The Sagely Activist
Category : July/August/September 2004
Published by Anonymous on Jul. 02, 2004

TRANSITION

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Ardent atheist turned born-again Hindu, Sita Ram Goel committed the better part of his 82 years on Earth to restoring Hindu dignity

Sita Ram Goel will be remembered by Hindus in India and around the world for a long time. For most of the last half of the twentieth century, he and mentor-friend Ram Swarup produced hundreds of books, articles and pamphlets extolling the glories of Hinduism while warning of its most malicious foes. They were a bold and outspoken twosome who published their works through the Voice of India (VOI), a publication house they created just for this purpose. Although both Sita Ram Goel and Ram Swarup have now passed away, the VOI is still active--dedicated exclusively to the promotion of issues important to the modern-day Renaissance of Hinduism, a cause for which Sita Ram Goel gladly and courageously dedicated his life.

Born on October 16, 1921, Sita Ram Goel finished his formal education with an MA in History in 1944 from the University of Delhi. Yet he spent his entire life pursuing and sharing a broad spectrum of knowledge on a variety of subjects. He was well versed in several languages and came to be respected as a scholar of literature, philosophy, religion, and sociology. By his own account, he drew his primary inspiration on all these subjects from Plato and Sri Aurobindo.

Although he developed a keen interest in communism during his college years, he turned against the ideology in 1949 when he came to understand the plight of people living in communist Russia. After 1950, he committed himself to informing the Indian people of the real theory and practice of communism in Stalin's Russia and Mao's China. His careful and tediously researched work during this time rightly earned him a reputation as a formidable activist.

Rivals both respected and feared his mighty insights, which were too often too true and well-articulated to easily refute. Sita Ram Goel chose to fight his battles so far above the common, war-torn terrain of human emotions that contenders not matching his wit were left to look like fools. Hence, direct challenges to his writings were few, if any. The most damaging effect upon his work came from rivals following a strategy of "strangling by silence, " a crafty tactic of blocking the publication of his name and his works. Such a passive confinement, however, was not nearly enough to stop his intellectual assault on anti-Hindu forces. The writings of Sita Ram Goel are alive and well today.

On December 3, 2003, at the age of 83, Sita Ram Goel passed away peacefully in his sleep following a long illness. It was a quiet end to a humble yet dynamic life dedicated to the revitalization of Hinduism and the evolution of India. We at Hinduism Today were honored to have maintained a fruitful association with him for more than 20 years and will long remember our visits with him in New Delhi at his home and during his one visit with us here in Hawaii. He is survived by his two sons, Saroj Kumar Goel and Pradip Kumar Goel.

Today, Pradip manages the Voice of India, which is supported both by donations and by VOI profits which are invested back into publications. Hinduism Today correspondent Rajiv Malik recently chatted with Pradip in New Delhi about his father, the state of Hinduism today and the prospects for India tomorrow. Here are some excerpts.

When did you first realize your father was a Hindu activist? In 1952 my father brought us to New Delhi from Calcutta. I was just seven years old then and too young to understand the kind of work he was doing. In 1964 there was some talk of his being arrested, but even at that time I was not really aware of what was going on. All I knew was that he had written a book criticizing Nehru, following the war with China, and a lot of people were getting upset. As time went on, my father brought together some Hindu scholars interested in defending Hindu society. This group stimulated the creation of the Voice of India in 1980. It was only then that I began to read my father's articles with interest and finally understood his work as a Hindu activist. At that time I was 35 years of age. Now I am 54.

What inspired your father to become an activist? He felt that the Hindu society was going through a crisis and that a Hindu renaissance was necessary. He wanted to do his part in bringing about change, but gained the confidence and guidance to do so

from Ram Swarup, his close friend and advisor. Together, these two men wrote pamphlets that were forceful and strong, with titles like "Hindu Society Under Siege, " "Defense of Hinduism " and "Perversion of India's Political Parlance." Eventually they decided that, to do this kind of controversial work, they needed their own publication house.

What was your father's most important contribution to the Hindu renaissance? We are proud that he brought forward new ideas in defense of Hindu society, and that they were well written. We can now see that people from all over the country and around the world were affected by this literature. Even the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), both Hindu nationalist organizations, used his literature. Not having such material themselves, they used Voice of India publications to give their positions substance.

What was the core of your father's message? In the good old days, my father used to run an organization called the Society for Defense of Freedom in Asia. Ram Swarup, who was also associated with this organization, helped to bring about its focus. He proclaimed that humanity had suffered three terrible tragedies: Christianity, Islam and communism.

Christianity is not now as bad as it used to be. The cruelties once practiced in the name of that religion have been eliminated by reforms. Now the only threat from the Christians comes from their missionary work. Because of the collapse of Soviet Russia, communism has also suffered a setback and has been weakened. The biggest danger humanity faces today comes from militant Islam. Sooner or later, we must take care of this threat that comes from these people. My father was saying this years ago. As I review his works today, I realize that his assessment of so many things was absolutely correct. He was ahead of his time.

Did you ever feel that your father and your family were in danger because of his work? Were there ever any threats? I could not say that we were really ever in danger. We may have thought so at the time. But, yes, there were some threats. My father would get postcards saying he was indulging in anti-Muslim activities and that one day his sons and grandsons would be converted to Islam. Also, the fact that father's friends were frequently coming to him and advising him to act cautiously had us all a little worried. But he used to say that he had fulfilled his duties and was ready to face whatever consequences might come. He definitely had some spiritual power backing him up. All these threats that we received affected

our family only monetarily, and only for a short time.

Was there one single incident that alarmed you more than the rest? Yes, one incident stands out. We were working on the Hindi edition of Ram Swarup's book, Understanding Islam Through Hades. We had finished printing the book and had taken it to the bindery. This bindery was located in the Muslim area of Old Delhi. Although a Hindu owned it, some of the workers there were Muslim.

One Muslim boy saw the word Hades in the title of the book and took it to a Muslim priest, who declared the book anti-Islam. About a hundred people then gathered around the bindery in protest, and the binder called my father on the phone saying, "These people want to burn down my shop!" The police picked up the son of the shop owner and took him to the police station for questioning. Because my father was the publisher of the book, he was also picked up. As a result of all this, our Hindu friends and well-wishers also gathered at the police station. That was a night of turmoil. Our whole family was quite disturbed and worried that father might be tortured.

The next day was Sunday. A special court was convened to listen to our case. Although my father was released, the case took a long time to settle. It was introduced in 1987 and was finally settled sometime in 2000. In the end, all that happened was we were asked to delete certain portions of the book. We complied. But the antagonism of the whole incident really wore us down.

Did your father have a support group during troubled times? Most of my father's Muslim and Christian friends deserted him when they came to know that his writings spoke against their religious beliefs. Although father put across his views in a very polite and analytical manner, there was often strong reaction. He used to say that just because he criticized Christianity, that did not mean he did not like Christians. He even invited critics to speak up against Hinduism in his same spirit. However, he did emphatically declare that it was clearly not fair to condemn Hinduism, then convert people from it.

Back in the eighties, my father aggressively defended Hinduism when there was a mass conversion of Hindus to Christianity at Meenakshipuram in South India. That one event was an important signal to my father that Hinduism was facing a major

crisis and that something should be done to meet the challenge.

Tell us about your father? What kind of person was he? He was a very simple man with very few requirements. His food was simple. His life was simple. When we provided him with a car on behalf of our business, we asked him many times to engage a driver, but he never did. He said that a driver would just waste a lot of time waiting around for him.

My father's general approach to life was always very humanitarian. He never wanted anyone else to get held up because of him. When he was active, he never required people to come to his house for a meeting. Rather, he would go and meet them at a place of their choosing.

Although he could have easily remained fully occupied writing his own books, he was always willing to help edit and organize the works of others. In fact, he used to insist that it was a part of his duty to promote the work of other deserving scholars. His first concern was to help the Hindu cause. He was a selfless man.

Can you tell us a little about your mother?

My mother was always at home looking after us and performing her puja (worship). She was a pious lady. Her primary duty was to take care of the family. She was not really concerned with what my father was doing. She had a high regard for Ram Swarup and took him to be an enlightened person. She always assumed that, because my father was always working with him, nothing could go wrong. She died in 1981.

How did your father's work impact you and the rest of his family? By 1980 my father had fulfilled his familial obligations and had lived a full life. All of his children were married and further business dealings were of no interest to him. He told us that he wanted to go full-time into writing and explained why.

"There are four types of debts, " he said. "bhuta rin, deva rin, pitra rin and rishi rin. (Rin means "debt.") Bhuta rin is one's debt toward the ancestors. Deva rin is one's debt toward the Gods. Pitra rin is one's debt to the father, which includes taking care of the family. Rishi rin is one's debt to the saints and rishis."

My father felt that he was at the stage in life when he should be working to settle his debt with the rishis and saints by spreading their message. He felt that the vidya (knowledge) of the rishis should be passed on to mankind. He used to emphasize that he was doing this work without hope of getting a reward or becoming famous.

Did your father cultivate any "disciples " to carry on his work? Only Dr. Koenraad Elst, who lives in Belgium, could be considered a true disciple. Another person who was strongly influenced by my father and is now doing good work is N.S. Rajaram. Mr. Rajaram is based in South India and even today is a fearless fighter for the Hindu cause.

Other well-known scholars have extracted extravagantly from my father's writings but have neglected to give him credit. This is plagiarism, no doubt. But my father used to insist that he was not bothered by it, so long as the right idea got promoted. Initially, I had our publication rights drawn up with a copyright clause, but my father directed me to remove it and let the people use the material any way they wanted.

Why did your father write only in English? Many people asked my father why he did not write in Hindi. His response was that because the Christians and Muslims were using English to put forward their message, and the media supporting them was English-based, he felt it was appropriate that his work should be published in English. He also made the point that the people who spoke Hindi as a first language were already with him ideologically and did not need to be educated or persuaded.

What do people most frequently request from VOI? We are contacted often for our publications on Hindu philosophy. Our best authors in this field are David Frawley and Koenraad Elst. Of course, the works of my father and Ram Swarup are also in demand, but they focused on Islam and Christianity.

How would you assess the current response to VOI publications? Today, the response is quite satisfactory, but our publications are fairly low priced and therefore yield low profit margins for book sellers, which means the books are not usually kept in stock in the stores but rather are kept on display so that orders can be made directly to us by interested parties. Today, we have 95 titles in print. Twenty-nine are authored by Sita Ram Goel himself.

To be honest, the literary value of a book has little significance in the book selling business. The physical value of the book is what counts. If you want books by Aurobindo, you have to buy them from the Aurobindo Ashram. They are not available anywhere else. Books on Gandhi are only published by the government. It is the same with most good Hindu literature. If Gita Press does not publish it, no one will. There is just not much money in it.

What guidelines did your father set up for you to do this work, yet make a good living and support your family? My father's guidelines stipulated first that I fulfill my responsibilities to my family. Then as time and resources allowed, I was to perpetuate the services of the VOI. To earn my livelihood, I manage Biblia Impex, a book export business that my father formed in 1964 to provide financial security for our family.

My father started Biblia Impex from a small table in a friend's office. He would sit on one side of the table, and his typist would sit on the other side. He was one of the first Indian publishers to send books abroad without asking for advance payment. Other export businesses would never do this. They would always require money in advance. My father understood European integrity. He knew they were trustworthy.

Father used to tell me that I should not work for more than I required. Years ago, I had an opportunity to purchase some properties that could have made us very wealthy, but I did not do so.

What are your plans to keep your father's books in print, as well as produce edited versions, collections, and more? My father used to make it clear that he had said what we wanted to say and that the work was complete. I feel that it is my duty now to see to it that the publications of the established writers for VOI--Sita Ram Goel, Ram Swarup, David Frawley, Rajaram and Koenraad Elst--are made available to the

people. I will keep doing this as long as I am able.

So far as editing these publications is concerned, we would need some very highly qualified people to do this, writers who are at least as qualified as my father and Ram Swarup. At the moment, I am not aware of such people. It is far better that we just ask our established writers to present their own points of view rather than have them attempt to modify the works of people who were established experts in the subjects they handled.

What about bringing his writings to the Internet? Right now, we have 28 titles on the Internet. Our website is www.bharatvani.org/books.I must admit, however, that this effort is minimal at most. We just do not have the capacity to go into a more elaborate web presentation. Others might offer to undertake this work on our behalf, but we ourselves cannot. Our primary obligation is to perpetuate the printed material. Also, putting these works on the Internet is expensive. The Voice of India is not a commercial venture. Whatever money comes from selling the VOI publications is invested back into printing and distribution.

Can you summarize your father's legacy? My father created an awareness of certain surreptitious forces threatening Hinduism and the fundamental culture of India. He made it his life's mission to expose the real intentions of people who were disguised as benefactors but were secretly intent upon serving selfish ends. In his book entitled Hindu Society Under Siege, he clearly laid out how we Hindus are under attack from many fronts. He emphasized that the biggest problem was a lack of awareness of the problem.

He and Ram Swarup were always challenging Christian and Islamic tactics, and in their analyses of these strategies did much to clarify Hinduism. Initially people did not know how to compare Hinduism with Christianity and Islam. People assumed that because the Christians set up hospitals and schools, they were good people with well-meaning intentions. They did not understand that they might have ulterior motives.

My father realized that, to expose these Christian missionaries, it was necessary to analyze their literature and critique them in a logical manner. This in itself was a big revelation that brought about many positive results.

The people also did not understand Islam. None of us knew about Mohammad Sahib, Akbar, Babar and Aurengzeb. We just thought that they were rulers of India. We had no idea about the many injustices they had ruthlessly inflicted upon Hindus. Ram Swarup and my father presented the activities of these people clearly and within a historical perspective. They won our hearts with their minds."