

COMMERCIALIZING AND POLITICIZING *DHARMA*: A NEO-PURITANICAL APPROACH THROUGH RAJKUMAR HIRANI'S *PK*

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Abstracts

In a hyper-technological era, India still cherishes to identify itself within the narrow puritanical garbs of theo-centrism. A nation identified as the birth place of natural (ayurveda) and divine medication (yoga) in the universal platform is gradually losing its immortal charm in the gigantic waves of commercialization and modernization. Every private and public, individual and collective aspects of humanity have been objectified so such an extent that the basic human values are getting naturally eroded from the various perspectives of existence. Economically India may be surging ahead towards becoming one of the biggest economies in the world but rationally or intellectually it continues to be the land of Sati Dharma and snake charming where individuals have got intertwined and caged into a depthless cauldron of confusion. This paper makes a cinematic attempt to bring the screen and the reality on the same platform through Rajkumar Hirani's PK unfolding the multi-dimensional religious deputations that India experiences consciously or unconsciously.

Key words: hyper-technological, theo-centrism, ayurveda, multi-dimensional.

Om poornamadah poornamidam poornat

Poornamudachyate

Poornasya poornamadaya poornmeva vashishyate

Om shantih shantih shantih

[That (Supreme Brahman) is Infinite and this (Conditional Brahman) is Infinite. The infinite (Supreme Brahman) proceeds from the Infinite (Supreme Brahman). Then through knowledge, taking the infinite from the infinite, it remains as the Infinite alone.]

Amongst millions of adages from the ancient Indian scriptures of Vedas and upanishadas the above mentioned is oft parrot-fashioned from the primary level Sanskrit books to the school assembly into the private chambers. Since the post-independent era, besides different anti-colonial strategies the Indian parents have developed fetishism towards sanctifying and baptizing their children. In fact, it has been promoted as a promising formula to de-anglicize Indian society and ensure indigenous rejuvenation. In order to evade my doubts recently I

conducted a survey amongst the school children where I teach. From the primary to the senior section I shortlisted fifty students and framed a similar questionnaire for them. I proudly questioned them about the contribution and valuation of ancient shlokas in their life, esteemed waiting for highly philosophical replies. But I was profoundly astonished. Most of them recited varieties of Sanskrit shlokas with such rhythm and confidence but when asked about the meanings their face soon I recovered and rebuked myself for my convulsive attitude. This is the real face of Indian society where words are galvanized and amplified in the tabula rasa; thoughts are puckered with visionless spots marinated with machinated acts.

Religion underlines the very root of India's existence and provokes individual thoughts. It has created a steep digression between the Indian and the universal version of man's history. Ignoring the Neolithic and the Paleolithic evolution of civilization redefines and retells an oriental version of history de-cathected from the occidents. According to the pre-Vedic and Vedic evidences the universe originated in the *Treta Yuga* and passing through the *Dwapar Yuga* it degenerated into the present *Kali Yuga* or the Age of Darkness. Indian society was inflicted with the Puritan Interregnum long before it invaded the European society during the 17th century. In fact, religion has permanently cemented itself with every individual's existential drive hegemonically functioning within the specific contours of time and space. With the interruption of Theo-centrism all forms of thoughts and actions (external/internal, private/public) were designed according to the norms and conditions propagated by different religious institutes under the royalty of 'God.' All forms of practical and theoretical discourses were governed by the respective religions and any form of violation stamped immediate social disbandment. As time trickled away, India like several fell prey to the British colonizers who despite multiple devastations planted the seeds of modernization upon which the Indian's continue to feed on. Being already scientifically and technologically advanced, introduced various persuasive strategies to psychologically manipulate the Indians towards rational innovativeness. In fact, they were the first one to disturb India's religious firmament which was complacent with orthodoxies. No one dared to question or inject any logic or reason between the religious narratives. Very believes and practices has been traditionally intertwined in our existence in such a manner that our mind remains automatically captivated in it.

The questions and doubts that successfully infiltrated in the minds and soul of the Indians catapulted their minds to rethink and this finally paved the way for true scientific maneuvering of India. But was the process free from the impact of religious hegemony? Historical documents clearly reveal that Christianity was channelized into India by dislocating the already existent principles which has been guiding individuals across ages. Though India as a nation rejoiced on 15th August, 1947 and the celebration of Independence Day is conjured with pomp and gay every year yet the newly formulated Indian society was flooded with all forms of social, economic or political principles echoing the west. The first government of independent India under the premiership of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru welcomed the rapid inflow of capitalism, commercialism and industrialism. With the long cherished vision of a well constructed, reformed Indian economy the UPA (United Progressive Alliance) government extended its arms towards the west inviting foreign

investors to parent and nurture the Indian economy. As India matured as independent nation commercialism bracketed from its mere economical bindings encroached and contaminated the aesthetics of religion and art. During the pre-colonial and even in the colonial times and art and religion existed far away from the habitual burdens generating external pleasure from through self-sublimation. The print media governed a culture which de-sanctified art and religion into a mere saleable object advertised the capital market producing commercial gains. The newly developed fetish towards achieving the '100 Crore Club' in Bollywood and successfully gaining even after producing trashes ensures commercialization and objectification of post-modern art.

Indian religion and their highly authorized principles have long been enslaved through capitalist ideologies which has alarmingly aggravated in the recent days. But its origin can be easily located in the ancient foundations of Indian religion. The Hindu-Muslim tussle dates back to the advent of Mahmud Ghazni who rampaged several Hindu temples and replaced it with finely architected mosques. Since then the poison of communal hatred fissured in our blood and it continues to ignite us. Though the historical documents reveal that the Muslim rulers have asserted a better prosperity as compared to the lacklustrous Hindu rulers, yet quite astonishingly the nation was coroneted as 'Hindustan.' The most surprising element was specifying a singular religious prefix 'Hindu' the midst of propelling towards building a secular republic where every civilized being will be granted equality. In order to uphold 'Unity' and 'Diversity' the Indian constitution marshaled separate laws and order for different religious communities to practicalize fake, inanimated vision of ushering a united, well-balanced society. But the results were catastrophic and the arrow was re-directed towards the central policy makers. Even questions are raised regarding the SC/ST (Schedule Caste/Schedule Tribes) or OBC (Other Backward Castes) reservations. Though Indian economy surges ahead riding on high market capitalism but the religious scenario continues to remain impoverished under the lingering dogmas. The Ram Mandir episode in Ayodhya epitomizes it.

In 1993, based on a dream story, the historical Babri Masjid was demolished and was replaced by the idol of Ram which evoked a never ending religious controversy. According to the ancient Indian scriptures Hinduism is embellished with thirty-crore deities commanding equal number of or more norms for appearing and worshipping them. Isn't the very concept of idol worship materialistic? At every step the Indian scriptures spurs irony by contradicting themselves. They practice very opposite elements of what they preach. Disassociation of the self is a common point that adores every scriptures but let us observe how most of the religious institution functions and the truth pouts on the table. In the name of 'Almighty's Will' millions of people from the elite to the beggars are financially swapped and aesthetically fooled by compelling them to perform uncountable ceremonies which involve a huge monetary drain. The individuals irrespective of being highly educated or commercially well acclaimed proudly submit themselves to the game of mass exploitation which not only concludes with illogical ceremonies or frenzied activities. In order to continue unhindered with the exploitative process rumours gets cooked up based on the super-natural abilities of the almighty. Around a decade ago, the entire nation was stunned by the magical powers of a

Ganesha idol drinking milk in Maharashtra. In order to seek the blessings of the lord lakhs of people and crowded and fed several litres of milk to it. This was not the sole incident. There are lots of temples across India, where daily the ideals are bathed in litres of milk, butter, ghee and dry fruits. On the other hand let us just consider the scene outside the temple premises which are occupied by the beggars wailing and frowning for a single rupee. The cultural and humanistic values of religion that has been promulgated by the scriptures have consistently failed to actualize. Rather it seems to deliberately dehumanize the modern ethics of existence. Instead of re-enlivening the scattered socio-cultural situation, it has masked itself as a synonym for corruption, pontification, genderization and classification of the human mind and body.

Cuurently, religion is not only a corruptive body but a political institute backed by the 'renowned' goons. It has not only sluiced and compartmentalized the society but induced multi-layered differences to upkeep its autonomy. The religious houses function like a private sector enterprise where accessibility is permitted on the basis of class, caste and gender. Let us consider the scenario of Tirupati Temple in Tamil Nadu or the Jagannatha Temple in Bhubaneshwar wre an individual can avoid the long queues and inch closer towards the deities by utilizing VIP passes which has been earned through lots of physical and financial labors. Either the person spends several lakhs of rupees per annum to register oneself as the lifetime member or have to bribe an influential priest inside. Which religious philosophy commands money as the medium of gaining closer access to the almighty? But this is what picturized by our surrounding reality is. That is why Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be given more preference in observing the *Rudrabhisheka Ceremony* in the Dashashwamedha Ghat of Varanasi rather than a common visitor hailing from a far off place. When the convoy of any highly honorable person arrives to visit a renowned temple or any other culturally significant place then the common man is barred from entering the premise. Which religious scripture or which god demands such discrepancies from his devotees? Religious dichotomies not only promote class or gender differences but also contribute towards class conflicts and inflict communal violence. The *Hindustan Times* on January 3, 2015 reported that:

A 25 year old married woman who eloped with a man from her village was allegedly forced to breastfeed him on the orders of a tribal village council in Madhya Pradesh's Alirajpur district. The Bhil tribal panchayat in Alirajpur district, around 200 km west of Indore, also cut the hair of the woman and the man who is in his early 20s as it handed out the punishment on the last day of 2014.

(Pg-04)

Very similar instances were outlined in a column giving instances of several other inhuman acts like a 20 year old girl 'punished' by the Khap Panchayat of Birbhum, West Bengal forcing her to get raped by 12 people. In another incident a man from Rajasthan was kidnapped, ccaged, sodomized and forces to drink his own urine on the orders of the Khap. What is the value of promulgating religion when the basic human values are getting eroded from the society? In the name of religion individuals are ready to drink cow urine or are forced to follow several other weird socio-cultural norms but if a beggar clings to us and begs for a rupee that person are shooed off. There are several temples in India which still remains

hostile towards the women, lower class people or individuals belonging to other religions. Religious believes have tampered the individuals to such an extent that they are ready to starve or accept their family to starve at the cost of saving thousands of rupees for religious offerings or conducting rituals.

The 21st century has assured several innovative procedures towards enhancing religious victimization and politicizing individual faiths. A recent fashion of self-acclaimed sainthood and constructing palatial ashramas (religious houses) has cropped up in India. Baba Ramdev, Nirmal Baba, Asharam Bapu, Sri Sri Ravi Shanker are self-proclaimed 'sadhus' or servants of god heavily backed by political stalwarts flourishing commercially. They have their respective institutional norms ensuring that they are all unique, strictly aligning to the divine values and not matching with each other. Millions of people clog their doors and multiple private and familial grievances vainly hoping for a satisfactory solution. In fact, Asharam Bapu getting convicted and imprisoned against murder and rape charges added another feather to his 'divinely' corrupted lineage. Land acquisition charges worth in crores were angled at Nirmal Baba who appeases millions of hearts with his enchanting smile as Ramdev or Sri Sri Ravi Shanker with his superb acrobatics. So, putting on white or saffron attires and attaining the image of 'living god' is the latest fashion statement of India. Only one has to be enough lucky and privileged to conduct miraculous activities. Even nowadays lots of failed and frustrated engineers and doctors are surrendering their profession and signing themselves into the company of the self-styled Babas. May be the immense pressure of the private jobs or the megalopolitan monotony are forcing the individuals to undertake such drastic measures which are extremely detrimental for our society. Rajkumar Hirani's *PK* compliments it.

The movie inaugurates with the arrival of an anonymous alien from a mysterious planet which harbors living beings similar to humans. In a nutshell, the planet appears to be an alter-ego of the earth. The alien (Amir Khan) is warmly embraced by the world of corruption and his journey upon earth commences from Rajasthan, India. He is nude with a shiny disc hanging round his neck which he refers to as a 'remote control.' The alien champions naturalism over human artificiality which has been engraved upon through the neo-colonial means of capitalism, urbanism and neo-Puritanism. A naturalist is free from the clutches of postmodern virtuality which embosses a definite structure of fashion and attitude infected with pretentiousness. Once the alien arrives in a remote desert region of Rajasthan his remote control is snatched away by a local rustic who mistaken it as a precious stone and sells it to the self-styled demi-god *Tapasvi ji*. After his stone is snatched away he is crippled and forcefully convinces himself to adjust to earth's lifestyle. Since then he launches himself towards a new mission of exploring the earth and invigorating himself with new passions and ideas. He very soon realized the three fundas of existence---name, clothes and religious faith. These extremely powerful triumvirates easily help individuals to masquerade their vanities within a virtual cocoon. It is through this virtuality unleashed by these three forces upon the individuals that pens the formulae of 'Realism.' Well my essay will concentrate on realism with the small 'r' rather than the capital 'R' which opines that I am concentrating more on human experiences rather than theory. Unable to communicate in any 'human' language,

accidentally he comes across Bhairav Singh (Sanjay Dutt) who carries him as his guest. The alien getting desperate to learn a human language rushes towards a woman to catch hold of her hand and incur the language she speaks through his meta-human abilities. Bhairav Singh misinterpreting his act plays the crook and guides him to one of the most infamous red-light area. Rajkumar Hirani very intelligently juxtaposed the two scenes where Sanjay is pleading to spare his wife through the song 'Tharki Chokro' on one side and the very next moment he is wickedly guiding Amir to the pros quarters to satisfy his burning spirit. Though Amir utilizes the situation for a different purpose but for the first time his tongue a signifier 'Bhaya' (brother) thus opening his gateway into the illusionary world of discourse governed by the complicacies of language and linguistics.

In fact the lyrics of 'Tharki Chokro' encompass the entire rhythm and sentiments of the movie as a far-fetched dream manifested in the deep sub-conscious of the individuals. No one can deny the fact that the regular toilsome life has often forced the individuals to harness a secret wish of retreating back towards 'Primitivism.' Amir's 'antique' behaviour' and 'insane' actions baptizes him as PK (drunk) and the sole reason is that he thinks and acts against the flow of the society. Initially he realizes that the external appearance is more valued than the eternal truth. This makes him wear clothes in a weird manner (dressed as half male and half female) which he has stolen from a 'dancing car.' The monetary value of an individual comes to the forefront when he realizes the value of Mahatma Gandhi in terms of the financial value of the notes which he exchanges for a daily bunch of carrots. Once again the director replenishes his sarcasm and upholds his artistic repertoire by juxtaposing the scene of 'dancing cars' just outside the premises of the temple, enveloped in the air of strong incense 24X7. This very scene questions and threatens the aesthetic values associated with the Indian culture. On one side the laws of religion dictates individuals to dictate individuals to ensure the social 'decorum' by veiling oneself (for women), maintaining beards or condemning public affection while shameless sexual acts inside the car or bargaining bodies in the red light areas remain ignored. What is the value of religion in a society where true emotional outflows are barged at the cost of exchanging sexuality and love? Religion not only corrupts the society but empowers politics as well (or politics empowers religion?) Renowned saint Yogi Adityanath has already won several laurels as a very motivational speaker for the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) government. The honor of *Tapasviji* gets enrolled in the same category. A self-styled Baba he owns a palatial ashrama where addresses thousands of Bhakts (followers) and is well guarded by a monstrous bodyguard. His followers and admirers comprises of the most unreligious persons, the most renowned faces of domestic and public violence. In front of his followers he lectures on high religious values and glorifies his divine capabilities by 'calling' god and communicating with him. He claims himself to be the servant of god and works according to his whims and fancies. But his pretentious game doesn't last long as PK very soon locates his stolen disc in the chamber of *Tapasviji* who has re-incarnated it as the broken fragment of Lord Shiva's 'Damru' (a kind of percussion instrument) further strengthening the faith of his sacrosanct followers.

In order to get back his 'remote control' PK has to undergo innumerable sanctifications each highlighting the illogicalities of existence. He underwent frenzied and mind boggling rituals with the vain hope of receiving help from god. But he soon realized the very sublimated, supernatural identity of god is a manmade construct and a hotpot strategy for inducing power politics. Often we find that the political leaders expresses over leniency or super moralism in order to maintain mass support. For instance let us consider ex-Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mayawati's views on the movie PK:

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati hasn't watched Amir Khan's PK---or any since joining politics, for that matter---but on Saturday she pitched for removal of 'objectionable portions' from the multi-crore grosser that have hurt Hindu sentiments.

(*Hindustan Times*, Pg-1)

Such a soft and lenient stance is so anti-Mayawatian and reflecting few years back during her regime all forms of 'moral' violation were condoned and disposed. Very similar political dilemmas pursue within the religious institutes were individuals turns from foes to friends and friends to foes within the wink of an eye. Indians remain so much engrossed in religious fashions and christening (like Jagatjanani in PK) that the real human values gets eroded from the society leaving behind dark patches of diplomacy and politics. Even Jihad (holy-war) is pronounced as the other name for terrorism yet such violent bickering are never found in the holy text of Quran. The concept of Jihad was propounded with the vision of cleansing the universe from its negative forces and promoting unity. But the 21st century organization like Al-Qaeda or ISIS declares Jihad with the hope of universalizing and imposing their religious cults and practices. The last minute confrontation between PK and *Tapasviji* in the live show 'Aur Ek Sawal' suspects and denounces the very notion of religion shattering virtual faiths and trends.

In a nutshell, the essay analyses and contemplates over the corrosion of human values at the conflicting juncture of religion, politics and commerce confusedly interplaying with each other and reigning the society with its epidemical prowess.

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