

**Indian Culture and Values in Narendra Kohli's Writings****S. Jagadish**

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*Culture* is a way of life of a group of people- the behaviours, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next. *History* is the study of the past, specifically how it relates to humans. Value is placed on respect for an individual's dignity and personal autonomy. A culture's values are its ideas about what is good, right, fair, and just. The value placed on cooperation is strongly rooted in the past, when cooperation was necessary for the survival of family and group. Because of strong feelings of group solidarity, competition within the group is rare. Approved behaviour includes improving on and competing with one's own past performance, however.

India is a pluralistic and multi-cultural society where many faiths and belief systems regulate the life of individuals. In this part of the globe many religious traditions, both indigenous and foreign, have been established over the years. We have Buddhism, Sikhism, Bhakti cult, Sufi tradition as well as Islam and Christianity. Many religious gurus, law-givers, social reformers and statesmen have come to guide and influence the life and culture of Indians. The Mahabharata, the Ramayana, the Bhagvat Gita as well as the Quran, the Bible, the Guru Bani, etc., have moulded the thinking pattern and consciousness of Indians. Indian culture never saw the individual and society as antagonistic to each other. The individual and society were viewed as two complementary and incomplete entities tied to a relationship of mutual obligations, a commitment which was essential to ensure the well-being of all.

Narendra Kohli, is credited with re-inventing the ancient form of epic writing in modern prose. He has published more than 76 books including short story collections, novels and plays. He wrote a few novels based on the life of families and societies as well. but just portraying the society, or ridiculing its flaws and dilemmas was not going to satisfy him, he realized, that literature cannot reach its ultimate goal just by a narrow, partial and limited display of society, nor can that society benefit from such literature. The demonstration of poor human qualities will only encourage the evil and the foul. Therefore, it must be the goal of literature to demonstrate the great, honourable and moral aspect of life, he believes. His popular novels based on the two epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, as well as on the life of Swami Vivekananda, a modern Indian leader have been massively appreciated and they created new records for Indian cultural values.

This twentieth century rendition of Ramayana is an apt example of classical literature fit for our modern times, for the present age of Reason. In such times when the young minds of today refuse to accept the status quo without questioning, when the rampant commercialism and meaningless and purposeless individualism have left no ideals intact for the youth to hold on to, there is an even greater need for literature that speaks of the high values and ideals but without alluding to the „golden“ times gone by.

I have selected a few key examples from Kohli's *Abhyuday* to demonstrate how the author has successfully exemplified Rama as a committed humanist and a karma-yogi who deeply believes and works toward creating a society on the true basis of equality, liberty and fraternity. This Rama is a revolutionary thinker who in his search for truth and fight for justice questions each and every stuck-in-time and dead convention of his time and place, is an idealist dreamer and a meticulous planner who is also powerful and capable of building a utopian society in actuality. Here, Rama is a compassionate and revolutionary leader who understands both

the limitations and potential of human nature and leads by his example to reveal how we may transcend our own limitations and realize our potential. Narendra Kohli's Rama in *Abhyuday*, on the other hand, is not a perfected God who doesn't need to deal with personal dilemmas and inner conflicts, but is a yogi who is able to grasp reality with a deep yogic insight and with calm, detached and disinterested reason and a keen intuitive perception can transcend his dilemmas and doubts to plunge into action. Dr. Kohli's story is certainly based in the times from long, long ago, yet his Rama seems to have taken a new birth for our times. His Rama comes to us with modern, updated sensibilities and sensitivities, whose values, beliefs and actions are not stuck in the times gone by but are guiding lights for how to be in our present-day times. This Rama's views on gender and *jati* equality, individual freedom, societal progress, upliftment of the weakest sections of society, nation-building, international and inter-regional cooperation that is based on principles of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence are aspects of the novel that will certainly speak to most of the informed and socially aware readers of modern times.

In one situation, Viswamitra explains to Rama the difficulties rishis and other sections of the society are facing at the hands of Rakshasas who are becoming more and more powerful because of the cooperation and support they are getting from corrupt and power-hungry kings and rulers who are least interested to know or care about the cruelties being unleashed on the ordinary people. As he interacts more with people, hears the facts from Viswamitra and learns more about the extreme cruelty and oppression being faced by powerless and weaker populace, he finds that it is not the courage or sense of justice that is lacking among people but that they have lost self-confidence to fight for themselves, fight for the justice. Once they are able to trust that they are not alone in their struggle and that they have the support and leadership of an upright and honest leader who is ready to fight with them and for them they are ready to do all that is needed to raise

voice for the truth, for the right. And Rama finds an aim for his life – to fight against injustice and untruth, to help people become strong and self-confident so that they will have the courage to fight for justice, to not stay as meek victims of oppression, to work towards establishing *Rama-Rajya*, a kingdom of peace and harmony, truth and justice.

In another situation Viswamitra says that “Prakriti or Nature has a strange sense of justice. She doesn’t give any one individual all her powers. The power and ability to think and to act are two different aspects of the personality. To some individuals, Nature gives the ability to think and contemplate, to others she gives the power to act. The thinker who thinks about what is just and what is unjust, who reflects upon the welfare of the society, develops his thinking and contemplative ability and power but may lose out on the aspect of action. Action without knowledge, action without reflection has the potential to downgrade a human being into a rakshasa, contemplation and knowledge of justice and injustice, truth and falsehood can transform a human being into a *rishi*.” Thus we see that Narendra Kohli has given readers a new way to reflect upon what or who may be considered an avatar in our modern times, what is the role an avatar plays in the societal consciousness and what characteristics and capabilities should such an avatar demonstrate.

Rama as a warrior for truth and justice is the most unselfish and unprejudiced leader, one who sacrifices all for the welfare of others, who is extremely sensitive to the layers and complexities of relativity of all truth and yet doesn’t deter from plunging into the rightful action and that is why he is eligible for avatar hood. One significant story that is told is about Ahalya, the wife of the highly revered and enlightened Rishi Gautam, the kulpati or President of the famous ashram-gurukulam of Mithila. Ahalya was abandoned by her husband Gautam because he suspected her of having an illicit relationship with Devraj Indra, even though it was Indra

who disguised as her husband had seduced her under false pretence. Gautam never even thinks of abandoning Ahalya, in fact he gives up his position and status as the kulpati of the ashram because the influential acharyas and rishis of the ashram would not accept his wife. More than twenty-five years pass. And Ahalya continues to live in complete isolation, as an outcaste, like a piece of dead matter, like a stone. When Rama has heard the story of Gautam and Ahalya from Viswamitra, Rama is deeply anguished at learning about the extreme injustice and humiliation that Ahalya has been facing for all these years, and for no fault of hers. In this reason Rama, Lakshman and Viswamitra come to her door. Rama touches her feet and says, “Devi, I, son of Kausalya and Dashrath Rama do my pranams to you. With me is my younger brother, Lakshman, son of Sumitra.” Ahalya She knows that Rama, with his one simple action of coming to her home and touching her feet has revolted against the dead social convention and false code of honour, and given back her true honour and self-respect. She knows that now nobody in the society can say anything against her, now that she has the protection of Rama. A new life has been breathed into her, she has become alive after all these years of being dead as a stone.

*Mahasamar* is a novel based on the Mahabharata. Written in contemporary style, it offers the reader a gripping account of the entire Mahabharata, seen from the eyes of its myriad protagonists. In *Abhyudaya*, Kohli has successfully exemplified Rama as a committed humanist and a karma-yogi who deeply believes and works toward creating a society on the true basis of equality, liberty and fraternity. His Rama is a revolutionary thinker who in his search for truth and fight for justice questions each and every stuck-in-time and dead convention of his time and place, is an idealist dreamer and a meticulous planner who is also powerful and capable of building a utopian society in actuality. Rama’s and Krishna's characters and personalities are available for interpretation. Their kathas are meant to be retold for each generation by each generation.