

RAM MANDIR: THE LEGACY OF SHRI RAM AND THE PRATHISHTA OF BHARAT

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Abstract

The construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya stands as a monumental event in Hindu faith, symbolizing a resurgence of spiritual and cultural heritage. Rooted in the narrative of Lord Ram, the temple embodies the values of virtue, righteousness, and dharma, resonating deeply within the ethos of Hinduism. Its significance extends beyond a mere physical structure, representing the reclaiming of a sacred legacy amidst historical and political complexities. The religious importance of the Ram Mandir lies in its role as a spiritual beacon, fostering devotion and cultural identity among millions of Hindus worldwide. Furthermore, its cultural significance transcends borders, influencing the cultural landscape of South Asia through shared historical narratives and religious practices. The civilizational connection between South Asia and West Asia, exemplified by the contributions of Hussaini Brahmins in Karbala and recent diplomatic initiatives, underscores the enduring bonds of shared values and respect. In the digital age, the global exchange of cultural ideas facilitates greater interconnectedness among communities, enriching understanding and inclusivity.

Keywords: *Ram Mandir, Hinduism, cultural significance, South and West Asia, civilizational connection, Hussaini Brahmins.*

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Introduction

The construction of the Ram Mandir holds profound significance within the tapestry of Hindu faith, marking a momentous chapter in the religious and cultural heritage of millions. The temple, dedicated to Lord Ram, stands not only as a physical structure but as a representation of spiritual resurgence, cultural preservation, and the embodiment of cherished values ingrained in the hearts of Hindus across the world. The narrative of the Ram Mandir resonates deeply within the ethos of Hinduism, reflecting a collective longing for the reestablishment of the divine in a sacred space.

At the core of its significance lies Lord Ram, the seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu, venerated as the epitome of virtue, righteousness, and dharma. The Ramayana, the epic chronicling his life and adventures, serves as a moral compass, providing guidance on duty, loyalty, and the triumph of good over evil. Lord Ram's unwavering commitment to upholding dharma and his embodiment of ideal kingship make him a revered deity, and Ayodhya, believed to be his birthplace, assumes a unique sacredness. The significance of Ayodhya transcends the boundaries of a physical location; it becomes a symbolic realm where the divine intersects with the terrestrial. Pilgrims and devotees of Hindu faith, guided by their spiritual calling, will now undertake journeys to Ayodhya, seeking a connection with the divine and immersing in the aura of Lord Ram's presence. Ayodhya, with its historical and mythological roots, emerges as the spiritual epicentre where Lord Ram took birth, setting the stage for the construction of the Ram Mandir.

The Ram Mandir is not merely a temple; it represents the reclamation of a cultural and historical legacy that spans millennia. The construction of the temple at the birthplace of Lord Ram is seen as a restoration of a sacred heritage that endured through centuries, overcoming historical challenges and political complexities. For Hindus, the Ram Mandir becomes a tangible link to their ancient roots, a testament to the enduring vibrancy of a culture that has endured through the ages.

The construction of the Ram Mandir holds immense significance for many Indians, particularly those who identify with the Hinduism. The Ram Mandir refers to a temple dedicated to Lord Ram, a central figure in the Hindu epic Ramayana. The site in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, has been a focal point of religious and socio-political debates in India for several decades. The significance of the Ram Mandir is heightened by the resolution of a protracted and often contentious dispute surrounding the Ayodhya site. The legal battles, political debates, and social tensions that enveloped this issue for decades find a conclusion in the construction of the temple. The resolution not only signifies a triumph of justice but also offers a sense of closure, allowing the faithful to look towards the future with a renewed sense of unity and purpose.

Religious Importance of Ram Mandir

The religious importance of the Ram Mandir lies deeply rooted in the faith and beliefs of millions of Hindus, for whom Lord Ram holds a central and revered position in their religious consciousness. The construction of the temple in Ayodhya, regarded as the birthplace of Lord Ram, signifies a spiritual and symbolic re-establishment of his divine presence on Earth.

The construction of the Ram Mandir is not merely a physical endeavour; it is a manifestation of a collective spiritual aspiration. The temple's design, architecture, and rituals are meticulously planned to adhere to the principles of Vastu Shastra and Agama Shastra, ensuring that the sacred space is conducive to spiritual practices and reflects the divine energy associated with Lord Ram.

The religious importance of the temple extends beyond its physical boundaries. It serves as a symbol of the victory of righteousness (dharma) over injustice, as depicted in the Ramayana. The narrative of Lord Ram's life, his exile, the battle against the demon king Ravana, and the eventual return to Ayodhya resonate deeply with devotees, emphasizing the triumph of good over evil.

The Ram Mandir is not just a place of worship; it is a living testament to the religious and cultural heritage of Hinduism. The temple complex incorporates various elements that celebrate the diverse facets of Lord Ram's life, including

his valour, compassion, and commitment to duty. Pilgrims engage in rituals, prayers, and festivals that revolve around these aspects, fostering a sense of spiritual fulfilment and a sense of cultural identity.

The religious importance of the Ram Mandir is also intertwined with the concept of darshan, the act of beholding the divine. Devotees believe that visiting the temple and having darshan of the deity bestows blessings, purifies the soul, and facilitates spiritual growth. The pilgrimage to Ayodhya and the worship at the Ram Mandir become integral parts of a devotee's spiritual journey, offering an opportunity for introspection, devotion, and surrender to the divine will.

The religious significance of the Ram Mandir is deeply ingrained in the hearts and minds of Hindus, representing a sacred space where the divine presence of Lord Ram is honoured, celebrated, and cherished. The temple serves as a beacon of spiritual inspiration, cultural identity, and the enduring values upheld by Lord Ram in the hearts of millions of devotees.

Cultural Significance of Ram Mandir

The cultural significance of the Ram Mandir extends beyond the borders of India, influencing and resonating with the cultural fabric of various South Asian countries. The temple, dedicated to Lord Ram, holds a central place in Hinduism, and its impact on the region's cultural landscape can be observed through shared historical narratives, religious practices, and the transnational spread of Hindu traditions.

The Ramayana, the epic that narrates the life of Lord Ram, is not confined to the borders of India. It has traversed geographical boundaries and left an indelible mark on the cultural consciousness of South Asian nations. Countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Malaysia have cultural ties to the Ramayana, with variations in local retellings and adaptations of the epic.

Over centuries, South Asian countries have engaged in cultural exchanges, trade, and interactions, leading to the amalgamation of diverse traditions. The

spread of Hinduism across the region has contributed to a shared cultural heritage, and the Ram Mandir, as a symbol of devotion to Lord Ram, plays a role in this interconnected cultural tapestry.

South Asian cultures have a history of syncretism, where different religious and cultural traditions coexist and influence each other. The stories of Lord Ram and other Hindu deities have become intertwined with the cultural narratives of diverse communities, creating a mosaic of traditions that reflects the region's pluralistic ethos.

The Ramayana has inspired literary works and performing arts across South Asia. Poets, writers, and playwrights in countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh have produced adaptations and interpretations of the epic, contributing to a shared cultural reservoir. In some South Asian countries, the Ramayana and the figure of Lord Ram are integral to national identity. For example, in Nepal, Lord Ram is considered a cultural and historical figure, and his connection to the country is reflected in its national symbols.

In countries with religious diversity, the Ram Mandir and the stories of Lord Ram often serve as points of cultural intersection. The themes of justice, righteousness, and morality found in the Ramayana can resonate with people of various faiths, contributing to interfaith dialogue and understanding.

Civilizational links between South Asian countries

The religious and cultural significance of the Ram Mandir in South Asian countries is embedded in shared historical narratives, religious practices, and cultural exchanges. The temple, dedicated to Lord Ram, serves as a cultural anchor that transcends borders, influencing architecture, art, festivals, and the collective identity of diverse communities. The enduring legacy of the Ramayana and the cultural resonance of Lord Ram continue to shape the dynamic and interconnected cultural landscape of South Asia.

Sri Lanka, being an integral part of the Ramayana narrative, has its own connection with the Ram Mandir. The demon king Ravana is said to have

imprisoned Lord Rama's consort, Sita, in Lanka. The eventual rescue of Sita by Rama is a pivotal moment in the Ramayana. The shared cultural heritage and the reverence for Lord Rama create a spiritual and historical connection between the two countries. The Ramayana has left an indelible mark on Sri Lankan culture, and the episodes from the epic are often depicted in various art forms and rituals.

The Ramayana's influence is widespread in Nepali society, and the temple in Ayodhya holds significance for Nepali Hindus. The cultural and religious ties between Nepal and India, especially through the shared heritage of the Ramayana and being the birthplace of Sita, strengthen the connection between the Ram Mandir and the people of Nepal. Devotees of Lord Ram and Sita from Nepal can now participate in religious events and festivals related to the Ram Mandir, further enhancing the civilizational bond.

The Ram Mandir in Ayodhya has received invaluable donations from all around the world, bringing people together to celebrate shared heritage and cultural harmony. These global offerings exemplify harmony and diplomacy, seamlessly integrating many cultures to honour the sacred site.

Nepal's Janakpur is thought to be the birthplace of Sita, the wife of Lord Ram. The Ram temple in Ayodhya has received over three thousand gifts, including clothing's, jewellery, and silver shoes. Earlier, Nepal presented two large Shaligrams to Ayodhya. Shaligrams are fossilised stones or ammonites discovered in the river bed of the Kali Gandaki, a tributary of the Gandaki River in Nepal, believed to represent a form of Vishnu. A delegation from Sri Lanka visited Ayodhya, presenting the Ram Janmabhoomi with a rock associated with the legendary Ashok Vatika. During Sita's captivity, she was confined to Ashok, a renowned garden from the Tretaug era within Ravan's domain. Water from the Kubha River in Afghanistan, known as the Kabul River, has been donated to the Ram shrine at Ayodhya. The Kashmiri Muslims gifted 2kg of organically produced pure saffron to the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Lord Ram is revered in countries like Thailand, Indonesia, and other Southeast nations.

In Muslim-majority Indonesia, Ramlila is also organised. The first Lord Ram and Lord Hanuman temples in Mexico were built at Queretaro, Mexico, on the eve of the “Pran Pratishtha” ritual in Ayodhya.

The civilizational connection between West Asia and Bharat amidst the Ram Mandir discourse

Lord Rama, who is also regarded as a symbol of love and peace, represents civilizational qualities that serve as the basis for life's ideals. The dedication of Ram Mandir is a noteworthy action that disregards the negative conversation and fosters a sense of optimism across nations and civilizations. There have been numerous occasions when Sufis and other Islamic intellectuals not only expressed respect for Lord Rama but also made efforts to restore the lost connections of affection between two civilizations.

The civilizational connection between the West Asian nations and Bharat dates back to around 1400 years, when King Samudragupta expeditiously gathered a contingent of courageous Indian soldiers and commanded their departure towards Karbala. The army commander was Rehab Dutt, who belonged to the Mohiyal Brahmin caste. Regrettably, when Rehab Dutt and his courageous warriors arrived in Karbala, Imam Husain had already been slain. The news caused great sadness among the entire Hussaini Brahmin community. They made the decision to wield their swords against their own necks. “Once the individual we intended to assist has perished, what course of action should we take regarding these weapons?” they inquired. At that moment, an Arab supporter of Imam Husain convinced them to remove the swords from their necks and join the Janab-e-Mukhtar’s group. Therefore, these Indian troops engaged in remarkable combat, showcasing their exceptional Hindustani swordsmanship in Karbala as a means of seeking retribution for the demise of Imam Husain.

Imam Husain sent a letter to his childhood friend Habib in Arabia, seeking help. In addition, his elder son Ali Akbar wrote a similar letter and sent it to a distant location, Bharat, specifically to Raja Samudragupta, who was both a

Hindustani Sapoot and the King of Bharat. It is worth noting that Raja Samudragupta was a cousin-brother of Ali-ibn-e Husain.

What needs to be noted here is that Bharat and its leaders had not only good relations with the Islamic world but also with the kingdom of Iran, which was Zoroastrian by faith. More than 1400 years ago, the ruler of Iran had two daughters named Maher Bano and Shaher Bano. Maher Bano entered into matrimony with King Chandragupta and subsequently assumed the name Chandralekha. After some years, Chanderlekha's younger sister, Shaher Bano, entered into matrimony with Imam Husain (A.S.). Samudragupta, the son of Chanderlekha and Chandragupta, was the reigning monarch of India when he received a correspondence from his cousin, Ali ibn-E-Husain.

Even in the present day, the location in Karbala where these courageous Brahmins lived is referred to as 'ad-Dayar-ul-Hindiyya'. Several Brahmins were killed in Karbala; some remained there, while a few returned to India. These courageous Brahmins are remembered in history as **'Hussaini Brahmin'**. Today, they must be acknowledged, and this lesser-recognised yet very remarkable story of civilizational connection must be honoured.

Sunil Dutt, a renowned Indian cinema actor, was a member of Rahab Dutt's family and so identified as a 'Hussaini Brahmin'. He would personally honour the martyrdom of Imam Hussain, following in the footsteps of his ancestors, during the sacred month of Muharram. On one occasion, Sunil Dutt made a donation to the Shaukat Khanum Cancer Hospital located in Lahore. Dutt vowed to donate to the hospital in order to help cancer patients, saying he would be willing to give whatever amount asked for and even pour his own blood in remembrance of his ancestors' sacrifice in Karbala for Imam Hussain (A.S.). The hospital's archive has documentation of this remark.

Munshi Premchand's renowned drama "Karbala," written in 1924, depicts the tale of the seven Indian troops who valiantly arrived at Karbala and fought with Imam Hussain (A.S.). Nonica Dutt, a former history professor at JNU and a member of the Hussaini Brahmin community, contested the notion that Hussaini Brahmins have disappeared from the social landscape in India.

Smt. Sunita Jhingran is a vocalist who venerates Hindu deities and Shia Imam Hussain. Sunita Jhingran, a celebrated exponent of classical music, particularly known for her mastery in thumri, khayal, dadra, and ghazal, is also upholding the ancestral customs as a Hussaini Brahmin. Hussaini Brahmins engage in the veneration of Hindu deities as well as Imam Hussain, the third Imam of the Shia branch of Islam.

Zain-ul-Abedin informed his family in India about their mission, and aware of their fatal battle, his Hindu uncle set off with his warriors to assist Imam Husain at Karbala. He arrived too late to save him, but his progeny, the Hussaini Brahmins, mourn their failure to help the Imam at his hour of need, commemorate Karbala to this day, and practice *matam* and other mourning rituals associated with the remembrances of the tragedy of Karbala. This lineage of Hussaini Brahmins includes the family of Indian actor Sunil Dutt.

In addition to the aforementioned, several occurrences highlighted stronger and more cordial diplomatic relations between the Arab nations and Bharat. Some of the prominent incidents are shared below:

First Temple in the UAE

The first Hindu temple, which is being built in the United Arab Emirates, is going to mark yet another historic step in the relationship between Bharat and the Arab World. After the consecration of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, the BAPS Hindu temple would be inaugurated by PM Narendra Modi on February 14, 2024. During Prime Minister Modi's inaugural visit to the United Arab Emirates in 2015, the UAE made the decision to allocate land for the construction of a temple in Abu Dhabi. The Prime Minister's visit held significant diplomatic importance, as he became the first Indian Prime Minister since Indira Gandhi to visit this strategically important Gulf nation in a span of 34 years.

Incorporation of the Ramayana and Mahabharata into Saudi Arabia's recently implemented curriculum

As per the Saudi Prince's Vision 2030, the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and other significant facets of Indian culture, such as yoga and Ayurveda, will be taught in schools. A Padma Shri recipient for being the first certified yoga instructor in Saudi Arabia played an instrumental role in the legalization of yoga and the incorporation of a curriculum based on Indian epics.

Conclusion

The civilizational connection between West Asia, and South Asia, and Bharat is a testament to the enduring bonds of shared values, respect, and cultural exchange. From historical events to contemporary diplomatic relations, the connection between these two civilizations has transcended time and space. The construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and the contribution of Hussaini Brahmins in the war of Karbala serve as a reminder of the deep-rooted unity and harmony that can be achieved when civilizations come together. It is through these connections and exchanges that we can build a more inclusive and understanding world.

In the contemporary era, digital connectivity has facilitated the global exchange of cultural ideas. The Ram Mandir, its rituals, and cultural significance are accessible to a wider audience through online platforms, fostering a sense of interconnectedness among South Asian and West Asian communities worldwide.

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