Sita, primarily to take revenge against the mutilation and insult of his sister Surpanakha. Ravana is practitioner of Bhakti, and is a virtuous man.

The latest version of Ramayana to be popularized and this one sends bouquets of roses to the parivar followers, was that of 'Maharshi' Ramanand Sagar's tele serial Ramayana, which went many steps further than the Valmiki Ramayana in glorifying Ram and the accompanying values. As an example here Sita herself is keen to be banished to jungle by her Lord and master to ensure that people don't talk ill of Him. And currently this is the bottom line, and any deviation from such blind obeisance comes for severe reprimand from the parivar. This selection of Ram and this version of Ramayana is no coincidence for the Parivar. It is very clear that this icon best conveys its agenda of subjugating the rights of Dalit-Bahujan, women, and adivasis. So starting from Savarkar who called Ram as the Monarch of Great Hindu race down to the Ramjanmabhumi campaign, which acted as the electoral goldmine for Parivar, Ram has to be its central figure.

And thus any other version, any different reading of Ramayana will be opposed tooth and nail by the 'tolerant Hinduism', as that stands opposed to the political message of Sangh Parivar.

Lord Ram: Abused for Political Goals

Political parties can play strange games. Some of them, deeply wedded to abolition of democracy can also use democratic means to come to power to implement their agenda, which is totally opposed to democracy. Hitler was one such example, who demonstrated as to how he could abuse people's faith in their racial identity to come to power through democracy and then to abolish the same system which helped it come to power. In neighbouring Pakistan, military dictators have regularly used the identity of Islam to strengthen their grip on Pakistan and so on and so forth. For Taliban Lord Buddha's statues became a matter of problem. Here in India from the decades of 1980s we witnessed how the faith in Lord has been used for electoral gains. Suddenly from nowhere Lord Ram and his place of birth cropped up in the political arena. It has created a mass hysteria around the place of his birth and a political party which till then was worth not more than two MPs, staked the claim for power and has currently been the major opposition party. So in a way it was no surprise that Rajnath Singh, the BJP president and Lal Krishna Advani, its prime ministerial candidate, once again called for the building of Ram Temple at Ayodhya during the last BJP convention held at Nagpur (Feb 6, 2008).

The mass hysteria leading to Babri demolition is too well known by now. Interestingly when the matters came up in the courts and the

historical evidence of Lord's birth place, put forward by BJP and company, came to be challenged, the BJP changed its tune by asserting that the place of birth of the Lord is a question of faith and how dare any body question that faith. Surely this was a manufactured faith, propagated and deepened by the RSS combine during the decade of 1980.

The role of holy seers in intensifying this wrongly held notion is equally dangerous. BJP associates went to challenge the authority of courts. They questioned as to how can courts decide the place of birth of the Lord; it will be decided by holy seers! So now court judgement is not acceptable to BJP etc. As a back up to the vote minting issue they brought up another one related to the same Lord, and this one is down South, the one of Ram Sethu. It is the electoral calculations which will decide which of the two issues and in what proportions will they be propped up at 'appropriate time' to garner the votes.

It is also true that India has seen many great devotees, believers of Lord Ram. One such was Goswami Tulsidas, for whom essence of his lord did not lay in the Ram Temple. When he was questioned by his caste panchayat for using Avadhi Hindi for telling Ram's tale to the people, he said, where he lives, in a mosque or temple, is not important for him, what matters to him is that he is devoted to the Lord, and that is all what matters. So today we have another set of Ram Bhaktas, in a way they are pseudo Ram devotees, as for them what matters is not faith in the Lord but to abuse his identity for political goals. In a way BJP wants to rakes up the issue at election times, for electoral goals. Can there be a bigger insult to Lord Ram, in whom many people genuinely vest their faith?

For parties like BJP the real issues of the people do not matter, it is only the identity related agenda which energizes them to get into action. That's how Ram temple or Amarnath shrine becomes the core issues. It is a matter of shame that the BJP had all the time as the major opposition party to raise the public issues during last four and a half years but it did not play the role of a critical opposition. During this time it did not raise a debate around a single major policy issue, its only method was to create a mayhem in the parliament and then to walk out.

Also its attitude to the Malegaon probe is a matter of concern. Since Saffron-robed sadhvi was involved and many associates of RSS family were part of the conspiracy of Malegaon blasts it not only condemned the probe but also attributed motives to the Maharashtra ATS led by Hemant Karkare who was leading the probe. The minimal democratic decency involves that the other worldly, the matters of faith should not be politicized and politics should be based on the issue of this world this worldly issues. As Father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi, who died with Hey Ram on his lips, said, "I am a Sanatani Hindu, I will give my life for my religion. But that is my personal matter. About India for whose fashioning I am struggling, that will be totally secular. Neither my religion will dictate the state, nor will state dictate my religion." No wonder Ram Temple or any other such issue was never a part of agenda of freedom movement. And who precisely needs one more Ram Temple when Ayodhya has close to fifty Ram Temples, with most of the pujaris of those temples claiming that it is their temple where the Lord was born?

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