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Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was once visited by a sadhu who had worshiped an image of Rama Lalla, infant Rama, for several decades, and who had as a result acquired many siddhis, occult powers. An amazing miracle occurred. Seeking liberation from sectarian possessiveness, the image transferred its loyalty from the sadhu to the sage. Adopting the vatsalya or parental attitude of devotion to Rama Lalla, Ramakrishna played with the image as Kaushalya, Rama's mother, would have done. He cuddled, scolded, spoke and sang to the animated image of the divine infant. When the time came for the sadhu to take leave of Sri Ramakrishna, the image would not part with the company of the sage! This story has a deep lesson for Hinduism in the modern world, and not only for Hinduism.

Like Rama Lalla in the Ramakrishna story, Rama bhakti in India today deserves enlightened trusteeship, not manipulation by the politics of historical revenge. The wrongs of the past, however hurtful to memory, cannot be put right by wrongs in the present, however advantageous they may seem to the ego of historically injured pride. We must not forget that Hinduism calls for an overcoming of ego, not an indulgence of it. We must not go against the grain of our svadharma, if we wish to be protected by dharma.

The Babari Masjid could have been allowed to remain unharmed in Ayodhya, and Muslims could have been persuaded to let the worship of Rama Lalla continue unhampered within the mosque-like edifice which had many Hindu architectural features. With Sita-ki-Rasoi as its companion shrine, symbolizing the compassionate nourishment of the Divine Mother towards all Her creatures, the functioning Rama temple inside the structure would have powerfully symbolized Vishnu's conservationist power in our times. A unique ecological shrine would have manifested for the next millennium in Ayodhya. But this was not to be.

Anger, like Ravana, drowned the voice of Vibhishana, the voice of conscience, and for the first time in history, at any rate in the modern period, Hindus destroyed a place of worship. That act initiated the violent persecution of members of a religious community, which in its turn invited a chain of retaliatory violence. The security of India and the integrity of Hinduism have been undermined as a direct result of the Ayodhya agitation.

Like Sita herself in the Ramayana, Sita-ki-Rasoī lies buried under the debris of the demolished Babari Masjid. If this second banishment of Sita is not to become a curse upon India, we must without delay move beyond the clenched fist of vengefulness into the hospitality of illumination, beyond the exclusivism of a "Sangha Parivar" toward the vastness of a "Bharat Parivar." We must allow the magical story of Ramakrishna and Rama Lalla to enable all religious traditions in the modern world to abandon fundamentalism and become playful trustees of spiritual truth.

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Hinduism Today has in the past published and will continue to publish in the future all sides of the Ayodhya issue including arguments for and against actions taken there. All readers' responses are welcome.