

Who is Mutalik

He is about five feet seven, mostly shrunk to that size from all the walking over the years. Wears an ordinary kurta and a matching pajama. Sometimes there is a kumkum spot on the forehead and keeps the lips parted exposing his teeth which look like a confused smile. There are traces of what could have been good looks in a bygone era. He is out of place in most places and polite most of the times. This is my introduction of the monster, the chief of Sree Rama Sene, Pramod Mutalik.

Till recently, or rather till after the Mangalore attack, most people who knew him did not know which organization he actually represented because, after starting as an RSS pracharak and then moving on to becoming the chief of Bajrang Dal in Karnataka, he has since been associated with and found under many banners, like Shiv Sena which he joined only to leave sooner after Kannada activists' protests, Rashtriya Hindu Sene, started as a political party under which he contested the last Assembly polls, and now for sure for some time now as the patron of Sree Rama Sene he founded for the youth.

The name Sree Rama Sene must have come as a suitable graduation christening after moving from Bajrang Dal which is named after Hanuman the faithful devotee of Sree Ram. If there was to be anything above and better than Bajrang it had to be Sree Ram.

Mutalik's first brush with fame was when he stood at the helm of Bajrang Dal in Karnataka. He was famous for his speeches and notorious for his anti Muslim rhetoric.

He spewed venom wherever he went against every threat he perceived as coming from Islam. He was a hero to many and a declared villain in the eyes of many secularists. Youth gathered at his speech venues only to be charged up by his calls to cut, slit, beat and banish. People who know him closely know that he often went onto the stage without any preparation and started talking whatever he felt like, and people listened, because most who came for his speech were ready to listen to him. He often cooked up stories about the perennial danger from Muslims loyal to Pakistan and how Hindus are to be annihilated in a few years or at the least be reduced to minority. Many outside his followers' circles ignored his speeches and there were frequent calls for banning and banishing him, he somehow kept himself free. There were many cases against him and most of his time was spent appearing in courts. His tongue became his weapon and his instrument to popularity. This made Mutalik a rule unto himself and he started making his own decisions. The step to build the Hindu Bhavan in Hubli much to the displeasure of the RSS made him trip for the first time in the Hindutva path. There were accusations that he had even resorted to extortion to collect funds from BJP leaders. Nobody dared to confront him, they contributed. Hindu Bhavan was built but Mutalik fell in the eyes of the RSS bosses. He had to leave.

Mutalik became bitter about the RSS and the BJP and started accusing both of not being committed enough to the Hindu cause. He let his tongue go wild on both the organizations and even started appearing like an arch enemy of the Hindutva outfits. He started claiming that he was the only one committed to Hindutva and the others were just bogus. His silent sympathizers do say that Mutalik is passionate about Hindutva even today.

People who watched a recent interview of his did not need much help to conclude that he doesn't know much about Hindutva either. He has only one belief. In India a Hindu's interest is paramount, India should become a Hindu country and Hindutva is superior to all.

Mutalik does not have either issues to represent or followers to stand by. (Mutalik does not have issues to represent nor followers to stand by) According to a rough estimate, Mutalik may have in all a total of five hundred followers all over Karnataka. Is he popular? Only he knows. He is lately sold to sycophancy, with a small group of people all around him, stopping him from thinking sense and getting him to make all wrong decisions. He first decides and then thinks how to make it happen. That is why even after a firebrand speech, he meekly apologises.

Mutalik, even if you threaten to slit his throat, cannot define Hindu culture in a paragraph, let alone in a sentence. He is at best a misled innocent man who only barks and has rarely even scratched. He is not a threat as he is made out to be. There was not a single instance where he could incite trouble with his speeches. He was more of a crude entertainment to some youth who suffered internally from pent up anger against themselves about not belonging to the times they are living in and also from self loathe.

The other reason people quote for Mutalik's exit from Bajrang Dal was the towing of the soft Hindutva line by the Sangh Parivar. The firebrand and passionate leader he was, Mutalik could not mellow down whatever were the compulsions. He came out screaming allegations against the BJP and the RSS. He even dared the leaders of the Parivar to take violent steps to settle some issues.

Shiv Sena's failure in Karnataka under the shadow of the Belgaum language issue dented Mutalik's popularity a great deal. He, without so much as a whine, dissolved the Party and started the Rashtriya Hindu Sena. Failing to register the required share of votes, the party failed to get recognition. The only thing left for Mutalik in recent times, to stay afloat was to start an organization to incite youth and get media attention. Handy came the founding of Sree Rama Sene.

Even his close associates can confess in private that there are not more than five hundred active activists of Sree Rama Sene in Karnataka at any given point of time. But, when it comes to settling old feuds or scores, anyone could suddenly become a member of the Sene. In Mangalore alone, a rough estimate puts the membership at a maximum of a hundred youth.

Mutalik is not known to be corrupt, per se, but not many can vouch the same about his supporters. Threats, warning of violence, prospects of defamation are some of the tools used by the operatives.

The Mangalore pub attack was an aberration. Everyone knows that it was not planned that way. The goons who call themselves as his supporters went berserk. Mutalik was kept informed only partly. He, in his usual style commended the attack and then when he came to his senses realized the gravity of the situation and started apologizing. Nobody heard his apology.

The attack on women by Sree Rama Sene activists was basically a publicity strategy gone awry. Rama Sena men mistook the outcome, when they actually were

expecting huge support from the public. Beating of women, like most people who know Mutalik, could not have been planned by the organization, let alone be condoned by him. The work could have been only an on the spot bravado by the member goons. Mutalik apologized and then said his organization had the public support. He flip flopped and then attracted derision and attack from all over the country.

This is Pramod Mutalik, a man who does not think nor does understand. He is a man of the moment. Wanting to survive. He, they say, does not have a single good advisor in the midst of all sycophants. If he receives one letter from Amritsar or Jammu saying that someone likes what his organization is doing, he immediately tells a hundred people that thousands of people have come together in those cities to start the branches of Sree Rama Sene. If he really had the money, manpower and the guts, he would have reacted to the pink chaddi campaign in his own way, perhaps suitably.

If Mutalik stands in the middle of a casual crowd, even in Karnataka, not even five people can recognize him. His words can be easily brushed aside as insane jokes. He is ill informed and lacks supporters. In the current elections he has even been accused of making deals with some candidates. He is a non entity in the local media. But, in the national scene Pramod Mutalik is still someone and that someone surely will get more and more people extending their support to him, to stay alive to play big and to cause monstrous harm to our society. Mutalik is talking and we are not listening but to one's surprise one can find hundreds of youth who do still think that whatever Mutalik is speaking and his Sree Rama Sene is doing are things that have relevance and cannot be ignored. Such supportive voices are heard not only in Mangalore but all over India. If Mutalik is still confident it is only because he has heard those voices. He knows his audience well and also knows that what ultimately matters is being able to matter to them.