



Religion at the Service of Nationalism

An Analysis of Sangh Parivar Politics

by
Madhu Kishwar

"I will not sacrifice truth and ahimsa [non violence] even for the deliverance of my county or religion. This is as much as to say that neither can be so delivered."

Mahatma Gandhi, Young India, Jan. 21, 1927

THE obsession of the Sangh Parivar (a combination of the BJP, RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal and other similar groups) with building a new Ram mandir at Ayodhya is interpreted by secularists as promoting excessive religiosity. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The priest of the disputed Ram mandir at Ayodhya accuses them of embezzling crores of rupees which they collected through donations in the name of Ram. He is

reported to have said that none of the Hindutvavadi VHP RSS leaders had ever "made a single offering nor had they ever prayed in the temple."

This is not surprising considering that many of the Parivar leaders belong to sects that did not confer upon Ram the status of a divine god. Moreover, the RSS-BJP support base of activists and leaders in the north comes largely from an Arya Samaj background. This nationalist reform

movement, which began in the late nineteenth century, sought to purify Hinduism of "evils" like idol-worship and make it resemble Islam and Christianity. But today many Arya Samajis are enthusiastic supporters of the campaign to install one more idol of Ram Lalla at Ayodhya - not because they have suddenly become devotees of Ram but because they hope to use Ram as a symbol to unify all Hindus as a political community.