

"Moreover, I must follow the good advice that all of you affectionate friends, respected throughout the world, have uttered for my own good."

When he had uttered these words, powerful Rāma, praised by his mighty companions for the feat he had accomplished, was reunited with his beloved. Then Rāghava, who well deserved it, experienced happiness.



RESONANCE

from *A Public Address, 1989. The Birthplace of God Cannot Be Moved!*¹

Victory to Lord Vishvanatha of Kashi!

Victory to the birthplace of Lord Krishna!

Victory to our Hindu traditions and the ancient Vedic religion!

Victory to Lord Mahavira and the Lord Buddha!

Victory to the great religious warriors Banda Bairagi and Guru Govind Singh!

Victory to Mother India!

Victory to Mother Ganga!²

Esteemed religious teachers, wise seers, mothers and sisters who love the God Rāma, my brothers, we consider it an honor to have been invited to this holy city to speak to you about the birthplace of Rāma, about our religion, our culture, all of these things. Seers are assembled here, but today they are not here to enlighten us about spiritual matters. Holy men are assembled here, but today it isn't to recite the *Bhagavata Purana* that they have come. Today Vishvamitra³ has come, and he is looking for Rāma. The minister Chanakya⁴ has come, and he is looking for Chandragupta. Dadhichi⁵ has come, and he is ready to sacrifice his own body to make the god Indra's formidable thunderbolt weapon.

1. Translated by Allison Busch: The story of Rāma reentered history dramatically in the 1980s. Religious groups in association with political and paramilitary organizations were attempting to mobilize the populace to "liberate the birthplace" of Rāma in Ayodhya—a very real town in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh—as part of a larger initiative to reorder India according to principles associated with the majority Hindu community. A Muslim shrine constructed in the sixteenth century by a general of Babur, founder of the Mughal empire (see Volume D), was alleged to have been built on the ruins of a medieval temple commemorating Rāma's birthplace. Various Hindu groups demanded that a new temple be built in place of the mosque. Demonstrations and speeches, such as the anonymous one translated here that argues against any suggestion of compromise, stirred up public passion to such an extent that on 6 December 1992, a large mob gathered in Ayodhya and demolished the structure. This was a historic moment, the first major breach of the mutual respect for Muslim and Hindu religious monuments and antiquities since India's independence in 1947; the significance of this event for the future of the nation-state continues to be vigorously debated. Stories can have consequences.

2. Lord Vishvanatha, more commonly known as "Shiva," is the patron deity of Varanasi, also called "Kashi," on the banks of the Ganga (the Ganges River). Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu, is said to have been born in Mathura. Mahavira and Buddha (both 5th century B.C.E.) were the founders of Jainism and Buddhism, respectively, the two most prominent heterodox religious movements of the 1st millennium B.C.E. Banda Bairagi (d. 1716) espoused the Sikh faith and joined the tenth Guru of Sikhism, Guru Govind Singh, in his military campaigns in the southern plains against Mughal forces in an era of imperial disintegration.

3. A sage who, in the first book of the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, takes Rāma into the surrounding wilderness to slay the demons that had been defiling holy sacrifices and harassing ascetics.

4. The chief minister of the Chandragupta Maurya (c. 321–268 B.C.E.), Chanakya is often identified with Kautilya, author of *The Treatise on Power*, page 871.

5. A pious sage known for having sacrificed his life in order to offer his bones to the gods. The bones were later fashioned into the thunderbolt with which the god Indra defeated many demons.

We are here to tell you about Rama, about Lakshmana. We are here to tell you about the bravery of the freedom fighter Bhagat Singh.⁶ We are here to tell you about Maharana Pratap Singh, and the glories of Shivaji.⁷

India has a long tradition of sages coming to the rescue in a time of crisis. There was a time when the demon Ravana was harassing the world. In those days India had three rulers. There was king Dasharatha, but he was too busy with all of his religious sacrifices to be an effective ruler. There was King Janaka, but he too was a man of an overly spiritual bent. And then there was King Vali, who was too caught up in the pleasures of this world.

The poet Tulsidas brings up this dilemma: "All the kings were chagrined—how could this wicked demon be killed?" Although there were already three kings to rule the land, it was a wise sage who took charge in this difficult situation. He emerged from his lofty meditations to enter the realm of human action. He saw us through our hour of need.

Today it is just such a sage, following in the footsteps of the great sages before him, who has come into our midst to tell you what it is your country, your society, your religion, your culture needs. We have come to remind you that it is not so much the perpetrator of injustice that is at fault, as the one that puts up with it. Holy men have come here to spur our brave young men into action, to tell them that now is not the time to let us down. Don't let your mother ever say of you that her sons failed her in her hour of need.

* And now the hour of need has come. We need your youth, your vigor, your faith. The blood of your heroic ancestors is coursing through your veins. We have seen enough of that kind of Hindu who stands as a paragon of tolerance in the world. We have seen enough of those Hindus who get up at the pulpit and spout universalist teachings. We have seen enough of those Hindus who preach that Allah and Ishvar are one.

It's the same old story. They commit murder and nobody utters a peep. If we voice even the tiniest complaint, then it is we who are to blame. We are not even allowed to talk about the injustices being perpetrated against us. Why are we treated like pariahs in our own home? This isn't any particular person's fault. Collectively we act like a bunch of political eunuchs. It isn't the fault of the appeasement policy toward Muslims, either. It is our own fault that even though we number hundreds of millions we have never united ourselves. We have not tried to mobilize our strength, we have forgotten what it means to have pride in our culture. We have sold off our self-respect in the auction house of politics.

A society that has forgotten what it means to value its heritage, a society that doesn't know what self-respect or pride is, might as well stand back and watch as politics tramples its culture underfoot. I don't need to tell you that this is happening to us. There is only one solution. The solution to our problems is for Hindus to band together. We need to break down the barriers of caste, we need to reconcile our language and regional differences. We need to be tightly bound, like fingers gathered into a fist. Hindus have traditionally shied away from using force, but now it's high

6. A militant Sikh nationalist and socialist revolutionary who founded the Young India Council in 1926 and was simultaneously active in the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association. He was executed by the British colonial government in 1932 for terrorist activities.

7. The Rajput ruler Maharana Pratap Singh (reigned

1572–1597) is remembered for his chivalry and bravery in fighting against Akbar's forces in an attempt to maintain sovereignty over the Rajasthan area. Shivaji (r. 1674–1680) and the Maratha kingdom he led posed a formidable threat to the Mughal Empire.

time you started defending yourselves. You have lived like corpses already for too long, now you have to die in the fight for life. Do not shy away from death. You may have to embrace death in order to live. * * *

Our country's leaders are power-hungry. All they really care about is getting themselves elected. The politicians—those in power and the opposition, too—just care about appeasing the Muslims. * * * V. P. Singh has made sure that not one of our workers can participate in the Rama temple campaign. Well, all we have to say to this is that we don't want Rajiv's rule, we don't want V. P. Singh's rule.⁸ It's Rama's rule that we want, and Hanuman is ready for action.

My Hindu brothers, you've shown enough sympathy for the rest of the world. You have always been a peace-loving people; the type to take pity on everybody else. Don't you know that this kind of pacifism can backfire, and those whom you treat with kindness and respect may one day turn around and stab you in the back? Our sages have resolved that the time has come for Hindus to start being concerned about themselves. Think about your children and future generations. Cast off the cloak of cowardice and weakness. It's time to adopt the ways of bravery and heroism. You just stood by and watched as the Somnath temple was looted, you didn't say a word.⁹ The Somnath temple was destroyed before your very eyes, and you didn't retaliate. Many have come and attacked you, and you didn't defend yourselves. And what have you received in return for this pacifism? How have your gentle ways been rewarded? People have mistaken your good will, your kind-heartedness, your generosity for cowardice and weakness.

No Hindu has ever razed a mosque to the ground, but what did we get in return for our gentleness? Muhammad Gauri came, Mahmud of Ghazni came.¹ Invaders kept on coming, one after the other. They attacked us and tried to destroy our culture. They demolished our temples, they violated the honor of our mothers and sisters—do you want to see this kind of appalling history repeated? * * *

My heroic brothers, I don't need to tell you that you should be wary of this country's leaders and all their antics. You'll recall that years ago before the creation of Pakistan there was all of this political rhetoric about "unity." When people began to talk of partition, our country's foremost leaders used to say they would rather die than see such a thing happen. But they did let it happen—our motherland was hacked in two and today separatist sentiments still plague us. In the Punjab we have the Khalistan movement, and secessionist movements have taken the northeast by storm.² Politicians may contest elections on the issue of unity, but what they're really doing is tearing our country apart. Soon all that will be left of U. P. is a tiny fragment—but their election campaigns will still consist of unity slogans. * * *

It doesn't matter how many times you shout out slogans about unity, or raising the living standards of the lower castes, or eradicating poverty. We're not going to be able to keep our country together with just a bunch of slogans. It's sacrifice we need,

8. Rajiv Gandhi became the prime minister of India under the secularist Congress Party after the assassination of his mother, Indira Gandhi, in 1984. Vishvanath Pratap Singh ruled as prime minister from 1989 to 1990, implementing affirmative action policies in favor of low castes, which upper castes held to be profoundly threatening to their interests.

9. Mahmud of Ghazni culminated a series of raids on Indian temple towns by plundering the Somnath temple on the western coast of India in 1026 C.E.

1. Mahmud of Ghazni used his plunder to further strengthen the Ghaznavid kingdom, in central Asia. By contrast, the conquest of Muhammad Gauri in 1192 led to the establishment of an enduring political entity in India, the Delhi Sultanate.

2. The Khalistan movement called for a sovereign homeland for Sikhs in the state of Punjab in western India. In Assam and neighboring states in the northeast, tribal groups in particular have long sought autonomy.

not slogans. And our opportunistic leaders are not capable of sacrifice. Sacrifice can only come from those who truly love their country.

My brothers, I know that you love your country. That's why I am telling you to get ready for action. Seeing our country's crisis, these sages have gathered here to help us. The policy of appeasing special interest groups has brought our country to the brink of ruin. These leaders are just greedy for votes and they don't care one bit about India's future. None of your leaders has the guts to raise his hand in parliament and stick up for the issue of Rama's birthplace. Because it takes strength of character to speak the truth and that's something our leaders no longer have. It's been forty-two years since Independence. We may have made some progress in this country, but we've also had major setbacks. All the ideals that our forefathers sacrificed so much to preserve are vanishing before our eyes!

Look at what's going on in the world, look at what things have come to.
Is there anything that isn't for sale?
Minds and bodies are for sale.
Our parliament was sold off long ago. Now the nation itself is up for sale.
Our natural resources are being plundered.
Youth is for sale. Now religion is for sale.
The honor and integrity of our elders are up for grabs now.
Everything is for sale—people would sell their very own soul if they could.
Go ask your sisters and mothers—their brothers and sons are for sale.
What a strange place we live in—brides and bridegrooms are for sale.
Leaders of today, take a good look around you.
We are hurtling towards destruction. Is there anyone who can save us now?

In this day and age people think nothing of abandoning truth in their grab for power. They'd sacrifice all our religious principles, the heritage of our ancestors. * * *

But the truth about Lord Rama's birthplace is something that can't be denied. The birthplace of Rama has always belonged to the Hindus. It still does, and it always will. We won't rest until we build a magnificent temple at Rama's birthplace. My brothers, your confused leaders are demanding proof of the existence of Rama. Tell them that one of our most basic everyday greetings to one another is "Victory to Lord Rama!" When we are tired from a long day at work, we get relief from our weariness by calling out to Rama. Sometimes we may be overwhelmed by sorrow, but we say his name and we feel peace. Our very life originates in Rama, and when we die the pall bearers carry us away shouting, "The only sure thing in life is the name of Rama!"

And they are still demanding proof of Rama's existence? Tell the whole world that this country is Rama's, the very air we breathe is Rama's. And the Lord Rama has set an example for us—that we fight our enemies. We have never tried to interfere with anybody else's rights, we have always treated others with respect. But when justice became a mockery, then even the great monkey king Vali³ had to be destroyed. And Rama gave the order to charge forth and wipe out the tyrant Ravana. When Hanuman on his own was able to reduce Lanka to ashes,⁴ then surely we should not shrink from the task of defending Rama's birthplace.

3. Rama killed the monkey king Vali to consolidate his alliance with Vali's brother and rival, Sugriva.

4. In the *Ramayana* of Valmiki, the valorous monkey

scout Hanuman is apprehended soon after locating Sita. Ravana orders his tail to be set on fire, but Hanuman escapes and with his burning tail sets the capital on fire.

How can people oppose the god Rama and still consider themselves Indian? That's just not possible! Shout it out so that the whole world can hear! It's not only India—the entire world knows that this country belongs to that supreme Lord Rama, king of Ayodhya. My fellow Rama devotees, political leaders like Chandrashekhar⁵ tell us that we should build our temple elsewhere, as though it were possible simply to move our God's birthplace. I would say to him, "Chandrashekhar, are you able to trade in your father for someone else?" No, he can't just go out and get a new father. And we are supposed to change the birthplace of the Father of the World?

Other leaders say, "Do you have to build a temple there? How about installing a commemorative plaque or something?" Well, what the hell are we supposed to commemorate? That a certain plunderer named Babur invaded India? That he attacked us, and demolished our temple and with it our sense of self-respect? Is that what our leaders want to commemorate? * * * Some of your leaders actually do have eyes to see, and they agree that the birthplace of Rama belongs to the Hindus, but they are too afraid to speak up about it.

My brothers, it's time to get ready for action. These sages have come today to spur you to action. Those good-for-nothing cowards can't do anything to protect your India. We are waiting for brave men who will fight, who will be able to protect this country's pride and honor.

That is why I am telling you to bind yourselves together like fists. Your powers are too diffuse, you need to gather your forces. There are caste barriers among you—you must eradicate those. There are language and regional barriers—be rid of them. You have to bind yourselves together like fists, you have to protect your honor and your self-respect. * * *

We don't have a problem with those Muslims who love India, Muslims like Rahim or Raskhan.⁶ We welcome them with open arms. But we will not tolerate the Baburs and the Aurangzebs.⁷ This is the truth, I don't care how much it hurts, you must listen to it! Let it pierce you like an arrow in the heart! I don't care if this will make you angry, or make you break into a sweat. How long can we remain quiet and avoid confrontation? We are boiling over with rage—how long can we put up with this? We don't want anything to do with those hypocrites who have hacked off the arms of our motherland, who heap curses upon our Lord Rama and extol the glories of Babur the invader. There's no room in India for such as they. They should get out, this isn't their India. * * *

An election is around the corner. Suddenly you're going to see a lot of politicians claiming to be supporters of Rama and trying to garner votes on this issue. You're going to have to watch out for false supporters spewing slogans about Rama. In the *Ramayana* there was that false ascetic Kalanemi⁸ who tried to kill Hanuman. That's what these fellows are like. * * *

Why are you so afraid of death? Death is something we're all going to have to face some day, there's no escaping that. What kind of death do you want, a dog's

5. The prime minister of India under the Janata Dal Party during 1990 and 1991.

6. Abdur Rahim Khankhana and Sujana Raskhan (late 16th and early 17th centuries) composed poetry in Hindi. Raskhan also composed verses in praise of the Hindu god Krishna.

7. Babur (1483–1530) was founder of the Mughal empire (see Volume D). Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707) was the most orthodox-minded of the Mughal rulers and the most oppressive toward non-Muslim faiths.

8. A demon uncle of Ravana according to some *Ramayana* traditions.

death or a hero's death? Hindus aren't going to let their principles be mocked. It's time to forget about turning the other cheek. We've had enough of Hindu tolerance and pacifism. You're going to have to start fighting back.

This is the message that these holy men have come here to deliver. They have come to spur you to action. You must protect our motherland, and victory will be yours! We will not rest until we have built a magnificent temple at the site of Rama's birthplace. I'm not addressing this to the sons of Ravana, and for supporters of Rama there really isn't any need. But let me just ask everybody here to hold up their hands and to pledge an oath to Lord Rama.

We pledge ourselves to Lord Rama!

We pledge ourselves to Lord Rama!

We pledge ourselves to Lord Rama!

Victory to India!

Victory to Lord Rama!

Daya Pawar, Sambhaji Bhagat, and Anand Patwardhan:

We Are Not Your Monkeys¹

The rulers who controlled all knowledge

And claimed the *Ramayana*
to be India's history

Called us many names:

5 "Demons," "Low castes," "Untouchables"

But we were the aborigines of this land

Listen to our story

Today we call ourselves
Dalits—the oppressed

10 Once Aryans² on their horses
invaded this land

And we who were natives
became the displaced

1. Translated by Anand Patwardhan. While the *Ramayana* of Valmiki has offered influential models of conduct to generations of men and women, it has also at times been regarded with considerable suspicion and resentment. Its ideal of gender relationships, for example—exemplified in the fire ordeal Sita faces (see page 912)¹ or, worse, her abandonment by Rama when rumors begin to circulate in Ayodhya about her chastity (in Book 7)—has been viewed as a distorted one, increasingly so in the contemporary world. (When Hindu refugee women from Sind who had been raped during the Partition of India in 1947 were abandoned on the streets of Bombay by their husbands² because that is what Rama would have done," a modern Marathi poet was moved to compose a new version of the *Ramayana* with a different ending.) Similarly, many historically oppressed communities in South Asia

believe themselves to have been humiliatingly represented as the demons or animals of the tale. "We Are Not Your Monkeys" gives voice to this sentiment among today's Dalits (formerly known as "Untouchables") of the state of Maharashtra in western India. That Valmiki almost certainly had not intended any such simplistic identification is less important than the fact that people have often been made to feel he did. Something of this complex relationship between literature and power in a world of inequality was noted by critic Walter Benjamin when he observed that there is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism.

2. The Sanskrit term *arya* was typically applied to men of the upper social orders in early South Asia. It took on racial connotations in the works of 19th-century Orientalists and 20th-century fascists.

O Rama, O Rama!

15 You became the gods
And we the demons

You portrayed our Hanuman
as a monkey

20 O Rama, you representative
of Aryans

You enslaved us
to form a monkey army

Those you could not subjugate
you deemed as *Rakshasas*—demons

25 But we were the *Rakshaks*—protectors
of the forest

To keep your racial purity
you invented the hierarchy of caste

30 Through your "Laws of Manu"³
you trampled on the rights of women

You made your wife Sita undergo
An ordeal by fire to prove her chastity

Such was your male law
O Rama

35 When Shambuka the "untouchable"⁴
Tried to gain knowledge

You beheaded him O Rama

Thus did you crush those that tried
To rise above their caste

40 Days passed
Years and aeons went by

But our lives remained the same

We skin your cattle
So you can wear shoes

45 We clean your gutters
So you can stay clean

Do you ask then O Rama

What our caste is?
What our religion is?

3. An influential ancient work of Hindu customary law, the *Laws of Manu* is attributed in Hindu thought to one of the progenitors of the human race.

4. In the seventh book of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Rama kills the low-caste Shambuka for engaging in ascetic practices reserved for the high-caste.

50 Independence dawned
 And with it began the rule
 of the Constitution
 The author of the Constitution
 Dr. B. R. Ambedkar⁵
 55 himself born as an "untouchable"
 Framed the Constitution
 around secular ideals
 The castle of caste privilege
 Began to crumble
 60 No longer could the elite
 Skim the milk
 of religious exploitation
 But poverty grew
 And to divert the attention of the poor
 65 A new enemy was found
 Muslims were targeted
 And "taught a lesson"
 To destroy Lanka, O Rama
 You formed us into a monkey army
 70 And today you want us
 The working majority
 To form a new monkey army
 And attack Muslims
 But be warned
 75 Be warned you purveyors
 Of self-serving religion
 We will be your monkeys no more
 We will sing songs of humanity
 And we will make you human as well
 80 We will make you human.



5. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), scholar, social activist, and politician, helped draft India's constitution and was the preeminent voice of the Dalits against caste discrimination.