



Ram, Ramayana and Tulsidas

Acharya Vinoba

A great man was born in India in ancient times. People saw manifestation of divine qualities in him and hence venerated him as an incarnation of God. The so-called incarnation of God in the form of man is, in fact, descension of a great principle. In the form of Rama, Truth became personified; Rama was only an instrument.

Had sage Valmiki not been born, we would not have got the saga of Rama, which can purify the whole world. Tulsidas went a step further. He took the saga of Rama to even the huts of sweepers. He wrote on the life of Rama in poetry, but stringed the whole spiritual philosophy in it. Kamban, Ezhuthachan, Krittibas, Shridhar, Girdhar—many have written Ramayana in their own language. Their works have a high literary quality and are popular also. Kamban's Ramayana is considered on a par with Shakespeare in poetical excellence. Yet it cannot match Tulsi-Ramayana, as Kamban was a great poet, but Tulsidas was a great man.

In Seoni jail (1943-45), Bharatan Kumarappa was with me. He requested me to teach him Hindi. I agreed, and chose the Ramayana of Tulsidas as our textbook. I told him at the start why I chose it, "Tulsidas is the combination of the Bible and Shakespeare." After two months' study, he said to

me, "What you had said is absolutely true." I replied, "Shakespeare is unrivalled in his use of the English language. He is great as a writer; the Bible is great spiritually. In Tulsi-Ramayana there is a happy combination of the two."

What Tulsidas achieved was unparalleled. His words give solace and support to people from all walks of life. And they are going to spread love for Hindi throughout India and unite the country. How could he do all this? Because he considered himself the lowest of the low, the worst among the sinners. Mentioning stories of redemption of those who

had committed grave sins, he says that it is no wonder that they were redeemed, for they had merit also in some measure; the glory of Ramanama—the Name of Lord Rama—lies in the redemption of Tulsi, the very embodiment of sin. He considers himself the embodiment of sin! This is the height of humility. It shows his identification with the sinners. He felt that their sins were his own. In declaring this, he was not writing rhetorically; he was only expressing his heart-felt sentiments.

We should not look upon Tulsidas as a writer only. Certainly, his greatness includes his greatness

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as a writer, but that is of secondary importance. From the point of view of literary qualities, we can find better writers in the world. Tulsidas' greatness lies more in his being a Self-realized devotee, concerned about the well-being of all. Had he been a writer only, he would not have attracted common masses and comforted millions of troubled minds, and his Ramayana would not have earned the place it has.

In a way, it is difficult to understand Tulsi-Ramayana. It is difficult to decide which philosophy Tulsidās subscribes to, what exactly he wants to tell and on what he puts emphasis. If one could have got an idea about it, Tulsi-Ramayana would have been a philosophical work, not a work of poetry. One can have an idea about what Kabir wants to say, even if his language is abstruse. But there is so much variety of emotions in Tulsidās' language that it is difficult to pinpoint a particular point of view.

Some portions of Tulsi-Ramayana reveal the situation at that time. This is inevitable for any writer. We have to take such portions after due refinement. We have to discriminate as to which portion is important and which is the subordinate portion.

Gandhiji, who was a great admirer of Tulsidas and his Ramayana, pointed out sayings like ढोल गवारं सूद पसु नारी। सकल ताडना के अधिकारी (Sundarkand, 59) (A drum, uncouth men, low caste persons, animals and women deserve to be beaten) and said that such statements were unacceptable. But we should give benefit of doubt to Tulsidas. Who has said this? It is the ocean. When the ocean did not make way for Rama to cross it despite the latter's penance, Rama lifted his bow to punish the ocean. Fearing Rama's

Fear Makes Man Violent

Huston Smith: Perhaps, accept it here or there but nevertheless you retain the say-so as to where an insight might be valid.

Krishnamurti: No, no sir. No, no. My own authority. What authority have I? My authority is the authority of the society. I am conditioned to accept authority, when I reject the authority of the outer I accept the authority of the inner. And my authority of the inner is the result of the conditioning in which I have been brought up.

HS: All right. I thought I had this in place. And I guess perhaps I still do. The only point that I am not quite sure about at this point is, it seems to me while assuming, accepting, affirming and maintaining one's own freedom...

K: Ah, you can't. Sir, how can a prisoner, except ideologically, or theoretically, accept he is

free? He is in prison, and that is the fact from which we must move.

HS: I see.

K: Not accept a big fantastic ideological freedom which doesn't exist. What exists is that man has bowed to this total authority.

HS: All right. And this is the first thing we must see and remove.

K: Absolutely. Completely that must go, for a man that is serious, and wants to find out the truth, or see things very clearly. That is one of the major points. And the demand of freedom, not only from authority, but the demand from fear, which makes him accept authority.

HS: Right. That seems true also. And so beneath the craving for authority is...

K:... is fear.

HS:... is fear which we look to authority to be free from.

K: That's right. So the fear makes man violent, not only territorial violence, but sexual violence and different forms of violence.

HS: All right.

K: So the freedom from authority implies the freedom from fear. And the freedom from fear implies the cessation of every form of violence.

HS: If we stop violence then our fear recedes?

K: Ah, no sir. It's not a question of recession of fear. Let's put it round the other way, sir. Man is violent, linguistically, psychologically, in daily life he is violent, which ultimately leads to war.

HS: There's a lot of it around.

K: And man has accepted war as the way of life, whether in the office, or at home, or in the

⇒ philosophy alone do not make a sacred book. Brahmasutra is a philosophical work par excellence, but it cannot become a sacred book for the people. When all the elements mentioned above are fused together to form a compound, which is palatable to the people and which they can appreciate a sacred book takes shape. Tulsidas gave such a book. Even children and the illiterate can hear or sing it with relish, and those who are in the habit of going deeper can delve deep into it.

In the process of narrating the life of Rama, Tulsidas has given a religious scripture in the people's language. It is on this basis that I have called him 'founder of the religion of Rama'. The Quran has said that God has sent prophets for every linguistic group. Tulsidas is the prophet for Hindi-speakers.

(Courtesy: Teaching of the Saints, page 80-84)

playing field, or anywhere war he has accepted as a way of life, which is the very essence of violence.

HS: Yes.

K: And aggression and all that is involved. So as long as man accepts violence, lives a way of life which is violent, he perpetuates fear and therefore violence and also accepts authority.

HS: So these three are a kind of vicious circle, each playing into the other.

K: And the churches say, live peacefully, be kind, love your neighbour, which is all sheer nonsense. They don't mean it. It is merely a verbal assertion that has no meaning at all. It is just an idea because the morality of society which is the morality of the church is immoral.

HS: Are we trying to see then these things that stand between us and lucidity and freedom, we find authority and fear and violence working together to obstruct us, where do we go from there?

K: It's not going to some place, sir, but understanding this fact that most of us live a life in this ambience, in this cage of authority, fear and violence. We can't go beyond it, unless one is free from it, not intellectually or theoretically, but actually be free from every form of authority, not the authority of the expert, but the feeling of dependence on authority.

HS: All right.

K: Then, is it possible for a human being to be free completely of fear? Not only at the superficial level of one's consciousness, but also at the deeper level, what is called the unconscious.

HS: Is it possible?

K: That's the question, otherwise you are bound to accept authority of anybody, any Tom, Dick and Harry, with a little bit of knowledge,

little bit of cunning explanation or intellectual formulas, you are bound to fall for it. But the question whether a human being, so heavily conditioned as he is, through propaganda of the church, through propaganda of society, morality and all the rest of it, whether such a human being can really be free from fear. That is the basic question, sir.

HS: That's what I wait to hear.

K: I say it is possible, not in abstraction, but actually it is possible.

HS: All right. And my impulse again is to say, how.

K: Refrain. You see when you say, how, you stop learning. You cease to learn.

HS: All right, let's just forget that I said that, because I don't want to get distracted.

K: No, no, you can never even ask that, ever, because we are learning; learning about the nature and the structure of human fear. At the deepest level and also at the most superficial level, and we are learning about it. And when you are learning you can't ask suddenly, how am I to learn. There is no 'how' if you are interested, if the problem is vital, intense, it has to be solved to live peacefully, then there is no 'how', you say, let's learn about it.

HS: All right.

K: So the moment you bring in the 'how' you move away from the central fact of learning.

HS: All right, that's fine. Let's continue on the path of learning about this.

K: Learning. So, what does it mean to learn?

HS: Are you asking me?

K: Yes. Obviously. What does it mean to learn?

HS: It means to perceive how one should proceed in a given domain.

K: No, sir, surely. Here is a problem of fear. I

want to learn about it. First of all I mustn't condemn it, I mustn't say, 'it's terrible', and run away from it.

HS: It sounds to me that you have been condemning it in one way or another.

K: I don't, I don't, I want to learn. When I want to learn about something I look, there is no condemnation at all.

HS: Well, we were going at this through a negative route.

K: Which is what I am doing.

HS: And fear is an obstacle.

K: About which I am going to learn.

HS: All right.

K: Therefore I can't condemn it.

HS: Well it's not good, you are not advocating it.

K: Ah, no. I am neither advocating or not. Here is a fact of fear. I want to learn about it. The moment I learn about something I am free of it. So learning matters. What is implied in learning? What is implied in learning? First of all to learn about something there must be complete cessation of condemnation, or justification.

HS: All right. Yes, I can see that. If we are going to understand something if we keep our emotions out of it, and just try to dispassionately to...

K: To learn. You are introducing words like dispassion, that's unnecessary. If I want to learn about that camera, I begin to look at it, undo it, go into it. There is no question of dispassion or passion. I want to learn. So I want to learn about this question of fear. So to learn there must be no condemnation, no justification of fear, and therefore no escape verbally from the fact of fear.

HS: All right.

K: But the tendency is to deny it.

HS: To deny the reality.

K: The reality of fear. The reality that fear is causing all these things. To deny by saying, 'I must develop courage'. So, please, we are going into this problem of fear because it is really a very important question: whether human mind can ever be free of fear.

HS: It certainly is.

K: Which means, whether the mind is capable of looking at fear, looking, not in abstraction, but actually at fear as it occurs.

HS: Facing fear.

K: Facing fear.

HS: All right, we should do this, and I agree with you that we can't deny it.

K: To face it, no condemnation.

HS: All right.

K: No justification.

HS: Simply being truly objective.

K: Aware of fear.

HS: Acknowledging.

K: I don't acknowledge it. If there is the camera there I don't acknowledge it, it is there.

HS: All right. I don't want to distract our line of thought with these words.

K: Please, sir, that's why one has to be awfully careful of words here, because the word is not the thing, therefore I don't want to move away from this. To learn about fear there must be no condemnation or justification. That's a fact. Then my mind can - the mind can look at fear. What is fear? There is every kind of fear: fear of darkness, fear of the wife, fear of the husband, fear of war, fear of storm, so many psychological fears. And you cannot possibly have the time to analyse all the fears, that would take the whole life time, by then you have not understood any fears.

HS: So it is the phenomenon of fear itself rather than any...

K: Than any particular fear.

HS: Right. Now what should we learn?

K: Wait, I am going to show you, sir, go slow. Now to learn about something you must be in complete contact with it. I want - look sir, I want to learn about fear. Therefore I must look at it, I must face it. Now to face something implies a mind that does not want to solve the problem of fear.

HS: To look at fear...

K: Is not to solve the problem of fear.

HS: Now...

K: Look, look, this is very important to understand because if I want to solve fear I am more concerned with the solution of fear than facing fear.

HS: A moment ago though we were saying we should think...

K: I am facing it. But if I say, I must solve it, I am beyond it already, I am not looking.

HS: You say that if we are trying to solve the problem of fear we are not truly facing it. Is that right?

K: Quite right, sir. You see, to face fear the mind must give its complete attention to fear, and if you give partial attention which is to say, 'I want to solve it and go beyond it', you are not giving it attention.

HS: I can see that if you have slipped attention while you are not fully attentive.

K: So, in giving complete attention to the learning about fear there are several problems involved in it. I must be brief because our time is limited. We generally consider fear as something outside us. So there is this question of the observer and the observed. The observer says,

I am afraid, and he puts fear as something away from him.

HS: I am not sure. When I feel afraid, I am afraid, I feel it very much in here.

K: In here, but when you observe it, it is different.

HS: When I observe fear...

K: Then I put it outside.

HS: No, again that doesn't seem quite right.

K: All right, at the moment of fear there is neither the observer nor the observed.

HS: That is very true.

K: That is all I am saying. At the crisis, at the moment of actual fear there is no observer.

HS: It fills the horizon.

K: Now, the moment you begin to look at it, face it, there is this division.

HS: Between the fearful self and the...

K: The non-fearful self.

HS: The bear who is going to eat me out there.

K: So in trying to learn about fear, there is this division between the observer and the observed. Now is it possible to look at fear without the observer? Please, sir, this is really quite an intricate question, a complex question, one has to go into it very deeply. As long as there is the observer who is going to learn about the fear there is a division.

HS: That's true. We are not in full contact with it.

K: Therefore in that division is the conflict of trying to get rid of fear, justify fear. So is it possible to look at fear without the observer? So that you are completely in contact with it all the time.

HS: Well, then you are experiencing fear,

K: I wouldn't like to use that word 'experience', because experience implies going through something. Finishing with it. ➡

Deeno Dan

Rabindranath Thakur

"There is no god in that temple", said the Saint.
The King was enraged;
"No God? Oh Saint, aren't you speaking
like an atheist?
On the throne studded with priceless
gems, beams the golden idol,
And yet, you proclaim that's empty?"
"It's not empty; It's rather full of the
Royal pride.
You have bestowed yourself, oh King,
not the God of this world"
Remarked the saint.
The King frowned, "2 million golden coins
Were showered on that grand structure
that kisses the sky,
I offered it to the Gods
after performing all the necessary rituals,
And you dare claim that in such
a grand temple,
There is no presence of God?"
The Saint calmly replied, "in the very year
in which,
twenty million of your subjects were struck
by a terrible drought;
The pauperized masses without
any food or shelter,
came begging at your door crying
for help, only to be turned away,
they were forced to take refuge in forests, caves,

camping under roadside foliages,
derelict old temples;
and in that very year
when you spent 2 million gold to build
that grand temple of your's,
that was the day when God pronounced:
"My eternal home is lit by everlasting lamps,
In the midst of an azure sky,
In my home the foundations are built
with the values:
Of Truth, Peace, Compassion and Love.
The poverty stricken puny miser,
Who could not provide shelter to his own
homeless subjects,
Does he really fancy of giving me a home?
That is the day God left that Temple of yours.
And joined the poor beside the roads,
under the trees.
Like emptiness of the froth in the vast seas,
Your mundane temple is as hollow.
It's just a bubble of wealth and pride."
The enraged King howled,
"oh you sham cretin of a person,
Leave my kingdom this instant."
The Saint replied calmly,
"The very place where you have
exiled the Divine,
Kindly banish the devout too".

⇒ HS: All right. I don't know what word. It seems better than, looking at, because looking at does seem to imply a division between an observer and the observed.

K: Therefore we are using that word 'observing'. Being aware of fear without choice, which means the choice implies the observer, choosing whether I don't like this, or that. Therefore

when the observer is absent there is choiceless awareness of fear.

HS: All right.

K: Right. Then what takes place? That's the whole question. The observer creates the linguistic difference between himself and the thing observed. Language comes in there. Therefore the word prevents being completely in contact with fear.

Uttered in South Africa Ends with truth in India

If I go to goal I shall die: Kasturba

An Interesting Conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Gandhi

[This is a conversation which took place between Mr. and Mrs. Gandhi at their home at Phoenix whilst Mrs. Gandhi was cooking in the kitchen and Mr. Gandhi was engaged in some domestic duties. This was a prelude to the Passive Resistance struggle in 1913 when Mrs. Gandhi led the first batch of women to goal. What Mrs. Gandhi uttered about her death in this conversation ends with truth in India on February 22, 1944.]

G- Have you heard this? —
What? asked Mrs. Gandhi with eagerness.

G- Smilingly: "Up to to-day you were my legally married wife. You are no longer so."

K- "Whoever has said that? You seem to be always finding some new points."

G- Smilingly: "It isn't I, it is General Smuts who says that our marriages are not recorded in Court as Christian marriages are, and therefore they are illegal marriages. So you are not my legal wife but a concubine."

K- Enraged: "He does not know what he is talking about. How on earth do such things come into his brain? Has he nothing else to do?"

G- Coming to the point: "Well, but what are you women going to do now?"

K- "What are we to do?"

G- "You must fight just as we are fighting. If you wish to be my legal wife and not a concubine, and if you love your self-respect then you must fight the Government even as we are doing."

K- "But you go to goal!"

G- "You too should go to goal for your self-respect."

K- With surprise: "What? I too go to goal? How can women go to goal?"

G- "Of course. Why can't women go to goal? Should not women share the Joyas and the sorrows of men? Sita followed Rama. Taramati followed

Harischandra. Damayanti followed Nalas, and all these underwent untold hardship."

K- "But they were all Divine beings. How can we mortals do what they did?"

G- "There is nothing in that. If we do as they did we could also become divine. We are descendants of Rama and Sita. If they did not suffer as they did for Truth they would not be worshipped as they are to-day. If you wish that Truth should prevail and if you wish to uphold your honour then you too must be prepared to fight the Government and go to goal."

K- "So, you wish to send me to goal, isn't that it? That is the only thing that remains to be done. Well, but will the goal diet suit me?"

G- "I am not telling you to go to goal. If you willingly desire for the sake of your honour to go to goal then only you should go, and if the goal diet does not suit you, you should take fruit diet."

K- "Will the goal authorities allow me to do so?"

G- "If they don't then you must fast."

K- "So, you are showing me the way to die, and I am sure if I go to goal I shall die."

G- With a hearty burst of laugh: "Ha! ha, that's just what I wish. If you die in goal I shall worship you like a Goddess."

K- "Very well, then I shall go to goal."

Secretary's Diary

75th Anniversary of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi:

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, constructive activities are being organized by the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi in Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh. In Himachal Pradesh, initiatives have begun, with approximately 500 children from around 40 villages and 25 schools in the districts of Shimla, Solan, and Mandi are associated with Mahatma Gandhi Community Centers set up by Nidhi. Children from rural areas often lack the facilities and motivation for learning compared to their urban counterparts. These community centers provide opportunities for children, conducting activities such as reading and writing sessions, festivals, general knowledge competitions, drawing competitions, science fairs, and cultural programs, fostering a conducive environment for learning and advancement. Children from villages often hesitate to step onto a stage, but through group activities, they gain confidence. These centers focus on children aged 3 to 14, up to the eighth grade. The smaller children get the chance to learn with the older ones, and the older children can discuss and learn from each other.

The library in these centers emphasizes language, knowledge, and pronunciation. Children are encouraged to express their thoughts and listen to the perspectives of others. They are motivated to write their stories and poems. These activities take place three days a month, instilling a love for learning in the children. The study of Gandhi's principles and his biography is also included in the curriculum.

Volunteers visit the homes of children in villages and inspire them to create their home libraries. Discussions with parents about helping children

are conducted, creating an environment where children are motivated to study. This approach encourages children to go beyond their syllabus and fosters creativity, reducing the tendency to rote learning. The community center's library provides books to children.

After India's independence, the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi had significant work in the united state of Punjab, which also included the mountainous region of Himachal Pradesh. Gandhi visited Himachal Pradesh ten times between 1921 and 1946. He held meetings and prayer gatherings at places like Shimla's Eidgah Maidan. He inspired women to adopt Swadeshi. The locals donated gold and cash for the Tilak Swaraj Fund. The aim of these programs is to promote physical, intellectual, and moral development in children, fostering the development of both the mind and body, along with spiritual awakening in this educational process. The majority of children come from farming and manual laborer families.

The Gandhi Smarak Nidhi's Patti Kalyana team under the coordination of Ashok Sharan, along with Sunita Sharma and Giriraj, are working in Himachal Pradesh. On the local level, under the leadership of Puspha Sharma, other volunteers like Devkala, Poonam, Nisha Bala, Kalpana Sharma, and Prema Laxmi are working in various villages.

Bhopal:

Every year, the M.P. Gandhi Smarak Nidhi conducts a special program on Gandhi Ji's Memorial Day on 12th February. This year, on 12th February, a Sarvadharm Prayer Meeting and Seminar will be organized. In memory of the late Lokendra Bhai, a senior Sarvodaya worker from Bundelkhand, Dr. Bharatendu Prakash will be honored with the "Lokendra Bhai Smriti Award"

for his lifelong dedication to social service. Dr. Bharatendu Prakash, an environmental scientist and author, is currently a member of the Madhya Pradesh Gandhi Smarak Nidhi.

Vijayawada (Andhra Pradesh):

On the 75th anniversary of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, a Gandhi portrait exhibition and book fair were organized at the Vijayawada Book Fair from December 28th to January 7th. The inauguration of the stall was done by former Deputy Speaker of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly, Mandali Prasad Buddha. There was also a display and sale of Gandhi literature in the Telugu language. Various programs were presented by students from different schools and colleges at the stall each day. On this occasion, personalities such as former Joint Director of the CBI, Lakshmi Narayan, former Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, Shankar Rao, Telugu film actor and author Tanikella Bharani, and former Election Commissioner of Andhra Pradesh, Nimmagadda Ramesh Kumar, motivated the students. Various spinning wheels were also showcased, and training on spinning was provided. Approximately 100,000 people visited the stall. The event was organized under the inspiration of Dr. P.C. Gandhi, the chairman of the Andhra Pradesh Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. Members such as Ravi Sharada, Ramachandra Rao, and Raviteja played significant roles.

On January 30th, a special Gandhi Memorial lecture was organized in Vijayawada in commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi. The main speaker for the event was Dr. Jayaprakash Narayan, founder of the Foundation for Democratic Reforms, with P.C. Gandhi presiding over the program. Additionally, Dr. N. Bhaskar Rao, Chairman of CMS, New Delhi, was present for the occasion.

Republic Day Celebrated

On January 26, at 11:00 AM, the chairman of the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi (Central) Mr. Ram Chandra Rahi, hoisted the national flag at the Gandhi Smarak Nidhi (Central) premises. In his address, he mentioned that in 1929, during the National Congress Session, the resolution for complete independence (swaraj) was passed. While we have achieved political freedom today, true self-rule is still incomplete. Today, democracy prevails, but the neglect of the people is evident. The democracy established for the welfare of the people has now taken away their freedom and dignity. The republic was attained through numerous sacrifices, asceticism, and dedication. The sacrifice of Gandhi Ji was for self-rule and the establishment of a republic. Today, it is essential for the people to understand the importance of democracy. We must establish our self-respect, rights, and dignity. The current events in the country are contrary to democratic values. It is necessary to rekindle the consciousness of self-rule that was awakened during the freedom struggle under the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru.

- Sanjoy Singha

Sansthakul

From IV-(Rule 8)

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I, Sanjoy Singha, declare that the particulars given above are true on the best of my knowledge and belief.

Sd/
Sanjoy Singha
Publisher

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Pratap Bhanu Mehta

There are moments in history that appear to drive wave after wave of people in a great torrent of catharsis, ecstasy, emotion and an elevated group mood that almost all conventional analysis, historical categories, moral measures and political prognosis seem beside the point. It would be foolish to deny that the *pran pratishtha* of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya is one such event. Just in sheer magnitude, of the tens of millions of people mobilised, whose identity, emotions and hopes are, at least for the moment, oriented towards Ayodhya, this event has almost no precedent in history. It is a watershed moment. The *pran pratishtha* following the foundation stone of Ayodhya, marks the consecration of Hinduism as a political religion pure and simple. It is not just a moment where the state, which has pulled all its mighty power behind this event, ceases to be secular. It is also the moment where Hinduism ceases to be religious.

The sheer spectacle of the event, now fusing modified but still traditional *yama* and *niyama*, with mass broadcasting and mass mobilisation, is itself considered an achievement. The spectacle is the statement: That Hindus have asserted their collective power, reclaimed their historical agency, and overcome the deep sense of insecurity, and despite some murmurings, for once managed to make something a show of unity. The BJP has kept its promises. Prime Minister Narendra Modi now donning the mantle of Hindu kingship, has the ability to get millions of people to play their parts for an audience of One, with all institutions, corporations, sects, civil society, media singing the same tune. It is a terrifying spectacle on any proper measure of democracy. But as a form of deference to mass sentiment it is now carrying its own democratic imprimatur. There is something quite astonishing about this mobilisation of power. You have

to struggle to remember its ominous origins and shadows.

Some parties may contest the ceremony. But everyone has to rush to declare their allegiance to Ram. Even Opposition parties are obliged to pay allegiance to Ram in the form that ironically was best described by Iqbal when he called Ram the *Imam-e-Hind*. The Ram whose role in Indian cultural and spiritual life was one whose centre was everywhere and circumference nowhere, has now been anchored to a centre. Ram has been transformed from a radiant glow of righteousness, compassion, and imaginative power into something merely instrumental: A litmus test for national loyalty. We are now more valorous devotees of Ram — more than Tulsidas or Gandhi, who rejected the logic of retaliation. You now have to swear allegiance to this *Imam-e-Hind*, or else.

In many ways, Bhagwad Gita 17.18 captures the spectacle being made out of this ceremony perfectly. It goes: *satkara mana puja artham tapah dambehna cheva yat/ kriyate tadiham proktam rajas am chalam adhruvam* (Penance and austerities performed ostentatiously out of pride for the sake of gaining honour and recognition are all in the mode of a passion. Its benefits are unstable and fleeting). This is both an accurate description of this mode of worship and a warning. It names this worship for what it is: A spectacle. But the fact that the passions and emotional resonances it produces are transitory is not reassuring in this context. It will require that the deep insecurities and needs

this spectacle has tapped into be constantly satiated. The passion around Ram is not a form of ecstasy finding its final repose in a radiant calm. It is going to be one in a long chain where our pride will have to be constantly fed. This is because in an inversion of dharma, the relation between pride and its object is reversed. We no longer take pride in genuine achievement; generating pride is considered the achievement.

In the *Mahabharata* there is an evocative word, *Dharma Dhwajii*. It is a pejorative for those who make a show of their worship in what is a sign of lack of real faith. The term *Dharma Dhwajii* refers to those who, as it were, care about the flag more than they care about dharma. The *Dharma Dhwajiis* have, for the moment, won the political, cultural and emotional battle fair and square. It is the overwhelming power of this moment, and the fact that we now inhabit a political universe solely dominated by power, that expressing even ambivalence about this *pran pratishtha* seems more like blowing straws in a hurricane. Bearing witness, fighting for republican ideals, are all now reduced to self-satisfied snarks or expressions of sour grapes. There is no real ideological counterpoint.

Rallying around the *dhwaja* is clear. What dharma it portends is less clear. The content of this new *Ramrajya*, is, for a moment, founded in a logic of retaliation and blood, rancour and division, that India's post-1951 constitutional ideals sought so hard to avoid. That project was, first and foremost, betrayed in many different ways by its own custodians. The *Dharma Dhwajiis*, with popular acclaim, have reduced whatever was left of the

dharma of that republic to ruins. The only content to the new *dharma* one can see on the horizon is, ironically, to intensify the logic of the 1930s: To create an ethno nationalist state with its cult of power and violence, its worship of purity and concentration of power. This is a project that never ends well. It produced devastating wars in Europe, and the partition of India.

This time the partition is more intimate and close: It is running through families. It is also a fissure within Hinduism. Worshipping idols is central to Hinduism, no matter what deracinated intellectuals might tell you. It gave Hinduism a playful intimacy. But the idols we worship are no longer intimate; they are mega showpieces. More grievously, concentration on the idol was a path to self-consciousness. But now, as the philosopher, Arindam Chakrabarti, once wrote, the idol has been replaced by the I-doll, the worship of the "I". We are consecrating our own collective narcissism in the image of God.

In the *Ramayana*, in any version, there is always a sense of sadness around Ram himself. Bhavabhuti captured it beautifully: Ram has been filled with the *rasa* of pity/ kept hidden by his profound demeanour/ the sharp pain of it held deep within/ like a clay pot baking in embers. This moment of triumphalism is also accompanied by a pain that cannot even be expressed. It will cook in the embers of this moment. Ram's *dhwaja* has been planted. But the question of *dharma* is met only with a yawning and ominous silence.

(Courtesy: The Indian Express, January 22, 20024)