

The Need for Temples by A.C.Sekhar

Temples are places of worship of God. Some call them by different names as churches, mosques, synagogues, gurudwaras, viharas etc. Whether they are empty spaces, or filled with or adored by symbolic representations of God like idols, books, statues or other types of symbols, they are all considered very sacred and congregations meet to perform different types of rituals to invoke the Almighty and to receive His blessings Thus in every civilisation, every religion, every society, a common place of worship has become a necessity for human life.

The question is whether this necessity has arisen out of the need to separate the activities of normal life from that of the teachings of the great Sages and Prophets of different religions or whether the necessity arose for a social commitment of the needed bondage between members of differing communities for their co-existence. Probably both are true and the necessity of temples or common places of worship have become inevitable in progressive societies.

In Sanathana Dharma and Advaita philosophy there are two ways of reaching human goals (1) through Pravriti that is through actions in mundane life and (2) through Nivriti that is, through renunciation of worldly life with complete Faith in a Supernatural Power, God. Most of the men in modern days need to run between the two due to the forces of circumstances around them, where as in the earlier days people, particularly in their old age used to go to forest areas or other secluded places to lead lives of renunciation also known as Vanaprasthashram .

The present day common places of worship, the temples, are serving several other objectives also. They are the meeting places for discussions not only on religious topics but also some socio-economic topics and even politics too sometimes. In some cases there are good commercial activities like renting halls for social functions, sale of religious literature, prasadam etc. Some maintain gift shops and serve as market places for sale of different types of fancy goods.

They also serve as museums of ancient art and culture preserving some traditional values. Who knows they may one day become laboratories for scientific blend of Spiritualism and Materialism, the two paths for Man to realise the Ultimate Truth of Creation and Creator, and decode the meaning of MAYA extolled in Hindu mythology. One of the examples where such blending is taking place is that of modern marriages. The religious significance of marriages is becoming less and less and its social considerations are increasing.

To-day marriages are evaluated not by the amount of spiritual content and religious ceremonies that have gone into it but by the amount of material content as to how many guests were present, how many presents were received, what food was served, what decorations were made how much money was spent etc. Even mass marriages have come into vogue patronised by some God-men, politicians and social workers. All these factors go into evaluation of the spiritual content of marriages A second example is unlike in previous times individual pujas at specific times to suit the individuals have been replaced by mass pujas at fixed times specified by temple administrations at specific commercial rates.

Some of the uni-polar temples are becoming multi-polar temples to suit the expanding materialistic tendencies in human beings Other fields of possible research experimentations in temples, mention may be made of meditation and its material aids to understand impacts on body and mind, rituals and associated material objects in comparative religions and their impact on social attitudes, temple architectures in changing civilisations etc. There are many more examples one can think of and thus the need of temples seems to be a necessity for modern progressive societies and would continue to develop with changing times.