Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self

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Programme Area: The Social Effects of Globalization
Project Title: Ethnic Conflict and Development
No. of Pages: 223

This book, by a group of Indian scholars and social activists, discusses the social and philosophical basis of a Hindu religious movement, Ramjanmabhumi. It focuses mainly on the political campaigns orchestrated by the movement, which culminated in the confrontation between Hindus and Muslims at Ayodhya, one of the country's sacred cities, and the seizure and subsequent destruction of a Muslim place of worship there.

The authors highlight three sets of explanations for the rise of the Ramjanmabhumi movement. The first relates to the breakdown of traditional social and cultural ties, previously binding all of India's religious groups together, as the country experienced high levels of modernization and Westernization. The second, which is a by-product of the first, is the emergence of a modern, mass-oriented version of religion. This became both a political ideology and an identity for groups of urban individuals who had lost many of their traditional values and beliefs but lacked a firm grasp on modernity and its associated benefits. The third is the use of religion by semi-modern middle class individuals as an instrument for gaining political power and economic resources. At the core of these explanations is the view that the colonial impact in South Asia in general introduced a Western concept of nation state and national self determination that was at variance with Indian traditions in managing community relations and differences.

The book provides a detailed account of the origins, membership, structure, forms of mobilization and goals of the various organizations that make up the Ramjanmabhumi movement. It also contains useful data on the scale, evolution and geographical distribution of communal violence, and argues that such violence is largely an urban phenomenon. The authors conclude with a plea for retrieving the strong traditions of cultural plurality and multiple selfhood that have been the hallmark of Hindu civilization for centuries.

The authors come from different academic backgrounds spanning the fields of political psychology, sociology, journalism, political science and environmental studies. They are members of the Committee for Cultural Choices and Global Futures in India.

Publication and ordering details
Pub. Date: 4 Jun 1998
Pub. Place: New Delhi
ISBN: 0 19564 271 6
Type: Paperback
From: Oxford University Press - India