Chapter IV

RECEPTION OF THE TEXT: AMALGAMATION OF THE SACRED,
THE POLITICAL, AND THE COMMERCIAL

The serialization of the *Ramayana* has been seen as an amalgamation of the sacred and the political in the form of a commercial-entertainment series. The major reasons for the magnanimous success of the serial were these three varied functions fulfilled by the television epic. Unlike most of the televised serials, the *Ramayan* was received by many Hindu viewers with profound faith and reverence. The tele-visual medium seemed to encourage a particular form of *bhakti* through the visual process of seeing or *darshan*. The viewers had attached to the *Ramayana*, the same reverence as they would have accorded to a religious ritual; seeing Lord Ram on the television became a form of *darshan* for them. Mankekar writes,

Ram *bhakti* is the dominant mood in Sagar’s rendition, which was based largely on Tulsi’s Ramcharitmanans. It was invoked at the beginning of many episodes with a devotional discourse (*pravachan*) or hymn. Further, viewers were encouraged to have *darshan* of Ram: the grace and beauty of Ramji’s form (his *chavvi*) were emphasized throughout the serial (200).

In the serial, we discover how Sagar’s *Ramayan* constructs *bhakti*, as a mode of engagement and entertainment. The viewers are engaged in worshipping their lord and the television viewing makes them feel connected to the lord. As sociohistorical narratives, enacting cosmological and ethical conflicts and dilemmas, epics are not just religious per se. This can be explicitly said for Ramanand Sagar’s *Ramayan* where according to many media critics the epic’s televisation led not only to religious fervor, but to the instigation of many political and communal events. Rajagopal writes,
Media critics and secularists condemned the *Ramayan* as a ‘communal’ text that had enabled the consolidation of Hindu nationalism. Three years after the telecast, tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities, which had been exacerbated by Hindu nationalist attempts to “reclaim” the site of the Babri mosque as lord Ram’s birthplace. In December 1992, in one of the most tragic outbreaks of violence, Hindu nationalists stormed the Babri mosque (167).

The above argument has been supported by many other critics (Mankekar, Davis) as well; therefore, the serial has been accused for the instigation of political and communal tensions in the country. It has been condemned as a ‘communal text’. Whereas, in a country like India where Hindu-Muslim communal riots have been a part of the national politics ever since partition, accusing a serial as an instrument leading towards communal tensions is unjustified. This shall be discussed in detail in this chapter.

This chapter is divided into three sub-units, discussing three different aspects of the serial, sacred, political and the entertainment. The first part of the chapter will attempt to discuss and analyze in detail how the televised *Ramayan* was helpful in reviving the religious fervor and was witnessed with profound faith by the viewers. The second part of the chapter discusses the political implications embedded in the sacred text which brought transformations in the political scene. However, *Ramayana* has been accused as a disguised form of the political and communal implications; whether *Ramayan* (Sagar) truly led the fire of communalism shall be discussed in detail in the second part. And the last component of the chapter discusses the magnanimous impact of the serial; it deals with Ramanand Sagar being taken as a reference point for the later day animated movies on the *Ramayana* theme. Many animated movies are being produced on the *Ramayana* theme, namely *Ramayan* (produced by many different production houses in India and abroad and in languages hindi and english), *Hanuman*, *Hanuman Returns*. Kids all over the world enjoy these animated mythologicals.
Contemporary Relevance of the Epic

In the 21st century when money has become the ruling power and emotions take a back seat, the diminishing importance of *Ramayana* and its ideals is apparently visible and understandable. This Aryan saga of brevity, generosity and giving up one’s life for the speech once uttered, “The way of the Raghus has never endured. Give up your breath but not your word” (qtd. Lutgendorf, “Raghu Family” 248) does not hold much importance.

In this era when marriages are breaking, illicit relationships are increasing, frivolity and promiscuity are prevalent in the societal set up the story of Ram (*maryada purushottam*) and Sita (an ideal of womanhood) does not seem to hold any relevance. However, *Ramayana* as a story has its own importance and is significant for every age. The code of *dharma* and the code of conduct enshrined in the *Ramayana* are applicable to each epoch. Throughout the *Ramayana*, repeatedly the sacrosanctity of the ethical and moral codes of *dharma* has been claimed. Valmiki portrays Ram not as a supernatural being, but as a human being who encounters moral dilemmas and overcomes these by simply adhering to *dharma* (the righteous way). There are several instances narrated in the Valmiki *Ramayana* which cast shadows on the pristine character of the hero and reinforce the theme of Ram struggling with mortal flaws and prejudices whilst struggling to follow the path of *dharma*. In his *Ramayana*, Valmiki expresses his view of human code of conduct through Ram. Valmiki adopts the view that *dharma* is what is proclaimed in the *Veda* and it should be followed for its own sake, not for what it brings you, pain or pleasure. Many principles are situated in the theme of the *Ramayana* and these are relevant for every age. The concepts of *Dharma, Ariha, Kama* and *Moksha* are old Hindu concepts but have their own importance in every age and there are prominent instances of these concepts being defined in the *Ramayana*.

All the moral codes of conduct have been enshrined through the *Ramayana*. Through the epic, we are made aware and familiar with the earlier existing codes of conduct. A few moral and societal codes very apparently visible throughout the narrative are: the patriarchal order, filial devotion, maintenance of the societal norms and the codes of the society. The patriarchal order has been asserted and re-iterated through various archetypal incidents. The very stance of the exile of Ram is an
instance of the assertion of patriarchal order and familial ties. Lakshman following Ram’s footsteps, accompanying Ram to the forest is an instance of filial devotion. Bharat’s effort to persuade Ram to return to the kingdom is another instance of filial loyalty. Another example of the assertion pertaining to the moral codes of conduct is the agnee pariksha. Though Ram was aware of Sita’s chastity, she had to undergo a fire ordeal. This was done only to reiterate dharma or the code of conduct which was similar for a queen or an ordinary man/woman. Ram and Sita had to stay separate in order to fortify the societal rules. Ram had to renounce Sita not because he doubted her chastity but because this was demanded of him, as a king. Since, the common men follow the example of their king, as Dashratha preaches Ram in the Sagar Ramayan: ‘King’s every action must set a standard of rectitude and establish an ideal. Because, his people follow the example he sets’ therefore Ram had to renounce Sita (Episode 13). Henceforth, just for the sake of the society, which might follow Ram’s example but not as righteously as Ram himself he renounced his chaste wife. Surpanakha’s disfigurement is another example to reinforce the importance of the code of conduct (behaviour) in a civilized society. The instance shows us that the violation of moral codes as done by Surpanakha became as hideous as herself. Even the Ahalya episode, where a woman is turned to stone asserts the importance of the moral codes. The cause of Ahalya’s suffering is the breaking of the moral code of conduct and she can get rid of her sufferings only through divine aid.

The Ramayana speaks of the true identity of the individual, the real significance of the family and the sanctity of the society. The Ramayana teaches the importance of human values. Today, corruption is rampant in all fields such as business, education and politics. Under these circumstances, the principles of the Ramayana are very important. It explains in detail the relationship that should exist between brothers, father and son, the preceptor and the disciple. The relationship that existed between Ram and his brothers is an ideal to the rest of the humanity. They lived in unity in spite of troubles and turmoil. Kaikeyi wanted her son Bharat to ascend the throne of Ayodhya, but Bharat never had any such desire. He went to Chitrakoot Mountain, requested Ram, that being the eldest, he should take over the kingdom of Ayodhya. However, Ram did not yield to his request; he exhorted Bharata to obey the command of their father and fulfill the desire of their mother (Kaikeyi) by becoming the king of Ayodhya. The teachings of the Ramayana are taught by many
sages in a beautiful way, but only a few people pay attention to the lessons taught by the *Ramayana*. This is the Age to revive the tale, re-enshrine the upright values and shining morals of the *Ramayana* to the masses.

**Contemporary Relevance of Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan***

Through the serial, Ramanand Sagar has tried to blend the different conceptions of the society and politics in one of the country's most popular and revered narrative(s). The serial could be interpreted by its viewers as presenting a benign tale of a bygone age, or alternatively as offering an urgent message for the present. Mankekar writes, “The Sagar *Ramayan* glorified the code of conduct (*dharm*ā) as practiced and exemplified by Ram, who was repeatedly hailed as *maryada purushottam* (roughly, ‘an ideal man of propriety’), and allowed no space for the criticism of any of his actions” (208).

The serial holds a great relevance in the contemporary society. Viewers could understand Sagar's *Ramayan* as offering a way of talking not just about the faith and the epic past, but about what kind of leadership a society requires, and the mode of public engagement appropriate for its members. Sagar through his serial has tried to modernize ancient education or our understanding of it.

In episode two, Sagar presents to us Guru Vashisht, teaching his disciples; among them are the four young princes. A patriarchal figure with flowing white hair and beard and saffron robes, Vashisht is seated on a platform under the tree, while his students sit cross-legged before him. Guru Vashisht speaks,

> The body is composed of five elements, earth, water, fire, sky and air. If all the five elements are perfectly balanced the body remains healthy. The factors that affect the human body are food, drink and the environment, his thought and actions. All must be simple and restrained. Besides this is the effect of the magnetic force because of which everything in the universe remains in place. All the stars in the universe, because of the force of mutual magnetic attraction stay firmly in their place. From this magnetic force flow waves of electricity. Not only the sun, moon, stars and our earth but even our bodies are affected by these waves. Look, I’ll demonstrate it in my body.... Remember,
the human body has magnetic nodes. They are invisible but have a deep effect on our bodies. They are essential for our physical and mental health. That’s why you should sleep in a direction that will enable the earth’s waves to act in your body (sic.) (Episode 2).

Hence, we can say that through the television Ramayan, Sagar has presented the scientific knowledge existing in our Vedas. A little later, Vashisht goes on to mention the kundalini (a “magnetic node,” in Sagar’s formulation). The creation of this episode seems to be Sagar’s attempt to modernize ancient education. Sagar here draws conclusions for human conduct from scientific descriptions of the universe, creating a kind of updated, unified system of knowledge on behalf of the Vedic Age, as it were. Most of the other signs of ancient science, however, are pronouncedly military in character. The Marich-Subahu incident, in episode four, is the first disclosure of the largely “defense” oriented understanding Sagar offers of ancient Indian learning. The Marich and Subahu episode is used to dramatise a number of themes: the rendition of “Aryan” sages as the repository of ancient Indian wisdom, the incident also provides the first encounter in the story, with the ‘other’, namely the rakshasas (demons). In the serial science is presented to us in a spiritual garb, in other words, spirituality comes disguised in a contemporary technological attire. While it was scientific knowledge, it was spiritual too, as the product simultaneously of mysticism and experimentation. Rajagopal writes, “Sagar’s qualification of the activity as science gives the otherwise somewhat nebulous Vedic goings-on a startling sense of contemporaneity. The spiritual aspect resonates with the assertion that the experiment was for the benefit of humankind” (105-07).

The theme of “spiritual science” and of benevolently controlled powers of destruction recurs frequently. After Vishvamitra has brought Ram and Lakshman with him, and Ram succeeds in killing Taarak, Vishvamitra rewards him with special weapons which he has obtained after years of prayer and austerities. “I’m going to give you weapons which in all the three worlds only I possess……Through worldly, heavenly and scientific research and spiritual power I possess these weapons ….. for aeons I have sought a man worthy of receiving them.” The scene has all the aura of a religious initiation ceremony. The awesome power of the weapons is conveyed; the
moral ambivalence in possessing them, and the insistence that they be used for “the
good of the world,” by “a man worthy of .....them” echoes the contemporary moral
dilemma with nuclear weapons. The disclosure that “they are energized by the power
of atoms” makes the parallel with nuclear weapons explicit. There is a convention of
taking the mention of these weapons seriously. The notion of righteous destruction as
a fit means to deal with “sin, injustice and oppression” is categorically affirmed:
“[U]se the weapons to kill the sinner and oppressor.” There is a suggestion of the
necessity of the national/racial defense (“in the future Aryan land must be saved”) though
the source of danger is left obscure. The repeated sanctification of weaponry is
noteworthy. “Research” in the serial is always in connection with instruments of war,
although such research is only performed by spiritual men. They are the very image of
benevolent patriarchs, seated cross-legged in a pose of worship. While scientific
research is mentioned, their spiritual energy as well is understood to be responsible
for their accumulation of destructive powers. (Rajagopal 107-08)

The Ram story, in being retold, communicates not only the story, but also
responds to the prevailing socio-historic context. It narrates to the world situating
itself in the present context and hence acts as a commentary and an observation, on
the present age. As Tulsi’s composition is imbued with the language of bhakti
movement, and, written in a Muslim ruled kingdom, it seeks inner spiritual
transcendence rather than a this-worldly association of spiritual and political power.
Hence, Tulsidas through a composition thoroughly rooted in Bhakti-ras, provides the
prevalent spiritual and political socio-historic context. On similar lines, Ramanand
Sagar’s serial too could be said to have two parallel versions, one version giving the
Ram story, and the other an account of the modern Indian state. Sagar talks of
weaponry skills, research, and missile warfare, while giving expression to a
patriarchal society, a society which exists because of the spiritual and virtuous
conduct of its rulers and the sages. A night before his coronation Dashrath instructs
Ram ....

...tomorrow you will wear the royal crown, but remember, who wears
this crown, he offers himself to the nation and his people. To be a king
means to become an ascetic. He has nothing of his own then.
Everything belongs to the nation. If need be a king must sacrifice his
women, sons and friends....even lay down his own life for the nation.
Because the nation alone is his friend, it is his friend, it is his family. If he can not sacrifice all that he has for the nation... he has no right to collect taxes from his people as their king. King’s every action must set a standard of rectitude and establish an ideal. Because, his people follow the example he sets. A king’s basic strength is not punishment but justice. Justice that is truly impartial and.... Which is not narrow (Episode 13).

Sagar brought different conceptions of society and politics together in one of the country’s most recognizable narratives. In a very subtle way, Sagar has presented moral lessons for the existing political order and has presented a comment on the existing political scene. The audience could read the serial as offering a benevolent tale of the past, or as one with an urgent message for the future. Rather than treat the Ramayan serial as either an aspect of unchanging tradition, I prefer to see it as a useful commentary on the present. The cinema has become a dominant form in the world of communication technology and this power helped Sagar to present a commentary on our society through means of the epic Ramayana. The Hindi cinema began its career presenting stories that were explicitly or implicitly religious. Though the Indian cinema had experienced countless retellings of the Ramayana before Ramanand Sagar’s serialized presentation of the epic, it was this televisual which revived the popularity enjoyed by the epic. It was this serial which gave ‘Hindutva’ forces the much awaited shot of adrenalin. The Bhartiya Janata Party, with its Hindutva ideology and Hindu nationalism, cashed in on the popularity of the serial in early 90s.

This part of my thesis examines the influence of media on the career of Hindu nationalist mobilization in India during the late 1980s and early 1990s. It also examines the unfolding of the Ram Janmabhumi, (the birthplace of Ram) movement, which brought the Bhartiya Janata Party into political prominence. In this chapter, I situate the televisual of the Ramayana within a socio-historical context marked by the intensification of tensions between Hindus and Muslims and the ascendance of Hindu nationalism. The socio-historic context referred to and discussed here is the historic weakness of secularism in India and the effect of post modern critiques. The
television reshapes the context in which politics is conceived, enacted and understood; I propose to try to understand the workings of television in terms of its influence in a country like India.

**Ramayana and the Political Consciousness**

*Ramayana* has always been a part of our political consciousness, consciously or unconsciously. The story has continuously supplied a reservoir of imaginative instruments for articulating political discourse. The text has constantly and readily supplied vocabulary for political imagination. If we try to enquire the relationship between *Ramayana* and the symbols existing in the political sphere a long history can be traced. The epic has since long occupied a place in the political screen through indirect means, which were invested in the performance and the written accounts of the epic. Pollock writes, “It may be doubted whether any other text in South Asia has ever supplied an idiom or vocabulary for political imagination. This is a history, however, that for pre-modern India, at least, remains largely unwritten” (262).

Ram (the hero of the *Ramayana*) has occupied a prominent place in history by means of his representation as human and not divine. He occupies the place of a national hero and an ideal king in the minds of people. According to V. D. Savarkar, “Some of us worship Ram as an incarnation, some admire him as a hero and a warrior, all love him as the most illustrious representative monarch of our race” (qtd. Udayakumar 18). Another Savarkar-like contends that the *Ramayana* is “a scripture of the ancient Hindu Race” that reveals “picture after picture of fascinating beauty in the life of India in that period in our history” (qtd. Udayakumar 18). Therefore, the *Ramayana* occupies a place of its own in the political and historical spheres.

The prevalence of *Ramayana* in the political realm can be gauged from the fact that, *Ramayana* theme has been performed in the courts of the kings since the fifth century. The *Ramayana* theme has been passed on, as a document of cultural performance from the court of one king to another. It has traveled from one era to another through the mode of performance. These performances occupy a central position in the cultural activities,
... a large number of dramas and other forms of narrative based on the Rama theme in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and regional languages were commissioned by, performed before, or indeed composed by kings over a thousand year period: from the court of the Vakataka (less likely Kashmiri) king Pravarasena in the fifth century (Setubandha), to that of Yasovarman of Kanauj in the seventh (Ramabhuyudaya), Bhimata of Kalanjara in the eighth (Svapnadasanana), Bhoja of Dhara in the eleventh (Campuramayana), to that of Sivaji in the seventeenth (the Ramayana of Ramdas) (Pollock 262).

If one tries to plot a history of the Ramayana theme in the realms of the political and literary imagination, one finds an apparent discrepancy. For a thousand years the literary imagination of India received undiminished stimulation from the Ram legend, even to the point of hypertrophy. In striking contrast to this, however, the political imagination during the first thousand years of the life of the Ramayana is barely affected by its existence. The epic may have inflected the political imagination, supplying an argument for royal sovereignty and indeed royal divinity; it certainly does not shape this imagination. However, something very different happens early in the next millennium; at that moment, the tale comes alive in the political sphere and for the first time, perhaps, kings become Ram (kings are named after Ram in Thailand).

According to Pollock the Ramayana may certainly have played a substantial role, in the political imagination of earlier India but, it comes to be deployed with a fuller and more referentially direct expression in royal cultic, documentary, and textual representations from the twelfth century onward. The Ramayana came alive in the realm of public political discourse in western and central India in the eleventh to fourteenth centuries in a dramatic and unparalleled way. From the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, the representation of invader as demon and defender as the divine king Ram, in the royal temple cult and documentary inscriptions provides us with the details about Ramayana being used as a tool for political imagination. In the face of substantial political uncertainty, then, and consonant with other kinds of cultural representations, the Ramayana was repeatedly instrumentalized by the ruling
Indian elites of the middle period to provide a theology of politics and a symbology of otherness. From about the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries, the *ramkatha* first appears in many regional languages, even in those with long antecedent literary histories. In Marathi, for instance, prior to Ramdas’s version we find only the 1599 adaptation of Eknath, which itself has a complex sociopolitical agenda. The earliest *Ramayana* in eastern India is the Assamese version of Madhava Kandali, composed at the order of the Barahi king Mahamanikya. Hence, the *Ramayana* narratives have always been directly under the influence of the royal or political realm with the epical theme being performed in the royal courts and composed at the order/ request of the kings. More important than this, however, were the valences formulated and established of the divine Hindu realm and the demonic “outsider,” a political mythology of efficacious simplicity acquired stability unlike any other representations. The very fact that earlier powerful groups had deployed them made these symbolic properties all the more ready to hand, and all the more univocal (284-87).

Hence, the *Ramayana* being composed at the request of the kings and the notions of the ‘other,’ ‘outsider’ formulated through the epic confirms its imprints on the political imagination not only in India but even outside India. The establishment of the Hindu sect as the divine and the Muslims as ‘outsiders’ further re-iterates the political imagination being framed by the *Ramayana*. However, though the adoption of the *Ramayana* to process the events of the eleventh to fourteenth centuries suggests a complex interplay of culture and political power, equally complex is the problem of the present. The culture and political imagination are in a great way shaped by the *Ramayana* theme in contemporary India as well. In the following pages we shall study and attempt to analyze the influence of *Ramayana* in its new *avatar* (the televisual form) on the contemporary socio-political scene.

**Ramanand Sagar’s *Ramayan* and the Political Consciousness**

*Ramayan* has always acted as an instrument in the struggle for nationalism. The feeling of national unity comes inherently embedded in the narrative. As noted above, there was an effort to demonise the Islamic people and unite the Hindu nationals. As far as Sagar’s *Ramayan* is concerned the process of unification of Hindu
nationals is prominent; this was not a new concern and is prevalent through the
Ramayan narratives. Ram became a new symbol for national unity, an icon for
cultural identity, projected with a bow and an arrow clad in saffron dhoti. In the
twenty first century the Ramayan (Sagar’s) provides the iconography which hints at
the required unification of Hindu nationals and save the nation from the outside
demonic forces.

Mankekar discusses that the past appropriations of “the Ramayana reveal that
it has long provided a language not only to articulate political struggles but also to
demonize cultural Others, as during encounters with Islamic peoples from western
Asia in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.” For a long period in the history of Indian
political scene the indigenous rulers were identified with the god (Ram), and Islamic
Others with the demons (rakshasaas/Ravan). She adds to the point saying that “the
political world came to be ‘read through – identified with, cognized by – the narrative
provided by the epic tale’: the demonization or ‘rakshasizations’ of the Muslim
‘outsiders’ became an enduring feature of various versions of the text.” For example,
in the late seventeenth-century version of Ram Das, the Mogul emperor Aurangzeb
is cast as the villain Ravan, and in Kavi Bhushan’s version, Aurangzeb is represented
as an incarnation of Ravan’s brother, the demon Kumbhakaran. Consistent with this
tradition, the television Ramayan also depicted rakshas as racial and cultural
‘Others.’ In it, rakshasas (demons) are portrayed as extraordinarily strong, larger than
human beings, and with big, protruding teeth and bushy eyebrows; their physical
appearance is an important index of their bestiality. This is particularly striking in the
case of ‘their’ women, the rakshasis, who are depicted as sexually aggressive,
physically strong, dark complexioned, and attired in feathers and beads. With their
loose, flowing hair, the rakshasis look wild, masculine, and ‘barbaric.’ For instance
Taaraka who is killed by Ram and Lakshman, is portrayed as a very large woman who
has the ‘strength of ten elephants.’ Her wavy, waist length hair is matted, and she
wears a garland of human skulls around her neck. Ram’s success in killing her
emphasizes his divinity. But more important than their physical appearance, the
otherness of these rakshasas is indexed by their ‘culture’, lifestyle and importantly,
their moral inferiority. They are usually depicted as antagonistic to brahmans and as
sexual predators. Their otherness is emphasized by the contrast drawn between their
‘culture’ and the kshatriya and the brahmanic codes of conduct followed by Ram’s
clan and priests. The conflict between the two kinds of ‘morality’ is laid out in one of the opening scenes when Vishnu descends on the earth to rid it of all the rakshasas: his reincarnation, Ram, is the embodiment of Good, and Ravan and other demons represent unmitigated Evil. The cultural difference is cast in the moral discourse of Good verses Evil, such that the other is implicitly evil (175-76).

Ramanand Sagar’s *Ramayan* has been accused for being a product of well planned political action which marked a new chapter in the political scene existing in India. The serial is believed to have generated communal feelings and is condemned for bringing many such events to the forefront which were buried deep in the history of Indian politics. Media studies and critics point the serial’s connections to a series of volatile acts associated with communal feelings. It has been qualified, as one of the major reasons which encouraged secular violence. Mankekar writes:

> The televisation of the *Ramayana* generated a great deal of controversy among Indian media critics, and secularist activists, who condemned the use of state controlled television to show a Hindu religious epic at a time when Hindu-Muslim relations were so volatile. They feared, quite rightly as it turned out, that the televisation of the Hindu epic would encourage a religious revivalism among the increasingly aggressive majority community, which in turn would exacerbate tensions between Hindus and minority communities, particularly Muslims (187).

As mentioned in the above text, Mankekar like many others believes that it was the screening of this epic on national television which led to the increased tension between Hindu-Muslim communities. However, in saying so she forgets that the Hindu-Muslim riots are not a newly sprung up issue in the Indian political scene and have been witnessed since the times of partition. Mankekar holds the telecast of the serial as one of the major reasons responsible for communal tensions. However, if analyzed carefully the serial cannot be held responsible for these episodes of communal violence.

Ramanand Sagar’s *Ramayan* and its impact on political consciousness cannot be undermined by the simple fact that it did not play its role or rather give a substantial contribution towards the communal acts of violence. The serial was
sponsored by a Congress-led government (with Rajiv Gandhi as the Prime Minister Oct 1984 – Dec 1989), on the national television with the hope that by its flagging, electoral fortunes might be revived with an infusion of Hindu vote. Hence, the simple fact that the political parties were attaching hopes of increase in their vote bank with the screening of the serial ensures the threads of political consciousness underlaying the serial. Therefore, the weekly broadcast of a serial like the *Ramayana* inaugurated a new era not only in television but in the realm of politics as well. In this respect, Vijaya Pushkarna writes:

The *Ramayan* actors were demigods and the BJP offered tickets to three of them in the 1991 Lok Sabha elections. All three – Dipika Chiklia who played Sita, Dara Singh who played Hanuman and Arvind Trivedi who played Ravan - won. Dressing up as the mythical characters they added colour to the election campaign. The Congress captured the primary character, Ram – Arun Govil who campaigned for Sunil Shastri in Allahabad Lok Sabha by election (40).

The *Ramayan* serial did not limit itself to the electoral success only. It evoked images of a pristine Hindu culture and enabled the popular imagination of the Hindu rashtra through the portrayal of the utopian ideal of Ram Rajya (also popular amongst the political leaders like Gandhiji and Rajiv Gandhi). It conflated “national culture” with “Hindu culture” and constructed a prehistory of the Hindu rashtra sought by Hindu nationalists. Through means of the episodes of the *Ramayana* and the ideal exhibition of monarchy during the times of Ram the imagination of Hindu rashtra as a utopia became possible. While *Ram Rajya*, the golden age of the rule of Ram, has long been held as a utopia, and has repeatedly been utilized as a mobilizing symbol. The term was frequently used by Gandhiji as well to articulate his dream of an independent India, often equating it with or preferring it to the term swaraj used by other leaders of the freedom struggle. For Gandhi, Ramraj was “not only the political Home Rule but also dharma-raj... which was something higher than ordinary political emancipation...” (Lorenzen 253). It was only by means of Ramanand Sagar’s serial that the philosophy of Ramrajya was presented to the audience and constructed in such a detailed manner. Therefore, the serial helped in the propagation and the unification of a national culture which was a Hindu culture; through the pristine images of Ram (as an ideal king), and influenced the existing political consciousness.
There is no simple connection between the televisation of the *Ramayana* and the outbreak of episodes of communal violence which ravaged the Indian subcontinent. However, the *Ramayana* serial sowed the seeds responsible for many transformations in the society. The serial participated indirectly in the list of factors contributing to the instigation of historical events like the ‘Advani Rath Yatra,’ the ‘Ramjnamabhoomi Movement’ and the ‘Rise of Hindutva’. Therefore, it played its part in the domain of reconfiguration of the nation, culture and community.

**Advani Rath Yatra**

The serial is held responsible for its televisation within a socio-historic context which marked the escalation of Hindu-Muslim tension and led to a series of events. The chariot procession (*rath yatra*) is one of these events, since this procession took place in the 1990 (two years after the telecast of the serial), therefore, it is also marked by some critics as a consequence of the serial.

This Chariot Procession (*rath yatra*) was undertaken by the then president of the *Bharatiya Janata* Party (Indian People’s Party, BJP), L. K. Advani, in October 1990. In a Toyota truck turned into an epic chariot, Advani traveled from Somnath in Gujarat to Ayodhya in north India, the putative birthplace of the hero god Ram. As court documents submitted subsequently by the BJP’s ally, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (“World Hindu Council,” VHP), put it, Rama is an immemorial object of worship basic to Hinduism, and this worship was being impeded by the presence of a mosque built on the site of his birthplace temple.

According to Davis the *Rath* was an extended DCM Toyota van decorated as a strange looking chariot. On the sides of the truck sweeping cutout patterns rose up to provide a small roofed space above and behind the driver’s cab and then swung back to encompass a small air-conditioned cabin. On the raised platform behind the driver stood five men, with L.K. Advani, leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), standing centermost and addressing the crowd through loudspeakers mounted on the roof of the driver’s cab and atop the rear cabin. The overall design was based on the design of Arjun’s chariot in the *Mahabharata*, a widely popular televised dramatization of the great Sanskrit epic, then running on national television. The *Rath Yatra* was heading towards the pilgrimage city of Ayodhya, where a sixteenth-century
Islamic mosque called the Babri Masjid stood on a site that Hindu activists were now claiming was the birthplace of lord Ram. The BJP and its confederate, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), both offshoots of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), planned to retake the so-called Ram Janmabhumi (birthplace of Ram), destroy the mosque if necessary, and build a magnificent new Hindu temple to consecrate the sacred site (28).

The serial has been accused as a raison d'etre which inspired this episode in the history of Indian politics. However, there are other reasons as well which contributed to the episodes of violence in the history of Indian politics. According to Nanda, Advani’s procession came at a time when communalization of Indian politics was already at an all-time high. Indira Gandhi had started playing the religion card in search for short term electoral gains. The tradition was continued by her son, Rajiv Gandhi, who bent over backward to first mollify the most conservative elements of the Muslim community over the Shah Bano affair in 1985, and then, to mollify the Hindus, pressured the judiciary to open the gates of the disputed mosque in Ayodhya to Hindu worshippers, “Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had then not only unlocked the disputed shrine, but had sought to take advantage of it” (Nandy et al 38). The lock of the shrine was opened in 1986 on Feb 1 which in itself serves as a proof for the serial not being the instigator of the riots. In the meantime, caste divisions had also taken on a huge political presence when affirmative action was extended to the untouchable lower castes in 1990, leading to massive street protests by upper caste youth. In the middle of this highly charged atmosphere Advani set out to Ayodhya in his modern Toyota converted chariot. (39-40)

The imitation of Advani’s Rath to the rath present in the television serial Mahabharata confirms the impact of iconography used by the television on the general public and the political symbols. This point serves as a proof for the effect laid by television as a mode of communication and in the sphere of politics. Speaking of the symbolism of the chariot, it invokes the image of Krishna, rather than Ram. Throughout the campaign VHP has tried to emulate and popularize the image of Ram. This iconography has to reverse the original Ramayana in which Ram fights his climactic battle with the demon Ravan without a chariot, standing on the ground and defying his own technological backwardness and Ravan’s more advanced war machine. In both Valmiki’s and Tulsidas’ Ramayan, it is Ravan, the demon who uses
a chariot, not Ram representing divinity. This rathyatra, which itself has to some extend sprung up from the mythologicals as mentioned above, instigated the Ramjanmabhumi movement. The iconography of the rath was similar to the chariots used by Ramanand Sagar in the Ramayan, therefore, the serial circuitously shaped the political scene in India, inspiring the chariot procession led by the BJP minister L. K Advani which indirectly played its role in the instigation of another act of violence ‘The Ramjanmabhumi Movement.’

Ramayan’s (Ramanand Sagar’s) association to Ramjanmabhumi

It is impossible, even irresponsible, to generalize about the causes of what were disparate acts of violence, unquestionably inflected by local factors that usually had little or nothing to do with antagonism between Hindu and Muslim communities. The Ram Janmabhumi movement was a many layered series of events, not submissible to a single mode of explanation. However, Roshni Sengupta thinks otherwise and writes,

The tele-serial Ramayan gave the Hindutva forces a massive impetus, the aftershocks of which were experienced on 6 December 1992 for the first time...The impact that the serial had on the masses was phenomenal considering the number of times women actually sat to pray in front of their television sets when the program was on (Sengupta 3).

According to Sengupta the serial had an epiphenomenal impact on the masses and played a major role in the instigation of Ramjanmabhumi Movement. Whereas, there were multiple socio-political reasons which led to the outbreak of this violent episode in the history of Indian politics.

However complex the causal nexus of these events may be, the symbolic nexus is simple. The VHP had launched their agitation for the construction of a Ram mandir in Ayodhya in the early 1950s. This nexus was advocated in the act that precipitated the earlier violence and it was on Oct 15, 1990 that Ram’s chariot procession (rath yatra) came through Delhi. This marked the opening of a new chapter in the scene of the Indian politics.
The unprecedented event of the broadcast of the Ramayana, a Hindu epic serialized on the state run television, and the astuteness of the BJP, which was eventually able to perceive the opportunity presented in the serial’s enormous success, are issues of great importance. Drawing on myth and devotionalism to portray a golden age of tradition that was yet ahead of the modern era in stagecraft and warfare, the show which ran from January 1987 to September 1990 (considering the series which presented Lav-Kush and were produced after some time) adroitly made appeals to diverse social groups, under a symbolic rubric that could be tied to the banner of Hindu assertion. This serial did not inspire or lead to the Ramjanmabhumi Movement but in its own distinctive way asserted the ideology of Hindu nationalism.

Advani’s popular ‘chariot procession’ was a means to reach for the masses and popularize the concept of Hindutva through a symbolic act of national assertion of Ram as a symbol of unity. The rath was an extended symbol for the assertion of Hindutva ideology and was inspired by Sagar’s serial. In this regard Vijaya Pushkarna writes,

In the run up to the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, the rath of BJP leader Lal Krishan Advani was decked up to look like the sets of the already popular serial. Posters of Ram were plastered on the sides of the rath, and Bajrang Dal cadres followed it in a procession. Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Advani were even portrayed as Ram and Lakshman. By the time Ayodhya issue became a political crisis, most people were aware about the significance of Ram’s birthplace as the teleserial had explained that in detail (40).

Note: Though Nandi tells us that the chariot used by Advani resembled Arjun’s rath and that too specifically in Mahabharata and not in Bhagvad Purana (Nandy et al 40), the primary impact was Ramayan’s. So much was the similarity of this rath with raths used by Sagar that the media critics and common people popularly mistake the rath used by Advani with Ram’s rath. Even the leaders driven on this Toyota turned rath tried to emulate the forms of Ram and Lakshman, heroes of the epic Ramayana and not Mahabharata. Therefore, it was Sagar’s serial which majorly affected the serial.
Granted, that a series of accidental proceedings joined to shape the Ram Janmabhumi movement, one has to agree that the disguised politicization engendered by television in a post colonial country like India where narratives of religion and community retain wide ranging influence both in private life and as plausible charters for social action did have its own impact. Political parties themselves began to draw on the narrative resources of religion to make sense of an often disorientingly unstable polity. Consequently, the Ramayan did play its own role in shaping up the final events whether in the form of an active and responsive public or integrating the lost Hindu ideals.

The Ram temple movement was an event that brought together diverse arguments and tendencies. Here television helped to define a context and to make evident certain latent opportunities in the political field. The realist convention adopted in Sagar’s dramatization and the extended serial format of the presentation gave the symbol a discursive detail it could seldom have had before. Moreover, the claim of a panacea for modern society in ancient Hindu culture, offered as a nationalist message on state medium, had clear political implications. The incantation of Sanskrit verses, by none other than Ram himself, sanctifies the sequence, and highlights the traditionalist meditation.

The theme of loss, alluded to but never directly addressed, underlay the entire serial. In interviews, it was explained that the culture and values of olden times have been lost, and people required reminding of them. Viewed in the privacy of home, the notion of great Hindu culture as a libidinal collective came to exist in the intimate spaces of people’s lives, and over the lengthy period of broadcast, these images became familiar and comfortable. This was arguably a key symbolic backdrop in the already existing socio-political conditions against which the Ram Janmabhumi movement can be said to have triggered off.

**Iconography (of the Procession and Janmabhumi)**

If we try to examine the ‘Rath Yatra’ and the ‘Ram Janmabhumi Movement’ we can easily identify how the iconography of these events has been inspired from the serial (Sagar’s Ramayan). The pattern of imagery used in the rath yatra, was enthused by the Ramayan serial. Ram (religion) as a symbol was commercialized, marketed,
and further used as a political aid. Religion here becomes a commodity and through means of this commodity God is marketed.

On the day of the Advani Rath Yatra as mentioned in a few magazines and newspapers,

....archways made of bamboo wrapped with leaves and festooned with marigold garlands were erected across the street, indicating, that a procession would soon pass. Posters had appeared on the walls, depicting a pristine sandstone-colored medieval North Indian temple below, while above, the light-blue complexioned god Ram, wearing saffron dhoti and a red cummerbund, arose from the clouds. The posters portrayed Ram striding forward, his left hand holding his strung bow and his right bearing one arrow. A look of divine confidence on his face, he seemed to be facing a storm; his hair and dhoti fluttered behind him and the clouds were dark blue-grey (Davis 27).

In this part of the chapter an attempt is made to decode the symbols used in the procession, the kind of imagery which was popularized by the serial. The colour 'saffron' which is attributed to religion in India, it is the colour of the saints and ascetics; and Ram shown in this saintly colour. Ram can be seen striding forward, which is a symbolic presentation of the common man aiming for a higher goal (here the construction of the temple). Lord's hand holding a bow and an arrow, signifying the state of action, an action similar to a soldier in a position ready for combat. A storm is depicted, which stands symbolic to the Ayodhya upheaval; and dark blue-grey clouds in the background showing times of distress on India through the presentation of the 'national' symbol Ram. It was the serial which gave the Indian public a shaking effect, the Ramayana culture and the reverence attached to it was highlighted and increased in substantial amounts by the telecast. The yatra was welcomed by people with the same reverence and faith as was observed during the serial’s telecast. ‘Archways made of bamboo wrapped with leaves and festooned with marigold garlands were erected across the street,’ which was a result of the Ramayan serial which worked as an enzyme in fastening the entire episode.
The decorative scheme of the Rath was complex and heterogeneous. Against a golden background, words indicating the procession’s itinerary – Somnath to Ayodhya – were printed above the van’s front grill, partially obscured by a large wooden cutout of an upraised lotus. Rather fierce-looking lions viewed in profile, seeming to strain forward, embellished the doors; snaking their way around the two side cutouts were flowing lotus tendrils, ending in eight-petaled lotus designs. The rear tyres had been covered with facsimiles of medieval chariot wheel designs. On each side of the rear cabin, large half-opened white lotuses rose against a circular blue background. On the rear of the cabin, underneath two large ‘Om’ insignia, was a portrait of Mr. Advani, looking avuncular with spectacles and a light blue shawl. To Advani’s left was a brief text, exhorting him to go ahead and build the temple.

![A picture of the rath (from google images)](image)

Hence, the entire episode (the procession) was presented in a dramatic manner, the grandeur which accompanied the procession was largely gifted by the popularity and the magnanimity enjoyed by the serial. At many places, there was a show of brandishing swords, bows, and tridents. Also many people dressing up as characters drawn from the epics (Ram, Lakshman, Hanuman, and even Shiva with two live snakes) could be seen along with the procession. These events though originally inspired from the jhanki (tableaux) style, (which is witnessed through the streets every year at the onset of the ramlila) were influenced by the seriāl (Ramāyana) as well. In this procession imagery pertinent to Ram serving as a political symbol was
imbibed in the entire episode. The high tech gadget support system derived its inspiration from the technologically aided Ramayana by Ramanand Sagar and provided a similar feel to the viewers.

According to Davis the iconography of ancient warfare (tridents, bows and arrows) and Advani’s soft-peddling of it corresponded to two different ways of situating the Rath Yatra and the Ayodhya campaign into overarching structures of historical meaning. These two narratives in turn identified two different enemies. The mythical war against demonized Muslims that the Bajrang Dal and the VHP were fighting was not quite the same as the political struggle that Advani and the BJP were waging against the Indian government (Congress). Yet in the end they were parts of a single agenda. Ram and the original temple represented a dehistoricized Hindu utopia; Babur and his mosque represented the Muslim invasions that brought the Ram-rajya to an end and began a series of oppressive foreign occupations (48).

Hence, this procession of Ram’s chariot across north India was an image-saturated cultural event. In selecting a heterogeneous assortment of conventional Hindu images, they were not iconologically expressing an existing ‘Hinduism,’ but rather were proposing and through their actions attempting to create a new formation, a reconstruction of Hinduism. Not only was the physical object or the structure (the Ram Janmabhumi) towards which the processors aimed, an imagined construction, but so were the more figurative goals they sought, Hindu unity and Ram-rajya, new religious and political configurations. The posters announcing the Yatra in Delhi referred in condensed imagery to this program with its two illustrations of the bow-wielding deity Ram and an architectural model of the proposed temple. The choice of site, then, juxtaposes two figures well known to most north Indians, Ram and Babar. God and human, they are made to stand for two religions, Hinduism and Islam, in a highly imbalanced manner. Ram is an avatar of the preserving member of the present-day Hindu trinity, Vishnu, who entered into the world to implement dharma. Ram is the Hindu god most amenable to utopian projects, for he himself created the state that most completely instantiated dharma on earth, the Ram-rajya.
Saffron Rise: The Rise of Hindutva

The serial gave an enormous contribution in the rise and spread of Hindutva amongst the Indian masses. The overwhelming popularity of the serial and the discourse of cultural values through a new communication mode called television had a cataclysmic effect on the Hindutva forces at work. If we attempt to define the term Hindutva, no precise meaning can be ascribed to the terms Hindu, Hindutva and Hinduism; and no meaning in the abstract can confine it to narrow limits of religion alone. The term Hindutva is related more to the way of life of the people in the subcontinent.

The serial had a pronounced impact on the life and culture of people in the sub-continent. It was not limited to and functional within the narrow range of religion alone but it popularized a new way of life adhering to the traditions and rituals observed in the Ramayana. Therefore, it popularized and generated the elements of Hindutva in the general public. The serial Ramayan, unparalleled for its popularity in the history of Indian television was able to accomplish much more than bhakti and devotion towards Ram. The overwhelming reception accorded to Advani’s rath yatra can be seen as a significant impact of the hold of the serial on Indian masses. Here, was an exhibition of Ram bhakti mounted on a Toyota van and the people were left dumb-struck; after all, the pictures of Ram were plastered across the rath and they were the replicas of the hero of Ramanand Sagar’s magnum opus. These were Arun Govil’s images, the character who played Ram and ruled the hearts of millions of Indian people through his enigmatic smile in the legendary serial.

Roshni Sengupta believes that though for political gains, the serial did lead to the popularization of the elements of Hindutva. Television gave the ancient epic a potency it never had before. The image of the god-king Ram has undergone a veritable sea change ever since the Hindutva conglomerate has begun producing new and ingenious images of Ram. From the obedient prince to the armored warrior, Ram has been transformed into the cultural symbol of the Hindus completely neglecting the multifarious divisions within the community in terms of both caste and religiosity. In VHP’s iconography, Ram is a heavily armed warrior. Moreover through the power of television, the city Ayodhya and Ram’s life in and return to that city are brought very close to the viewers. In contrast with the old
iconography, which provoked reverence and contemplation, the VHP representation is propagandistic and seeks to steer and direct thoughts and action. Thus there is careful selection and rearrangement of elements from the available repertoire according to the kind of behaviour sought to be provoked. The point is not of course to stimulate Hindu consciousness as such, but to attach the appellation ‘Hindu’ to the desired aggression (15-16).

The serial *Ramayana* led to the rise of the elements of Hindutva through the Hindu imagery in market circulation through the *Ramayan* videos. The calendar art or advertising redefined the popular symbols and proffered an invigorated sense of identity inserting these symbols into the popular culture. The serial therefore succeeded in an attempt at creating a cultural hegemonic space where all other influences are carefully ignored and removed from the public memory. Hence, through public domination of the images of Ram, the serial helped in popularizing the ‘Hindu-ness’.

The cultural impact laid by Ram and the symbols popularized by the serial was not new. The name of Ram and the epic *Ramayana* has always had an impact on the cultural scene in India. Udayakumar writes:

> Ram has always had an impact on the cultural imagination in India. With a “pervasive presence of Ram’s name in North India” that is reflected in invocation in moments of distress, rural greetings (Ram-Ram), and in the pallbearers’ chant (*Ram naam satya hai* - Ram’s name is truth);’ it is no wonder why Hindu communalists try to appropriate the *Ramayana* and come up with claims of historicity (18).

As far as the Ram *Janmabhumi* is concerned, we can broadly characterize two intersecting but distinct levels of aggression, rhetorical and physical, at work. At the rhetorical level, the means included pamphlets, posters, wall-writings, slogans, and speeches, championing Hindu pride in various ways. The introduction of Ram in the words of greeting was itself no innovation. Ram has always occupied a noteworthy place in the colloquial greeting jargon. But, there is none denying the fact that the forceful, enthusiastic slogans raised by the RSS-BJP-VHP definitely brought these forms of greetings in vogue.
Rajagopal tells us, the formula was in fact a modification of an existing greeting; villagers and townspeople might greet each other, *Jai Ram ji ki*, or *Jai Siyaram*, the latter name referring to his consort Sita as well. For the most part the words were spoken softly. “In the VHP form, the words were sanskritized, with the colloquial *Siyaram* giving way to the more formal *Shree Ram*. *Karsevaks* uttered the words loudly and defiantly, as a quasi-military salute rather than as a greeting or a shared prayer.” Therefore a new form was given to the disguised existing form of *bhakti* (greeting) and this was loaded with political implications. The words were now transformed into an altogether new form, “so that now... The clear enunciation of each word and the high pitch of their utterance indicated not an invocation of conventional sentiment, but rather the statement of an explicit difference from convention or the emergence of a new one...” We can very well observe the transformation of symbols, in this case greetings from sacred to political (222-23).

If the symbols and the power at their hands is discussed in terms of ‘religious’ or ‘sacred’ as in case of Ram/ *Ramayana*, it has always been the political support to these symbols which lifts symbols from rituals to public domain. There were a series of these symbolic (ritualistic) activities which helped in the sustenance of the movement’s unity. Though all these styles of conversation did exist prior to Ramanand Sagar’s serial, the serial brought these in vogue. Ramanand Sagar is in no way wrong when he declares having brought the college boys from ‘disco’ culture, ‘hello!’ and ‘hi!’ to ‘Jai Shree Ram’. He helped in the spread and popularity of Hindu culture in a grand way. As Rajagopal writes,

Hindu nationalism came to prominence in the context of economic reforms and through the expansion of the market accomplished by liberalization. The *Ramayan* serial in a sense joined these events together in the medium of its communication, swiveling between the lost utopia summoned by Hindu nationalists and the brave new world promised by them and by market enthusiasts alike. Audiences then experienced two events traveling in different directions, liberalization, as a portent of things to come, symbolized in the newly visible wealth of consumer goods, and the *Ramayan* serial, harkening back to a golden age. They were in a sense hinged together by television, as a
device that brought past and future together while itself oscillating between time zones in a kind of eternal present (74).

According to Nanda, the reasons for the outbreak of these acts of violence and popularity of the Hindu right politics lie in the historic weakness of the enlightenment and the secularization in India. On December 6, 1992 a mosque in Ayodhya was razed to the ground by Hindu mobs to make way for a temple to a Hindu god, Ram. On 11 May, 1998, Indian scientists tested nuclear weapons in the western Indian desert. Historians will look back at these events as major turning points in India’s history. Chest thumping Hindu nationalists have already begun to characterize them as heralding India’s turn to reactionary modernity. “These two events – the politicization of Dharma leading to the Ram temple agitation, and the development of the bomb are symptomatic of India’s turn towards reactionary modernity” (Nanda 37).

To the Indian masses caught between the promise of modernity and the psychological comfort of traditions, Hindu nationalists offer a way to become ‘modern’ by returning to the ‘traditions’. The Hindu nationalists propagated a return to the Vedas and Mythological tales which they were defensive of and attributed everything pertaining to the Vedas to be of a scientific temper. Therefore, the ideology of hindutva conferred Hinduism as ‘modern,’ with rational beliefs and this call for a return to Hindu traditions to find an authentic model of secularism and tolerance has found support from the anti-modernist and anti enlightenment revivals. This Hindu modernity led to the unification of the nation and the widespread popularity enjoyed by the nationalistic-hinduistic ideologies. And this serial by spread of the notions of an ideal Hindu society participated in the propagation of Hindutva.

Commercialization of the epic

Mythology, as a genre occupies a major commercial space in the form of movies and tele-serials. The commercial significance of Ramayana can be gauged from the fact that the ‘Ramayana culture’ occupies a place not only in the Indian market but abroad as well. Amongst all the mythological tales the Ramayana story
tops the popularity charts in the way it has been translated into various languages and is prevalent across cultures. This story is the most widely televised mythological tale with two detailed serials – Ramayan (1987-89) and Ramayan (NDTV Imagine, running since Jan 2008), many mythological and animated films produced on the theme. The tale has been variously retold over the generations in different formats of cinema - films, serials and animated versions. Today Ram is seen as a symbol of not only a divine power but, an ideal king, an ideal son and an ideal human being 'maryada purshottam,' therefore forming an ideal narrative to be screened:

It is the eternal branding of Ram which is the story of Indian civilization, history and culture. It is also saleable. ...... Ramayan is a story conveyed from generation to generation, and Ram is a part of the Indian psyche and being (The Week Feb 2008, 41).

In this part of my thesis I shall lay emphasis on how the serial televised by Ramanand Sagar promulgated the Ramayana culture and helped it to swell in all possible dimensions. Also, I shall attempt to show the impact levied by this serial upon all the other produced serials and films on mythological themes. Ramayan (Sagar’s) was seen as a reference point as far as the production of mythological serials on television is concerned. Ramayana occupied a place in Indian cinema since the early years of this century in the form of films. Thereafter Anant Pai, the chief editor of ‘Amar Chitra Katha’ brought out the comical series on Indian mythology and history and Ramayana occupied an eminent place in these comical series. The story was extended to the serial form in late 1980s and today it charms the kids by means of animated forms.

The unprecedented epical success of Sagar’s Ramayan has led to spawning of a multitude of religious dramas on the small screen. The Mahabharata by B.R Chopra tried to emulate, the phenomenal reach and success achieved by Sagar’s Ramayan. Dr. Chandraprakash attempted to revive the nationalistic fervour by his depiction of the life and times of Kautilya in his Chanakya. These were trailed by a series of mythological and historical programs telecast on the television. After Mahabbharata (The Great Indian Epic), a full sequence describing the life and glory of Krishna was produced – Shree Krishna; this was followed by Tipu Sultan – a voluminous series on artistocratic life in India during that era. The list continues with the production of Jai

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Santoshi Maa, narrating the story of the Goddess. This was followed by ‘Jai Hanuman’ and many more less popular ones.

The serial Mahabharata can be seen as an immediate consequence of the overwhelming popularity enjoyed by the Ramayan. This serial was not only the direct outcome of Ramayan but also borrowed extensively from the same, Sagar’s serial was considered to be a turning point which changed the entire course of mythological cinema. The director B.R Chopra tried to overcome most of the faults pointed by critics for the earlier produced mythological serial- Ramayan.

Looking at the sets used in the Great Indian Epic – Mahabharata one immediately recalls the days of Ramayan. Mahabharata’s elaborate, gaudy, brightly coloured sets perfectly emulate the sets used by Sagar. The sets were magnificently and richly decorated and have been laid in a manner similar to Sagar’s with pillared halls gloriously and splendidly decorated. These pillars are carved and unlike Sagar we find a lot of gold and silver paint used on the walls and pillars. Below are given two pictures displaying the grandeur of the sets used in Mahabharata.
In the above given pictures the courtly conduct with all the richness has been portrayed. The second picture shows king Drupad’s court showing Draupadi’s Swayamvar. In the picture can be seen kings and princes who have come with a hope of marrying Draupadi. All the kings can be seen to be dressed in brightly coloured costumes resembling the nautanki tradition; in the centre of the court can be seen Arjun in an ascetic garb targeting the fish’s eye.

The costume pattern strictly adheres to the style set by Sagar. Whether we pay attention to the male costumes, female costumes or the rishi’s (saints), all are dressed in a manner Sagar dressed his characters. The males are dressed in brightly coloured silken dhōtis and an angavastram upon the shoulders which comprises the entire set of clothing used by Sagar for his male characters as well. Adding charm to these silken dhōtis is the kamarbandh giving a look like gold. All the actors (male/female) wear a headgear made of gold and studded with precious gems and pearls; the bare chests are covered by strings of pearls, other precious stones and huge metallic plates, imitating gold and designed as jewellery. The arms have broad armlets and unlike Sagar’s costumes here males are more richly adorned with jewellery. The basic pattern resembles the costumes used by Sagar for every small detail.

The above pictures depict few of the principal characters in the epic Mahabharata. The first picture shows Shri Krishna, Arjun (one of the Pandava brothers) and king Drupad in a meeting; whereas in the second picture we can see Duryodhan, Karan, Dushasan and Shakuni – the Kauravas (in opposition to the Pandavas).

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As far as the female costumes are concerned even they are a copy of Ramanand Sagar’s costumes. The characters (below shown: Kunti and Draupadi) can be seen wearing similar kind of a blouse showing the arms and the back. The headgear remains exclusively studded with precious stones and the female characters are highly bedecked with jewellery as already done by Sagar. The characters can be seen wearing a similar kind of a costume dhoti/saree and a cloth tied at the waist forming a pattern. The only difference lies in Draupadi’s costume. The dress worn by Draupadi is pleated in a particular way and resembles the costumes worn by classical (Bharatnatyam) dancers.

The saints (rishis) who form another major character portrayed in these mythological presentations are also similarly dressed. B. R Chopra has also shown his saints in a cross-legged posture, with white flowing beard and hair, adorned with beads which form the ornaments and carry a kamandalu (a wooden utensil).

The execution of Ram’s story with the usage of special camera techniques and the special effects employed was the major reason for the popularity enjoyed by the Ramayan. The costumes and architectural sets used by B. R Chopra have been discussed and they bear a great resemblance to the Ramayan (serial). On considering the special effects, many episodic events have been crafted in a manner which bears a great resemblance to Ramanand Sagar. For example, the execution of the episode where Draupadi appears from the fire as a result of a ‘yajna’ is similarly executed as done by Sagar in a few of his episodes (sometimes agnee god appearing from the fire, and sometimes a ‘dev’ appearing from the same fire). In another picture given below
we find Kunti rewarded a boon from the Sun god, who suddenly emerges as Kunti gazes out of the window. The god emits rays from his hand which turn as a boon for Kunti’ (in the form of a son).

In the execution of Mahabharata, B.R. Chopra tried to rid the presentation from all the flaws Sagar’s presentation of Ramayan was criticized for. However, since the audience/ viewers were familiar with this kind of employment of the techniques of camera the impact was not as spell-binding as in the case of Ramayan.

The performance and the production of the Mythological serials were in vogue for a decade starting from the late 1980s but it did not come to an end. As far as the performance of Ramayana and related stories on television is concerned it extends till date (with a serial being telecast on NDTV Imagine). The Ramayana culture witnesses its commercialization. As far as the market forces are concerned, it is no more an epic with religious and moral implications; to them it is a story with widely receptive audience. Ramayana theme paving its way from the mythological films and serials has now reached the world of animations. Many animated movies have been produced on the Ramayana theme and in most of these movies Ramanand Sagar acts as a reference point. Ramanand Sagar might have never anticipated such a huge success for his production (the Ramayan); none could have foreseen the serial becoming a legendary telecast alive in the hearts of the people even after twenty years of its production. However, the serial had an immortal impact on the Indian mythological cinema and served as a reference point for all the myhtologicals produced after Ramayan. Many animated movies have been produced on the Ramayana theme. To name a few we have – Ramayana - The Legend of Prince Ram, Rama - The Prince of
Light (early 1990s), Warrior Prince, Dashavatar (yet to be released) etc. There have been two animated movies on Hanuman also; Hanuman in 2005 and Hanuman Returns in 2007 and the process of animated versions of the story of Ram continues. These animated movies are meant to make our children acquainted with our culture and increase their familiarity with the mythological tales (legend of Ram in this case). These animated performances are extracting the real essence from the story. According to Walter Benjamin, the original work of art possesses an ‘aura,’ and this aura is dissipated through the mechanical reproduction of the form of art. The object (story here) undergoes a metamorphosis in the process of being electronically disseminated. The journey from the recitation of the verses to the audio cassette culture experiences and induces many changes in the narration of the story. There occurs a huge difference in the live recitation or performance of the narrative to an electronic performance and then multiplication of the narrative in the mechanical way. In the whole process of being reproduced; it is the ‘aura’ of art which is being depreciated. Benjamin writes,

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term aura and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced (part II).

Hence, as the ramkatha or the story of Ram is produced and further reproduced mechanically, the true aura of the story (Ramayana) gets lost in the whole process. From the live Ramayana performances, the ramlila (as discussed in the earlier Chapters) we have entered an era of electronic communication. It is not only the mechanical age (as Benjamin would have called it) but the digital age (which has gifted us the tool of animation) which acts as a greater hindrance in the flow of emotions and poses a threat to art and art forms. Through this latest technology of
digitalization the sanctity, aura and the emotions attached to an art form are almost fully lost. For the mythologicals circulated digitally the mythical aura gets dissipated in the monotonously produced action. As we know, in an animated film a true emotion can never be produced, everything happens mechanically. This whole process takes art away from the true realm of art and the artist. This stage engulfs the artist and the true nature of art. From live singing (right from Ram’s own times ‘Lav-Kush’ singing) of the Ramayana we have entered an era of cassette culture, Ramayana verses are now recited and distributed in the form of thin audio cassettes. The dohas and chaupais of Ramayana are available in the mechanically produced and electronically run cassettes.

In the 21st century animated characters have been used to replay the story of king Ram. This animated characterization further dissipates the aura embedded in the narrative. However, the new age animated movies should be awarded for their effort to cultivate the Ram story in the present era. One might ponder upon the point, whether this is the effect of Ramanand Sagar’s epic on television or the power within the ramkatha narrative itself which is persuasive enough to sustain itself in every age, moulding and adapting to the changing culture of every age and continuing till date. It can be said, that the 21st century animated world is engulfed by the encompassing effect of the tale, for the Ramayana does not belong to any one moment in the history. If the upcoming animated movies are watched and analyzed it is not hard to depict the pronounced impact of Sagar’s Ramayana in these videos. The style of production, the presentation and the sets in the animated movies all are almost similar to Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayan (this shall be discussed in detail in the following pages). On watching both the screenings (Sagar’s Ramayan and the Animated versions), one can say that the animated movies are a copy of the legendary serial except that, these tellings are compressed to three hours and instead of human beings the roles are being played by animated characters. The architectural sets and costumes used both are similar to Sagar’s Ramayan. These animated movies can be considered as the extensions of the latest Ramayana televisation tradition inaugurated by Ramanand Sagar. A few very prominent points which helped in the production of these animated versions and were borrowed from Ramanand Sagar’s stylization have been discussed in the following pages.
If a comparative analysis of the animated movies and Sagar’s *Ramayan* is done many analogies can be found in both. For instance, the sets are laid almost in the same manner, the animated movies have Sagar’s *Ramayan* as their model, as far as his choice of brightly coloured, *nautanki* like sets is concerned. Just like Sagar’s production, these animated movies with their bright and extravagantly gaudy sets remind us of the ramlila and the nautanki tradition if the animated characters are neglected. Below are given the pictures of Ravan’s court, as presented in the animated movie *Hanuman* and as presented by Sagar in his *Ramayan*. We observe a similar set up in both the presentations; almost alike in all respects. In both the pictures we can see Ravan occupying his throne which rests at a raised platform and numerous other *rakshasas* (demons) respectfully seated at their own respective seats.

![Ravan's court, Hanuman](image1)

![Ravan's court, Ramayan (Ramanand Sagar)](image2)

Another scene I would like to draw the audience’s attention is the one depicted in the Ashoka Vatika which is also almost similar to the way it was depicted by Ramanand Sagar. At a platform under a tree we find Sita surrounded by *rakshasis* (demonesses) in a beautiful garden - the Ashoka Vatika. We can see Sita in the ascetic garb, yet again almost similar to the costume used by Ramanand Sagar for Sita during exile.
Another example I would like to cite here is the style in which the last episode is presented - the enthronement of King Ram. Below are given pictures from both (the animated presentation as well as Sagar’s presentation), if we analyze both these pictures we find an icon of Sun god shown in the background. Ram and Sita are seated on the royal throne, whereas remaining three brothers, Lakshman, Bharat, Shatrughan are standing by the sides; Hanuman can also be seen in the picture. The below given picture is from Ramayan movie but if the same episode is seen in other animated movies, the presentation is almost an emulation of Sagar’s episode. In addition, Ram’s and Sita’s costume is also alike to the one used by Ramanand Sagar in not only stylization but also, the colour, Ram can be seen wearing a yellow dhoti and Sita is seen in pink (dhoti/lehanga kind of a costume).
Above given were the few incidents picked by me from the animated versions of the Ramanayan, concentrating on the similarity in sets and the presentation style. Glimpses of importations from the Sagar Ramayan are further easily visible if we consider the costume designs. The opulent lifestyle of the princes, kings, and other principal characters of the story is brought forth in its new animated avatar by the use of costumes, jewellery and an extravagant ambience. Else, the public would have had a tough time accepting these characters as Gods. Ramanand Sagar knew this, followed the principle and created a legendary impact; so did the animated characters with similarly designed costumes, highly bedecked characters dressed in bright colours. The kings and queens are shown adorned with heavy jewellery of gold and pearls. The head gears are a work of great artisanship in gold, with intricate carvings and designs. The apparel worn generally has a feel and look like silk.

Below are presented pictures of the principal characters from both the Ramayanas - animated version and the television series (Arvind Trivedi [Ravan], Arun Govil [Ram], Dara Singh (Hanuman) and Deepika Chiklia [Sita]). If we look at the below given pictures carefully we can say, the characters are presented not only in a similar costume, but the facial make up and expressions are also quite similar.

In the set (2) of pictures below, we find a heavily built, robust man. He is seen having thick moustaches; a lot of gold ornaments adorn the bare chest. An emotion associated with rage is visible on the face of the rakshasa king in both the pictographs and a sense of arrogance abounds his visage. The style in which Ramanayanavan is presented by Sagar has been thoroughly emulated by animated movies.
Ram is presented in a silken dhoti and an angavastram in Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayan and this has been strictly copied by the makers of animated movies as well. Below we can see pictures of Ram in both the presentations of the story – animated Ramayana and the serialized version. These are pictures, when Ram is prepared to face the hardships of exile, and is dressed in an ascetic’s garb. Even in presenting an ascetic Ram, Ramanand Sagar’s style has been copied. In both the presentations Ram is shown as a soft, wise and a humble being. We can point many analogies in these presentations; the calm expression on his face, a tilak adorning the forehead and the facial expression.

The pictures given below depict the monkey god Hanuman, adorned with a golden mukut (headgear), rings in his ears and his chest adorned with pearls. In both the presentations he is shown wearing armlets and a bangle (thick, tribal like in form). The episode of Hanuman tearing apart his chest to show the image of lord Ram in his heart has also been executed in a manner resembling Ramanand Sagar. In both the productions he is gifted a necklace by (devi) mother Sita, Hanuman throws the beads of the necklace one by one, when questioned for his doing, he tells that anything however valuable but without the name of his lord is worthless to him. This is the time when the importance of his own body comes into question and he tears apart his chest to show the image of lord Ram accompanied by Sita, in his heart.
Throughout the serial Sita has been portrayed as a meek, docile character, with innocent, childlike expressions on her face. The animated movies also present Sita’s character with a similar simplicity and innocence. This quality wins over the viewers both in the human and animated forms. The costumes used for Sita in these animated movies are similar to the costumes used for Sita by Ramanand Sagar in his serial. This can be analyzed by the pictures from an animated movie given below.

Sita is dressed just the way Sagar dressed his Sita; almost similar accessories used for her hair, the blouse worn by this animated Sita is again an imitation of Sagar’s costume pattern with her back and arms naked and visible through her dupatta. The ascetic garb used by the producer of animated movie Ramayana (The Legend of Prince Ram) are also an imitation of the costume used by Sagar. Even the animated movies show her with her ornaments and unlike the animated movie Hanuman, Sita has her hair tied in Ramayana – The Legend of Prince Ram (resembling Sagar).
All the other female characters are also shown dressed in a similar fashion. Alongside can be seen a picture of Hanuman’s mother worshipping lord Shiva; the pattern of her dress, accessories everything resembles the characters shown in Sagar’s Ramayana.

![Picture from Hanuman](image)

The demoness’ are also depicted in a manner which emulates Sagar Ramayana. The demons are shown bearing normal human form except that they are heavy structured, pot-bellied and having protruding teeth. Below can be seen pictures of demoness Tarakaa and Ravan, wear beaded necklaces, have dark eyes and protruding teeth.

![Tarakaa, Ramayan](image) ![Ravan, Ramayan](image)

The utilization of the high-tech camera tricks to capture the audience’s imagination has been the USP of Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayan; similar special effects were employed by the animated productions as well. Ramayana, the folklore talks of its principal characters having superhuman capabilities. The makers of the movie correctly chose not to break any of the myths of the legend by depicting all the characters with legendary strength and fighting abilities. The computer simulated graphics used by Ramanand Sagar in the serial was an important reason which contributed to the popularity of the serial. Ramanand Sagar very sagaciously exploited
the cinematic techniques to establish the supernatural, divine and something much distinguished from the world of the mortals. The producers of these animated movies imitate Ramanand Sagar even in the special effects used by him. Hanuman’s paranormal command over his size and shape has been sagaciously replicated; below are present pictures of Hanuman carrying Ram, Lakshman on his shoulders

Even other episodes utilizing special camera tricks have been meticulously executed. Throughout these animations we find those superhuman, divine happenings taking place. The execution of these miraculous incidents is done in a manner resembling Sagar. Gods appear floating in the sky, appear with a wave of air and then suddenly disappear. In the below given pictures we can see Ravan carrying Sita forcefully on his spaceship (the modern name for modern telecast). The episode of Hanuman coming across a mountain god on his way to Lanka has been similarly crafted. In the third picture the power of the divine, supernatural has been established by means of these special techniques; here a ‘dev’ suddenly appears near the window.
The presentation, costume of the principal characters and the styling everything is almost similar. It is not only in the costume or architecture that we can observe glimpses of borrowings from Ramanand Sagar’s - seventy eight episode serial, however the impact of this serial can be felt throughout these animated movies on the Ramayana theme.

By means of all the animated versions of the Ramayana it gets transformed from a serious religious epic to an entertainment form. The story told in the 21st century in the form of animated characters validates the living presence of this epic. The epical tale along with imparting religious instructions, qualifies to be called a means of entertainment.

The production of Ram and related stories on the television screen does not come to an end. A new Ramayana is being televised (started on 21st Jan 08’) on the channel NDTV Imagine, with Sagars once again directing and producing the serial. The style of the production, list of sources cited everything seems copied from Ramanand Sagar, it seems that the new Ramayana places the last produced (Ramanand Sagar’s Ramayan) as a model for its production. The production of Ramayan today, in the year 2008 once again confirms Ramayana occupying the place
of a living epic. Shailja Kejriwal, executive vice-president, content, NDTV Imagine, the brain behind the show tells,

We simply thought that the time is ripe to revive the tale. India is shining, but on the other hand, there is moral and social degeneration. The *Ramayan* with its upright values needs to be retold to the masses yet again........ Indian audience is forever looking for icons, and who better than Ram (The Week, Feb 2008, 34).

Shailja Kejriwal’s opinion once again extracts *Ramayana* from the national — local arenas to a universal phenomenon. Kejriwal’s belief in the social, behavioural and ethical values contained in the *Ramayana* verifies the moral teachings contained in the epic and imparted amongst the people over the generations.

As told by the Channel’s content team, the production and telecast decisions were not influenced by Ramanand Sagar’s production of the Ramkatha. Samir Nair, CEO, NDTV Imagine tells us that this *Ramayan* is going to be different from the earlier one,

The format is going to be the big change. As a one day weekly show, *Ramayan* could not explore many sidetracks. We will show it in greater detail within the half hour daily format. Whether it is the past life of Kausalya or the story of Sita’s interaction with her guru *rishi* Gargi, we wanted to bring out the story in detail (The Week, Feb 2008, 39).

Though Samir Nair tells us that the new *Ramayana* is different from the 1987-88 produced *Ramayan*, he discusses almost nothing about the performance aspects. He tells us nothing about, how far the new *Ramayan* would differ from the series produced earlier in terms of performance. Considering the side-plots discussed in this new produced *Ramayan*, it is appropriate to call the *Ramayan* telecast (from Monday to Thursday for half an hour daily) as an extension of the earlier serialization of the epic. The CEO tells us, ‘this show would try to explore many sidetracks related to the epic; which could not be done in Sagar’s *Ramayan* because of the serial being screened once a week’ (The Week 39).
This *Ramayan* telecast on NDTV Imagine almost executes every scene in the manner done by Ramanand Sagar in 1987, except the detailed manner in which the story has been presented. Analyzing the production of the new *Ramayana*, many of the presentation styles and skills used in the earlier show have been borrowed by the producers. Considering the show, right from the first scene, where every episode begins we can see the impact laid by Ramanand Sagar. In Ramanand Sagar’s *Ramayan* every episode used to begin with Ram and Sita, bedecked and bejewelled seated on a royal throne amongst the clouds. A scene similar to Ramanand Sagar’s *Ramayan* is exhibited in the beginning of every episode. Every episode starts with the screening of Ram-Sita seated on the royal throne. All the three brothers are attending to them and are shown standing by their sides, Hanuman bows to Lord Ram. The pictures taken from the starting of both the serials are presented below for comparison.
The only difference lies in Ramanand Sagar’s presentation being more divine, paranormal, showing Ram-Sita above the clouds, *devatas* (Gods) showering flowers and blowing conch shells. Whereas, in the new presentation the scene is depicted in an earthly manner, with Ram not shown above the clouds with *devatas* all around. In Ramanand Sagar’s presentation only Ram, Lakshman, Sita and Hanuman are seen in the picture. Whereas, in the new production all the three brothers can be seen accompanying them.

The performance style, especially the close-up technique, large heads occupying the television screen for a substantial amount of time in every telecast; has been copied (from Ramanand Sagar’s production) but it doesn’t interfere with the pace of the serial. The concept of close ups emphasizing on the character’s performance and capturing every emotion has definitely been borrowed, in the pictures given below are shown Ram and Sita, both in one of the emotional scenes; their faces occupying the entire television screen.

The *Ramayan* shows the influence laid by Bollywood, the episodes like *karvachauth* shown in this new *Ramayan* and screened in that typical *filmi* style forms
for deviations. Also, the depiction of the male showing fasting along with the beloved adds for the Bollywood touch.

Everything is executed in a manner similar to Ramanand Sagar, be it the special effects and their execution in the new Ramayan. The latest telecast episode (1st Sep 08') where Ram tries to attack the ‘Ocean God’ for not paving a way for Ram and his army, the episode is telecast in a manner exactly similar to the way this was executed by Ramanand Sagar. The Ocean god appears, apologizes the lord with a hope of being pardoned.

The new broadcast has tried to overcome the charges and accusations laid upon the earlier Ramayana. One of the major flaw lamented upon by the critics, which according to them deteriorated the Ramayana and this was the pace of the serial has been overcome in this new telecast of the Ramayana. As Harshikaa Udasi says, “going high tech may not be the only salvo they might have to fire to capture audiences’ imagination. The pace will need to be right, since one of the biggest criticisms against the last show was its excruciatingly slow delivery” (40).

Hence, the pioneering effort by Ramanand Sagar has now metamorphed into a phenomenon encompassing a multitude of commercial-religious-media conglomerate. Ramayana today is synonymous with tele-serials, animation films, and comic books. Along with the Ramayana getting commercialized even the characters playing the principals have attained a lot of commercial success and value.

Through the televisation of the Ramayana the political and the sacred were amalgamated. With the institutionalized production and circulation of Ramayana icons and images, the boundaries of political sphere in India were transformed. The popularity of the Ramayana (Sagar’s) allowed the ambivalent status of religion to be exploited. There are two key meanings available by the broadcast of the Ramayana serial, first in terms of the institutional circumstances in which it was telecast, and in terms of the reformulation of an epic tradition. Television created a new representational field; specific messages were now circulated, within the historical context of their making. In this sense, the Ramayan (the serial) became the medium within which a new set of political opportunities came to be articulated.

One can say that technology is being harnessed to consolidate the regime of dharma. Here we find, the perpetuation, begetting of religion but through a scientific
temper, through the means of technology. This propagation of religion is a multi-faceted event, at one end it helps in the proliferation of our mythological stories whereas, on the other end the religious temper is lost. Religion becomes a newly sprung industry and hence, loses its real fervency. The iconisation of Ram has though popularized the Ramayana tradition but along with popularization also led to the corrosion of this culture. Today, Ram has left the altar and entered our bed rooms, be it in the form of the decorative pieces hanging in our rooms or the images of Ram darbar which adorn almost every north Indian house. Also, the serialized story form and its availability in the form of video tapes and compact discs makes the Ramayana appear like any other film/serial on television. The sanctity bordering around the ramkatha is a past vehemence; the narration of the Ramayana verses which was seen as a religious ritual is a thing of the past. This has now transformed into a process of viewing the serial while lying on our beds. An eminent screening of the Ramayana on the television was witnessed for the first time in the late 1980s (twenty years ago). It was observed that this television series was viewed and accorded the same reverence as any other religious ceremony. It is by means of the animated series and the present day viewers that the epic has been reduced to a mere television serial. The experience if summed up is a distorted religiosity. Nevertheless, the animated movies are making our youngsters familiar with our culture. These have depreciated the image of our Gods to mere animations, young kids who are nonresidents of India, know of Hanuman as a monkey with special powers. The credit goes to the animated mythologicals.

It is not only the realm of films/ cinema where Ramayana theme has manifested itself. Ram occupied the commercial markets as well. At this stage the commercialization of religion begins, religion behaves as a commodity and this commodity is marketed by various forces which come into play. Sometimes, the name of Ram (the lord) is marketed by means of that everlasting smile (Arun Govil in this connection), at times by the grandeur made possible by the efforts of Ramanand Sagar and the means of television. Hence, the market forces transformed the sacred image of Ram into a commercially popular image. Ram’s image was practically found everywhere around us, on match-boxes, posters, note-book covers, decorative items, wall hangings etc. So much was the impact that even dresses (T-Shirts), bags, jewellery had Ram on them. Today, almost every north Indian house has a Ram-
Darbar meticulously placed either at the altar or one of the corners of the drawing room.

Decorative items - Ram darbars, kurtas

These pictures given above and their domination in the commercial markets validly point to the popularity enjoyed by Ram/Ramayana. Our society is infatuated by the Ramayana. This mythical lore draws the attention of all the generations. This infatuation for the Ramayana has manifested itself in different forms; it occupies the religious-sacred, political and commercial domains. The story has become all pervasive; Ramayana story is noticeable in different formats (teleserial, films, and comics – with Virgin comics compiling a new comical series on the Ramayana which is yet to be released in the market). Sagar’s Ramayan, the series was almost enforced on the viewers since it was broadcast at the prime Sunday morning, and doordarshan was the only available entertainment channel. But in today’s era when we have hundreds of entertainment channels available the formation of a new Ramayana and that too by the pioneers in this field (Sagars) is pure economics. And not only Ramayana but Mahabharata telecast on the 9X channel and Jai Shri Krishna on Colours speaks for the popular demand of mythologicals in Indian cinema and the minds of common people. Everywhere, every channel has something to quench our
thirst for mythological stories and the only possible reason is the appeal of these mythologicals in Indian cinema. One conclusion which can be certainly drawn from this is that mythology still lures the common man.