REUTERS



BABRI DEMOLITION
25 YEARS LATER

REUTERS



File photo of litigants leaving the Lucknow HC after the historic verdict on Sep 30, 2010, ordering the disputed Ayodhya site to be divided between Hindu and Muslim sides.

2 AYODHYA & THE DISPUTE
3 BJP'S TRANSITION: FROM RAM TO REFORM TO RAM
6 P V NARASIMHA RAO TO L K ADVANI: KEY FACES OF BABRI ERA
9 HINDUS HAVE THREE OPTIONS THAT MUSLIMS DO NOT DESIRE
11 HOW INDIA, HINDUS & MUSLIMS HAVE CHANGED SINCE BABRI
13 I DEMOLISHED THE MOSQUE FOR RAM: CONFESSIONS OF A KAR SEVAK
14 'NOT THE SMALLEST TRACE OF A RAM TEMPLE REMAINS'
16 WAS BABRI REALLY A MOSQUE? WAS RAM BORN ON DISPUTED SITE?
17 FROM 1853 TO NOW, A TIMELINE OF THE AYODHYA DISPUTE
19 MRINAL PANDE: UNLEASHING OF THE MAJORITARIAN BEAST
21 APOORVANAND: WHEN A BORDER WAS CARVED ON A NATION'S PSYCHE

AYODHYA & THE DISPUTE

December 6, 1992, Sunday, is the day that saw the Babri Masjid being demolished in Ayodhya, District Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh. Even after 25 years, India, Indian society and Indian politics continue to feel the aftershocks of the demolition, to this day. Built by Awadh's governor (appointed by Babur) Mir Baqi nearly 500 years earlier, the large mosque had come to be known as Babri Masjid.

The demolition was the result of an eight-year campaign over a dispute that was more than a century old. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad, established in 1984, had top of its agenda the establishment of a Ram temple in place of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. This campaign of the VHP was made bigger when the then BJP President Lal Krishna Advani made it the central piece of his party's politics towards the end of the 1980s. His pan-Indian tour from Somnath to Ayodhya in Sep-Oct 1990 tore India's social fabric, leaving a trail of communal riots in its wake. But it took the Sangh Parivar and other proponents of Hindutva politics two more years before they would succeed in demolishing the centuries-old mosque.



Independent Indian politics can be neatly divided into two halves: pre- and post-Babri Masjid demolition. Its aftereffects might not have been recognisable immediately in the aftermath, but they can be seen clearly 25 years later. It emboldened Hindutva majoritarianism and made minorities, especially Muslims, insecure in this country. It symbolised a slow turning back on the assurance of a secular, constitutional republic of India made by the founding fathers between 1947 and 1950. In the revised (and being revised) relationship, religious minorities' rights do not seem guaranteed by the constitution but by the indulgence of the religious majority. This event and the aftermath also highlight how India mistook the mob for democracy.

In this e-book, Business Standard focuses on the period after the demolition of Babri Masjid. It looks at the transition of the BJP's projection from Ram to Reforms to Ram. Besides featuring the faces of the Babri era, it talks about how the relationship between Hindus and Muslims has changed since 1992. It also features the confessions of a Kar Sevak who claims to have been on top of the dome when the mosque was brought down. The e-book also features special write-ups on how it unleashed a majoritarian beast in 1992 and how it divided the nation's psyche.

PHOTOS: REUTERS



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath *(left)* worships before artists dressed as Rama, Sita and Laxman on the Diwali day of 2017, in Ayodhya

BJP'S TRANSITION: FROM RAM TO REFORM TO RAM

With a new Hindutva mascot, the Bharatiya Janata Party's political narrative has been re-defined since 2014

SAI MANISH

The year was 1989. The first general election in which the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP's) manifesto explicitly talked about reconstructing the Ram temple in Ayodhya. "By not allowing the rebuilding of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, on the lines of Somnath Mandir built by the Government of India in 1948, it has allowed tensions to rise, and gravely strained social harmony," the party's manifesto that year stated.

The year 1989 was in many ways the BJP's chance at redemption after its predecessor Bharatiya Jana Sangh got its first shot of power along with its socialist allies after Emergency. In 1984, the party had managed to win just two seats in the parliamentary elections. The Congress, riding high on a sympathy wave following Indira Gandhi's assassination, swept the country by winning 404 out of the 533 seats.

So, BJP's redemption song in 1989 was going to be the Ram Mandir. With mandir on its mind, the BJP won 85 seats, and so began the party's push for a Ram temple in Ayodhya, with none other than L K Advani leading the charge with his Rath Yatra.

The VP Singh-led National Front government that tried to throw a spanner in Advani's Rath Yatra was derailed after the BJP withdrew support following Advani's arrest at Samastipur in Bihar while galvanising foot soldiers for the Ram temple in Ayodhya. The BJP's egression from the National Front government set the stage for yet another election in 1991. The 1991 elections, widely dubbed as the Mandir vs Mandal elections, was perhaps when the Ram temple pitch in the BJP reached a crescendo.

Yes, 1989 was the year when Mandir found a mention in BJP's manifesto for the first time. But its decibel still hadn't

reached the feverish pitch that came in 1991. The BJP's electoral push was largely powered by the ammunition it had against the then prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi. And Gandhi had given his principal opposition quite a few of them – Bofors, India's humiliation in Sri Lanka and economic regression, among other things. The BJP minced no words while describing him in the run-up to the 1989 elections in its manifesto, "Everything Rajiv Gandhi touches ends up in a bloody mess. A man who waded to his office through the blood-soaked streets of Delhi will be leaving behind a gory legacy. This country is not safe in the hands of such a man or such a party."

But by 1991 the BJP was selling itself to Indian voters as the only viable alternative to the Congress. And central to this sales pitch was Ram Mandir, firmly entrenched in the party's strategy to make it stand out in India's highly polarised political landscape. The party's pitch was retrofitted appropriately in 1991 to tell voters that building a Ram temple in Ayodhya was righting of historical wrongs. To build a Ram temple would end the centuries old virulence and distrust between Hindus and Muslims. The party's election manifesto read: "BJP firmly believes that construction of Ram Mandir is a symbol of the vindication of our cultural heritage and national self-respect. For BJP it is purely a national issue and it will not allow any vested interests to give it a sectarian and communal colour. The party is committed to build Shri Ram Mandir at Janmasthan by relocating superimposed Babri structure with due respect."

The BJP's attempt to storm to power on the back of such strong assertions of Hindu pride suffered a setback with the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi after the first phase of polling. Election analysis of the time shows that following Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, after the first phase of polling was held on May 20, 1991, the vote polled by the Congress in India's most electorally crucial state improved by five per cent in the second phase. Riding on the Ram Mandir wave, the BJP won 52 of the 85 seats in Uttar Pradesh – almost half of all the seats it won nationally. This was a significant vindication of BJP's temple politics. In 1989, the party had won just eight seats in Uttar Pradesh.

By the time the 1996 elections approached, the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the ensuing communal riots had singed the nation. For the first time since 1984, the BJP introduced Hindutva in its electoral discourse and started expounding the concept of 'Bharatvarsha' as the true identity of a united India. In the background of the deadly post-Babri communal riots, the party sold Hindutva as a principle that alone could preserve the unity and integrity of India. In the party's own words, Hindutva was "a collective endeavour to protect and re-energise the soul of India, to take us into the next millennium as a strong and prosperous nation. Hindutva is also the antidote to the shameful efforts of any section to benefit at the expense of others."

BY 1991, THE BJP WAS SELLING ITSELF TO INDIAN VOTERS AS THE ONLY VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE CONGRESS. AND CENTRAL TO THIS SALES PITCH WAS RAM MANDIR, WHICH WAS FIRMLY ENTRENCHED IN THE PARTY'S STRATEGY TO MAKE IT STAND OUT IN INDIA'S HIGHLY POLARISED POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

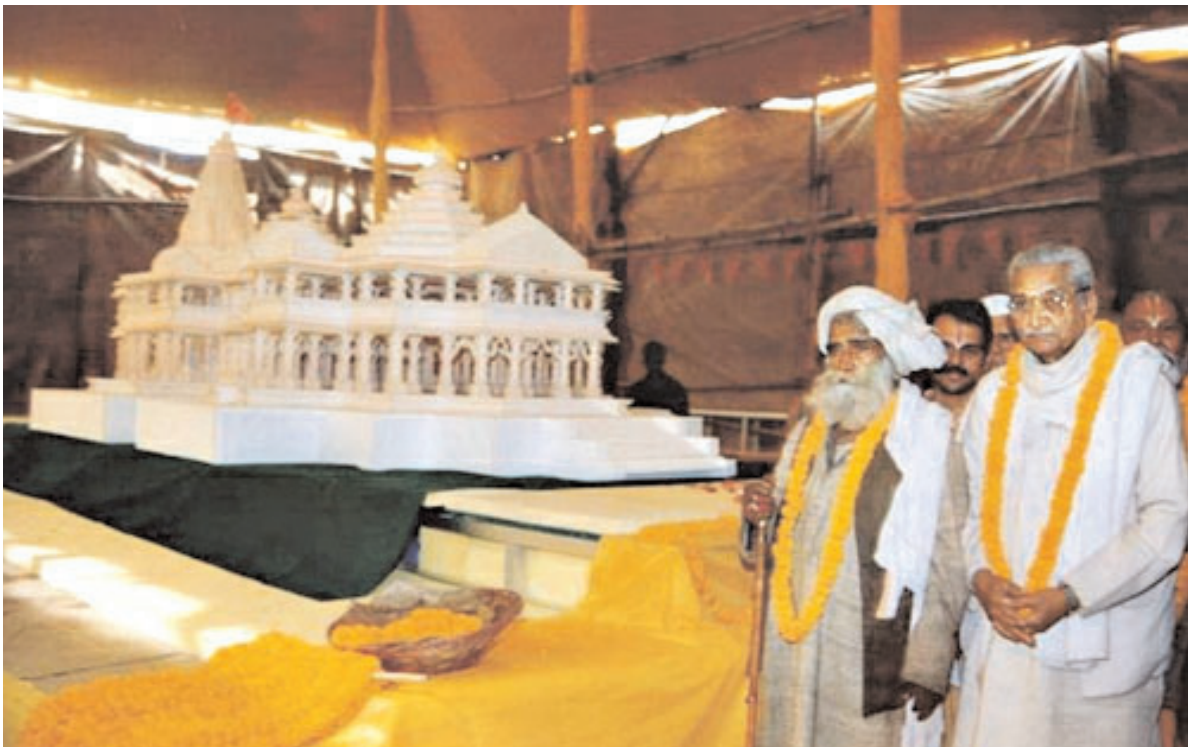
For the BJP, the ultimate vision of Hindutva would be realised only after the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya. The BJP's 1996 manifesto set forth the agenda: "We hold that only by recognising the limitless strength of cultural nationalism can the nation be moulded. When the BJP joined the movement for the construction of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya, it was to strengthen just these foundations. On coming to power, the BJP government will facilitate the construction of a magnificent Shri Ram Mandir in Ayodhya which will be a tribute to Bharat Mata. This dream moves millions of people in our land; the concept of Rama lies at the core of their consciousness." A similar vision was set forth by the BJP in its 1998 manifesto as well.

The years of political uncertainty that followed the 1996 elections led the BJP on a different trajectory altogether in 1999 after Atal Bihari Vajpayee's infamous 13-day government failed to muster the numbers in Parliament. The Kargil war, largely perceived as India's victory over Pakistan's aggression with Vajpayee leading the charge meant that Hindutva and Ram Mandir were completely dropped from the BJP's manifesto for the 1999 elections held a couple of months after the culmination of the conflict. The BJP's cultural nationalism rhetoric of the past completed disappeared off the party's discourse. For the first time since 1989, Ram and the politics of Mandir were relegated to the background in favour of words like administrative reforms, trade & commerce and price stability. From a discourse that sought to highlight the failures of the Congress party, the BJP now overwhelmingly focussed on its own model of economic metamorphosis that revolved around an 'India built by Indians'.

But BJP's economic model failed to woo voters. By 2002-03, India's GDP growth plummeted to 3.8 per cent. The BJP government failed to arrest India's rising unemployment rate. By 2004, unemployment rates were above 8 per



File photo of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee *(left)* and former home minister Lal Krishna Advani at a meeting called by the former to explain his govt's position on construction of a Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya.



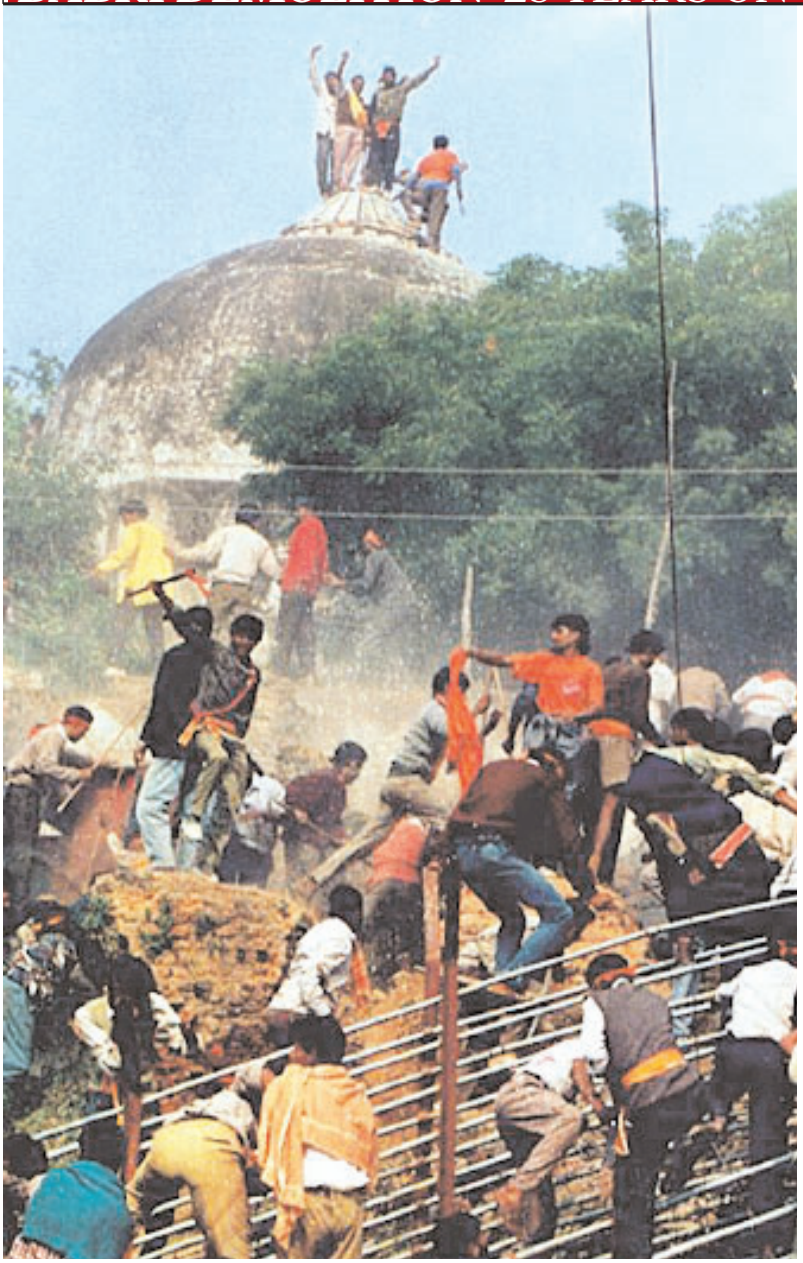
cent – at the same level it was in the early 1980s. The Babri demolition and Mandir politics that had now faded from public memory found no resonance with Indian voters. Sensing that economic gloom would spell its doom, the party reverted to Ram Mandir – atleast on paper. The party re-affirmed its commitment to build a Ram temple in Ayodhya in the light of a judicial order to maintain status quo at the disputed site. The BJP's 2004 manifesto stated, "As Maryada Purushottam, Ram is an inspiring cultural symbol of India. His birthplace in Ayodhya is also associated with the religious sentiments of crores of Hindus. The BJP remains committed to its stand that the judiciary's verdict in this matter should be accepted by all. However, we believe that dialogue, and a negotiated settlement in an atmosphere of mutual trust and goodwill, are the best way of achieving this goal." The BJP sought to re-sell itself through the 'India Shining 'campaign but failed to sell the proposition to Indian voters.

The BJP had no clear answer to what would revive its fortunes. The Congress was at the peak of its socialist powers from 2004 to 2009 with its various social sector programmes redistributing wealth to India's rural population. This meant that the BJP wouldn't get another chance of power at least till 2014. In 2009, when the United Progressive Alliance – 2 (UPA-2) government led by the Congress stormed back to power, the BJP had already reduced Ram temple to the footnotes of its electoral discourse. The construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya was now competing with other issues that the BJP wanted to project as preserving India's cultural heritage. Now Ram Mandir was being spoken in the same terms as cleaning the Ganga, saving India's thorium reserves, saving cows and calves, supporting religious monasteries, saving Waqf properties from illegal encroachments and preventing archeological sites from public vandalism. Hindutva as the party's core philosophy that was last reiterated in 1998 failed to even a find a mention.

THE BJP'S ELECTION MANIFESTO IN 1991 READ: "BJP FIRMLY BELIEVES THAT CONSTRUCTION OF RAM MANDIR IS A SYMBOL OF THE VINDICATION OF OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE AND NATIONAL SELF-RESPECT"

In 2014, the BJP's election manifesto committee headed by Murli Manohar Joshi further diluted the Hindutva pitch in the run-up to the elections. Hindutva was never uttered. The BJP would now 'explore all possibilities within the constitutional framework' for the construction of a Ram Mandir. The BJP's political whirlwind in the 1990s around Ram Mandir looked like having sailed into the doldrums. Instead, the quest of power now revolved around one man – Narendra Modi. Political slogans like 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' and 'Ek Bharat, Shreshta Bharat' now resounded in the party's corridors. At the core of BJP's new vision of India were administrative, institutional and electoral reforms.

Ram was spoken in hushed voices before the 2014 elections and the construction of his temple in Ayodhya wasn't meant to be a vote generator for the BJP. But these were reiterations before the elections. Once in power BJP leaders and prominent personalities like Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath have openly projected the return of Ram rajya (rule of Ram). The BJP may not be shouting from elevated pulpits any more, but rebuilding a temple for Ram allegedly annihilated by India's first Mughal emperor is not a dream the party wants to silently relegate to the background.



PHOTOS: REUTERS

P V NARASIMHA RAO TO L K ADVANI: KEY FACES OF BABRI ERA

While Rao will be remembered for his purported inaction, Advani faces additional charges of criminal conspiracy

NIBIR DEKA

On 6 December 1992, a large crowd of Hindu 'Kar Sevaks' demolished the 16th-century Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, considered the birthplace of Lord Ram. The demolition took place after a political rally led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) involving 150,000 'kar sevaks' at the site turned violent.

Two FIRs were filed in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition case. FIR no 197 deals with the actual "demolition of the mosque by kar sevaks" and FIR no 198 names BJP leaders L K Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, ex-chief minister of UP and current governor of Rajasthan Kalyan Singh, founding president of VHP and ex-MP Vinay Katiar, current Union minister Uma Bharati, VHP leader Sadhvi Ritambara and others for 'communal' speeches before the demolition.

FIR no 198 alleges offences under Section 153-A of the Indian Penal Code (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, language, etc), Section 153-B (assertions prejudicial to national integration) and Section 505 (statements amounting to public mischief). Another 46 FIRs pertaining to cognizable offences and one pertaining to non-cognizable offences were also lodged. Further, section 120-B (criminal conspiracy) was added.

On October 5, 1993, the CBI filed a consolidated charge sheet against 48 persons in all, including the names of Balasaheb Thackeray, Kalyan Singh, BJP leader Ram Bilas Vadanti, former VHP General Secretary Ashok Singhal, BJP MP Brij Bhushan Saran Singh, and others.

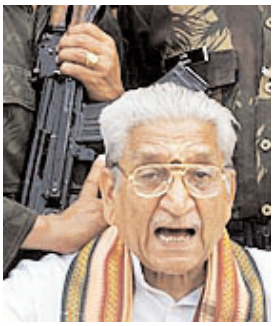
A subsequent inquiry into the incident by the Liberhan Commission led by Justice M S Liberhan gave its findings to the government after an inquiry of nearly 17 years. It found 68 people responsible for the demolition. Justice Liberhan termed Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Advani, Joshi as pseudo-moderates, pretending to keep a distance from the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign when they were actually aware of the whole conspiracy. A report in *The Hindu*, quoted Liberhan as saying, "It



MURLI MANOHAR JOSHI, then Union HRD Minister, being escorted by his armed guards after terndering his resignation after a court ordered his prosecution over the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition case



L K ADVANI, former home minister and one of the three members of PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Cabinet charged in the Babri demolition case, in front of the Liberhan Commission office in New Delhi on April 10, 2001.



ASHOK SINGHAL, International President of the VHP on March 13, 2002, after the Supreme Court barred hardline Hindus from holding special prayers in Ayodhya

can't be assumed even for a moment that L K Advani, A B Vajpayee or M M Joshi did not know the designs of the Sangh Parivar. Even though these leaders were deemed and used by the Parivar to reassure the cautious masses, they were [in fact] party to the decisions which had been taken."

The Supreme Court on April 19, 2017 revived conspiracy charges against Advani, Joshi and 13 others in the 25-year-old Babri Masjid demolition cases.

Throughout the timeline of the proceedings, several charges and allegations have been levied against the names involved in an incident that shook the secular fabric of the Constitution.

L K Advani: According to the Indian Express, the CBI chargesheet alleges that Advani asserted that the kar seva to be held at Ayodha "would not mean only bhajan and kirtan, but would also involve construction of the Shri Ram temple." It adds that the final decision to demolish the disputed structure was taken on December 5, 1992, at "a secret meeting" which was "held at the residence of Vinay Katiyar and was attended by Advani."

While the demolition was in progress, the chargesheet says Advani instructed people to block the national highway so that forces do not reach Ayodha. He also told Kalyan Singh not to tender his resignation to the governor till the disputed structure was completely razed.

Uma Bharti: The CBI chargesheet says that she had shouted at Ayodhya, "*Ek dhakka aur do, Babri Masjid tod do* (Bring down Babri Masjid with a solitary blow)". It adds she had told kar sevaks that the Supreme Court had not told them to demolish but only to not do construction work and hence they are removing the black spot from the nation's forehead.

Following the Supreme Court prosecution in April 2017, Uma Bharti refuted claims about her speech and told TV channels, "I did not give any speech on December 6, 1992. When we reached the site, the demolition had already begun. There was no opportunity to give any speech".

JUSTICE M S LIBERHAN TERMED ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE, ADVANI, JOSHI AS PSEUDO-MODERATES, PRETENDING TO KEEP A DISTANCE FROM THE RAM JANMABHOOMI CAMPAIGN WHEN THEY WERE ACTUALLY AWARE OF THE WHOLE CONSPIRACY

Kalyan Singh: Though he wasn't present at the time of occurrence, the former UP chief minister was still found prima facie guilty u/s 120-B of IPC. Kalyan Singh had given assurance to the National Integration Council that the disputed structure wouldn't be razed and the Supreme Court had permitted only symbolic 'kar seva' to be performed at the site.

At his swearing-in as chief minister, Singh and Joshi visited Ayodhya along with members of his cabinet and party legislators, where they allegedly took a vow to construct the temple, the chargesheet claims.

A conspiracy was hatched with the people being trained by the Bajrang Dal of Gujarat. In pursuance of this, Kalyan Singh acquired 2.77 acres of land in October 1991 "under the pretext of developing the land for tourism purposes."

Kalyan Singh made statements and gave public speeches indicative of his

PTI



RAM VILAS VEDANTI
ACCUSED BJP LEADER

"I TOLD THE COURT IN CLEAR TERMS THAT THE STRUCTURE WAS BUILT OVER RAMLALLA. AND I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR BREAKING THE STRUCTURE. IF I AM FOUND GUILTY, I AM READY TO GO TO JAIL OR BE HANGED"

involvement in the matter.

Murli Manohar Joshi: According to the CBI investigation, Murli Manohar Joshi had said at Mathura that no force can stop the construction of Ram temple. He was accused of encouraging the kar sevaks from the manch to carry out the demolition and for shouting provocative slogans.

Brij Bhushan Singh: On December 6, 1992, Brij Bhushan Singh, who is serving as MP from Gowda was allegedly in Ayodhya and provoked the kar sevaks. He has also been accused of sheltering some kar sevaks and facilitating their journey to Ayodhya. As cited in the Times of India, in December 2012, the special CBI court in Lucknow hearing the demolition case issued a non-bailable warrant against him, for his continuous absence from the court during the trial.

P V Narasimha Rao: The Prime Minister's tenure is well known for his inaction during the demolition. NDTV has reported recent revelations by Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyyar, in which he said that Rao possessed a "pro-hindu mindset" and was convinced that by talking to the sadhus and saints, he could solve the problem. The Congress leader maintained that Rao could have dismissed the Kalyan Singh government and imposed President's Rule in Uttar Pradesh. Excerpts from the memoirs of former Union Minister Arjun Singh, published posthumously, reveal the PM's inaction over the issue.

Administration: Accused public servants R N Srivastava, (then District Magistrate of Faziabad) and Sri D B Rai (then SSP of Faizabad who later became Member of Lok Sabha from BJP) and Kalyan Singh were well aware that the central para-military forces were duly equipped with riot gear and plastic and rubber bullets to avoid casualties.

Majority of the UP officers indicted by the Liberhan Commission for their role in the Babri Masjid demolition have since retired.

Other leaders: The special CBI judge S K Yadav also asked Vinay Katiyar, VHP's Vishnu Hari Dalmia and Hindutva preacher Sadhvi Ritambhara to remain present before the court in person.

The Liberhan Commission held Sadhvi Ritambhara culpable of leading the country "to the brink of communal discord" for her role in the demolition of the Masjid. She was one of the three key women leaders of the movement, the other two being Uma Bharati and Vijayaraje Scindia; their leadership was largely responsible for the involvement of women in the movement and the form it took. Her speech "Haan Hum HINDU Hain (Yes, we are Hindus)" preceding the aftermath of the demolition is still available on social media portals.

One of the prime accused, Vinay Katiyar reiterates that there was no conspiracy. "Whatever happened that day took place in front of lakhs of people. Nothing took place in a closed room," he told Times Now TV channel following the Supreme Court hearing on April.

Another accused, BJP leader Ram Vilas Vedanti, told TV reporters, "I told the court in clear terms that the structure was built over Ramlalla. And I am responsible for breaking the structure. If I am found guilty, I am ready to go to jail or be hanged."

HINDUS HAVE THREE OPTIONS THAT MUSLIMS DO NOT DESIRE

PHOTOS: REUTERS



SAI MANISH

For M A Siddiqui, this would be the 40th year as a lawyer in the Ayodhya dispute case – one of the first cases he took on the day he started practicing law. His client Hashim Ansari, the youngest of the petitioners in the Sunni Waqf board's appeal in 1961 died last year at the age of 95. "Hashim was a very vocal man. His house was barely 200 metres away from the Babri mosque. Whether he is dead or alive is immaterial to the case. The solution to Ayodhya is a matter of public interest and his death would have no impact whatsoever," says Siddiqui.

While the Ayodhya land dispute has finally reached the country's highest court, the solution that people like Siddiqui have been seeking all their working lives may still be some distance away.

"The Allahabad High Court has committed an error by partitioning the inner side of the mosque compound as this was the property of Muslims before 1949. The high court has presumed that Hindus were also having a faith that it was the birth place of Ram. This faith was never proved by any evidence. Hindus never exercised any such right until 1949. Faith is not evidence. Evidence is what is defined under the Indian Evidence Act 1872," says Zafaryab Jilani, the lawyer of the Sunni Waqf board representing the Muslim side in the case.

Muslims feel an out-of-court settlement will amount to surrender

ONE OF THE REASONS FOR THE APPREHENSION AMONG MUSLIMS IS THE NATURE OF THE DEAL BEING PUT FORTH BY THE HINDUS, MORE SPECIFICALLY THE NIRMOHI AKHARA

"Our appeal in the Supreme Court is going to be that the entire trifurcation of the birth place of Ram is illegal. The place of birth of Ram belongs to Nirmohi Akhara. We will also challenge the high court's ruling that Nirmohi Akhara came into existence only after Babar. The Ramananda bairagees who make up the Nirmohi Akhara have been in existence from times immemorial. The formal nomenclature came later," says RL Verma, the lawyer for the Nirmohi Akhara in the case.

"Faith is not a matter of a few decades. It is a matter of centuries. We have shown that this was not the place of faith of the Hindu community or the birthplace of Ram. We have given historical and other evidence in court. There is no new evidence that can now be given," says Jilani.

While conflicting histories has introduced its own set of complications, there also seems to be a bigger divide than ever before on who is representing the Hindu side in the case. "It is not yet decided who is representing Lord Ram to whom a third of the land was awarded by the high court. That's in a legal vacuum at the moment," says Verma.

If the Nirmohi Akhara decides to challenge this part of the order in the highest court, it would intensify the acrimony between Hindutva representatives and the Nirmohi Akhara. That's because the suit on behalf of Lord Ram, to whom a third of the land has been awarded, was filed by a former judge affiliated to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). At present, the representative of Lord Ram in the case is senior VHP leader Triloki Nath Pandey. If the Nirmohi Akhara manages to successfully challenge the VHP's claim over Lord Ram, it could repudiate the VHP's decades-long projections of being the champions of a new temple as is evidenced by their stone carving workshops in Ayodhya and large-scale displays of an envisaged temple at its base camp at Karsewakpuram in Ayodhya.

"The Vishwa Hindu Parishad is the outside party in this case. Their influence has gone up manifold in Ayodhya after 1989. They started buying properties and organising agitations in Ayodhya," says Verma. "In 1949, big people were not involved. Since 1976, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have taken up this matter. Pictures depicting Ram in chains were pasted across Ayodhya and the impression was given that these people have come to free him. This was an emotional call to Hindus," says Siddiqui.

With fissures deepening among the non-Muslim parties in the case, there have been efforts by people like Art of Living founder Sri Sri Ravishankar to act as mediators with the goal of negotiating an out of court settlement. But even a so-called out of court settlement is a minefield not all parties want to enter. The Muslims represented by the Sunni Waqf board are averse to an out of court settlement. The Nirmohi Akhara welcomes Ravishankar's mediation but wants to firmly keep out the VHP from the talks.

"We are willing to accept Sri Sri Ravishankar as the mediator. We want a solution. Our claim is that the entire disputed site is ours. We are opposed to the VHP. Their goal is to make a Ram temple with a portrait of Ashok Singhal outside. They want to build a temple and employ Nirmohi Akhara as priests. That is impossible," says Verma.

"An out of court settlement is most welcome. The only thing that matters is for things to be settled. But now it is not possible. There has to be some common ground between parties. But, here each party wants the whole thing. There is infighting among the Hindus. The Nirmohi Akhara is being ousted by the BJP and RSS," says Siddiqui.

"We do not want to waste our time on third parties who have no legal grounds. I am advising Sri Sri Ravishankar not to enter into this. He should first approach the VHP. Only if the VHP is willing to negotiate should he approach us," says Jilani.

One of the reasons for the apprehension among Muslims is the nature of the deal being put forth by Hindus, specifically the Nirmohi Akhara. They have three options for the Muslims to choose from in the event of an out of court settlement.

The first option for Muslims is to relinquish claims over the entire land and say they do not want to build a mosque. The land would be given to Nirmohi Akhara without any quid pro quo. The remains of the Babri mosque would be razed and a Ram temple built. The second option being put forth by the Nirmohi Akhara is to give Muslims land at least 500 metres away from the disputed site to build a mosque. But the Nirmohi Akhara would oppose the construction of a mosque any closer to a Ram temple than that. The third option put forth by the Nirmohi Akhara is that if Muslims agree to move out of the disputed site, they will be given four bighas (or an acre) of land owned by it at a locality called Vidyakund in Ayodhya. Vidyakund is almost three kilometres away from the disputed site and houses many temples, religious ashrams, and educational institutions. "It can be given at a nominal rent of, say, two rupees since Muslims believe a mosque should not be built with donations and has to be bought," adds Verma.

ZAFARYAB JILANI
LAWYER OF SUNNI WAQF BOARD

"WE DON'T WANT TO WASTE OUR TIME ON THIRD PARTIES WITH NO LEGAL GROUNDS. I AM ADVISING SRI SRI RAVISHANKAR NOT TO ENTER THIS. HE SHOULD FIRST APPROACH VHP. ONLY IF VHP IS WILLING TO NEGOTIATE SHOULD HE APPROACH US"



File photo of Zafaryab Jilani *(centre)* leaving the Lucknow High Court on September 30, 2010

Although the VHP hasn't yet revealed its proposals in the event of an out of court settlement, they are believed to closely resemble those of the Nirmohi Akhara. The very question of dislocation from the disputed site, unless ordered by the country's highest court, is unacceptable to the Muslims. Moreover, the Sunni Waqf board says any out of court settlement should also be monitored by the court.

Jilani says, "Any negotiation will have to start with the realisation on part of the VHP that Muslims will not surrender. I don't think the VHP is prepared for this. When somebody told me that Sri Sri Ravishankar wants to meet me, I told the person that he should be meeting VHP first because we know from experience that VHP doesn't want any negotiation. It wants only surrender. Surrender is not negotiation."

Beyond the preparations of a final push for the disputed site in courts or the negotiating table, there is a sense of subdued anticipation among VHP cadres in Ayodhya. Hazaari Lal, a man in his 50s with a strong hand and a cataract in his right eye, shows visitors to Karsewak-puram a life-size model of the proposed Ram temple. He claims to be one of the many on top of the mosque's dome on December 6, 1992, bringing it down.



HOW INDIA, HINDUS & MUSLIMS HAVE CHANGED SINCE BABRI

India's economy has changed but social conditions are ripe for resurgence of destructive tendencies

SAI MANISH

The demolition of Babri Masjid and the deadly riots that followed remain a grim reminder in India's history of volatile politics and the sway it has over the minds of people who are bent on the path of destruction in the name of religious resurrection. A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since December 6, 1992, when scores of Hindutva foot soldiers, purportedly egged on by some who would later be the tallest Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders, went on the rampage to demolish a medieval mosque built by India's first Mughal emperor, allegedly after dismembering an ancient Hindu temple built in the name of Ram.

In many ways, India was at an economic cross-roads. The per-capita income of Indians was barely ₹16,000 (or $245 at current exchange rates) in 1990. When the Babri mosque was pulled down, it fell even further. Added to this abysmal per-capita income was the high inflation rate. In the year the Babri mosque was demolished, the consumer inflation in India touched 14 per cent — a record high in many years. A year before the demolition, inflation was still at a debilitating 9 per cent. Unemployment levels (data for which in India are highly dubious) stood at 4 per cent. For many Indians, who were just about making ₹1,300 (or $20) a month on an average, the economy wasn't something they could look up to for redemption.

By 1991, 18-year-olds were staring at a future where their incomes and standard of life would be no better than their parents. In 1973, when these young people were born, the per-capita income in India was around ₹11,000 ($169 at current rates). From the time they were born to the time they became major, the average earning prospects of Indians rose by a pittance. At the rates of inflation prevailing in the run-up to the Babri mosque demolition, this



unimpressive rise in income would have been negated in just about three years. In effect, a vast majority of India's population would have been at the same income levels of their parents, maybe even worse.

In present-day India, the young are much better off than some of the youth who were either perpetrators or victims of the events that preceded and followed the demolition of the mosque at Ayodhya. India's per-capita income over the past two decades has grown almost five times. In the two decades preceding the Babri mosque demolition, it had grown less than 50 per cent. Consumer inflation now is less than half of what it was back then, though it has shown signs of spiking sporadically, irrespective of the blessings of bountiful monsoon. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth has been steadier than in the pre-Babri days.

But things aren't as good as they look. Unemployment rates are almost the same as they were in 1991, even though a significantly higher number of young people are now entering the workforce. Literacy levels are much higher than in the Babri days, though serious questions have been raised on the quality of education imparted to Indians to put them in the literate bracket.

Economic improvement may not necessarily be an indication of India's social evolution, though rising prosperity usually makes people more indifferent to religion. So, even as unemployment remains at the same levels as in the Babri days, India is increasingly becoming a male-dominated country. The ministry of labour and employment's statistics suggest that sex ratio of in the 15-34-year age group has steadily declined since 1991. In the year the Babri mosque was demolished, there were 950 females for every 1,000 males in this age bracket. In 2011, the sex ratio stood at 934. The World Bank estimates that the proportion of females to males in this age group in India will further slide to 904 by 2021. By the look of it, and the unemployment levels at present, this would leave a vast majority of unemployed youth disgruntled with the fruit of economic development flying past them without stopping by.

What should give Hindutva proponents more ammunition to ramp up their battalions is the fact India's demographic transition since Babri has been unfavourable to Hindus. In two decades preceding the Babri mosque demolition, the Hindu population grew by almost half, while Muslims grew by 62 per cent. But since 1991, the growth rate of Hindus in India has slowed down to 42 per cent. Meanwhile, the Muslim population growth has further accelerated to 70 per cent. Besides, Muslims have shown better progress on certain socio-economic development parameters than Hindus. National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) figures show that while the labour participation rates among Hindus have marginally declined between 2001 and 2010, more Muslims than ever before are now entering the workforce. While labour participation rates include the unemployed as well, a more accurate representation of Hindu stagnation and Muslim progression would be the worker population ratios. This includes people who were not just working for a significant part of the year but also worked for at least 30 days during the year. Worker population ratio among Hindus in 2010 was at the same level as that in 2000, despite increasing significantly in 2005. Muslims, meanwhile have shown a steady growth in the same period.

THE MEMORIES OF BABRI MIGHT HAVE FADED, BUT SOME OF THE UNDERLYING FORCES THAT GALVANISED THOUSANDS TO DEMOLISH A MUGHAL MARAUDER'S STAMP OF DOMINATION MIGHT AGAIN BE BUBBLING BENEATH A VENEER OF UNEASY CALM RARING TO BE BACK IN PLAY AT SHORT NOTICE

These socio-economic trends indicate the memories of Babri might have faded, but some of the underlying forces that galvanised thousands to demolish a Mughal marauder's stamp of domination might again be bubbling beneath a veneer of uneasy calm raring to be back in play at short notice.

I DEMOLISHED THE MOSQUE FOR RAM, AND FOR INDIA: CONFESSIONS OF A KAR SEVAK


Hazaari Lal, VHP functionary at Karsewakpuram

HAZAARI LAL, a man in his 50s with a strong hand and a cataract in his right eye is still on duty at Karsewakpuram, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's (VHP) base camp in Ayodhya. He is now entrusted with showing visitors to Karsewakpuram the biggest replica of the proposed Ram temple at the site, where he, along with others, had climbed the mosque's dome 25 years ago to bring it down. Almost half-blind, Hazaari Lal also sells Ayurveda products, cow urine, herbal medicines and accessories like spiritual bracelets and other paraphernalia from the same compound that houses the replica. In his early 20s, he was one of the thousands of karsewaks mobilised by the war cries of some of the tallest Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders with the mission to pull down the Babri mosque. In this piece for *Business Standard*, he recounts events and the day that shook India.

I arrived in Ayodhya on the night October 2, 1990, from my village in Shajahanabad district. My father had brought me here for the first time when the locks were opened. I, along with others, had already started the karsewa. Many of us who had come here were angered by Mulayam Singh's statement daring anyone to set foot in Ayodhya (Ayodhya *mein koi pair bhee nahin maar sakta*). I came walking to Ayodhya from my village. On December 6, 1990, many big leaders were shouting not to cause damage to the mosque. But none of us gathered there listened to them. We had come with the objective of demolishing the Babri mosque. Only if the mosque were to be demolished could a new Ram temple be built there. And we were going to achieve that at any cost.

Somehow, I managed to climb on top of the dome. We started breaking the dome. I fell when a portion of the dome collapsed; I remember lying there in the rubble. I had broken my back, jaw, arm and shoulder, and had injuries across my face. I was trapped for almost 10-15 minutes in the rubble before being pulled out. After about two hours, I was taken to a hospital in Ayodhya. The following day, I was shifted to a hospital in Faizabad where I was kept for a week before being arrested. I spent four days in Faizabad jail. Then, I was moved to Lucknow medical centre for treatment. After I was discharged, I was moved to the Lucknow central jail. We were visited by officers of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in jail and hospital. I and many others were told by a senior legislator (name withheld) not give our names as those who demolished the mosque. There were other much elderly leaders of the organisation who gave their names instead. And that is how they, instead of me and many others, were listed as accused by the CBI. The CBI officers failed to even visit many of us after we were discharged from hospital and released from jail. In a proper investigation, they should have asked us how we broke our limbs or suffered the kind of injuries they saw. But there was none of it. My case still lies buried somewhere. I had once got a notice from the police station here but after that nothing happened. I have asked for my case file many times but no one knows where it is. I had come in the service of Lord Ram and believe that I should have also been listed as an accused by the CBI. I can't sleep at night sometimes . I broke the mosque with my own hands but still could not become a part of the case. What objective will remain in my life if I am not included as an accused in the case for the service I have done for Lord Ram? I will also give my testimony in court. I will speak for Lord Ram. The site where the mosque stood was the birthplace of Ram and will continue to be. I did not partake of demolishing the mosque for my household. I did it for Ram, for the nation, and for Ayodhya.

After securing bail, I came back to Ayodhya. When I went back to my village after a week, I was given a hero's welcome. I spent six months in my village and decided to move back to Ayodhya where I have been since. I have no family and have kept my house in the village locked. When the temple is constructed, I will go back home. At least, things have started changing in Ayodhya. The biggest Parikrama in years happened recently in Ayodhya. During Mulayam Singh's time, people were scared to come to Ayodhya. People feared they would be shot at any time. Now the time has come for a temple to be constructed. Everyone is losing strength in fighting this case over Lord Ram.



'NOT THE SMALLEST TRACE OF A RAM TEMPLE REMAINS'

British accounts from the 19th century are part of historical evidence in the Supreme Court

BS WEB TEAM

The Allahabad High Court, which delivered its verdict trifurcating the disputed site in Ayodhya, had relied extensively on the 19th century accounts of British gazetteers. The primary aim of studying these accounts was to determine the existence of any Hindu place of worship or a city with any semblance to Ram, a god to many Hindus in India. Here is a look at some of the accounts of British officials recorded and dispatched at a time when modern day archeological techniques were unheard of.

Walter Hamilton's account (1828)
"Pilgrims resort to this vicinity, where the remains of the ancient city of Oude, and capital of the great Rama, are still to be seen; but whatever may have been its former magnificence it now exhibits nothing but a shapeless mass of ruins. The modern town extends a considerable way along the banks of the Goggra, adjoining Fyzabad, and is tolerably well peopled; but inland it is a mass of rubbish and jungle, among which are the reputed site of temples dedicated to Rama, Seeta, his wife, Lakshman, his general, and Nanimaun (a large monkey), his prime minister. The religious mendicants who perform the pilgrimage to Oude are chiefly of the Ramata sect, who walked round the temples and idols, bathe in the holy pools, and perform the customary ceremonies."

Dr Buchanen's account after he surveyed eastern parts of the country, including Ayodhya, from 1807 to 1816 and sent his reports to England. Montgomery Martin published parts of the said reports in 1838 in a six-volume book titled *History, Antiquities, Topography and Statistics of Eastern India*:
"…. if these temples ever existed, not the smallest trace of them remains to enable us to judge of the period when they were built; and the destruction is very generally attributed by the Hindus to the furious zeal of Aurungzeb, to whom also is imputed the overthrow of the temples in Benares and Mathura. What may have been the case in the two latter, I shall not now take upon myself to say, but with respect to Ayodhya the tradition seems very ill founded. The bigot by whom the temples were destroyed is said to have erected mosques on the situations of the most remarkable temples; but the mosque at Ayodhya, which is by far the most entire, and which has every appearance of being the most modern, is ascertained by an inscription on its walls (of which a copy is given) to have been built by Babur, five generations before Aurungzeb… The only thing except these two figures and the bricks, that could with probability be traced to the ancient city, are some pillars in the mosque built by Babur. These are of black stone, and of an order which I have seen nowhere else, … they have been taken from a Hindu building, is evident, from the traces of images being observable on some of their bases; although the images have been cut off to satisfy the conscience of the bigot."

Thornton's gazetteer 1854-58 reprinted in 1993 devotes a page to Avadh/Ayodhya. In the said gazetteer heavy reliance is placed on Buchanan's report (who later on took the name of Hamilton).
"that the heaps of bricks, although much seems to have been carried away by the river, extend a great way; that is, more than a mile in length, and more than half a mile in width; and that, although vast quantities of materials have been removed to build the Mahomedan Ayodha or Fyzabad, yet the ruins in many parts retain a very considerable elevation; nor is there any reason to doubt that the structure to which they belonged has been very great, when we consider that it has been ruined for above 2,000 years. The ruins still bear the name of Ramgurh, or Fort of Rama; the most remarkable spot in which is that from which, according to the legend, Rama took his flight to heaven, carrying with him the people of his city;

in consequence of which it remained desolate until repeopled by Vikramaditya, king of Oojein, half a century before the Christian era, and by him embellished with 360 temples. Not the smallest traces of these temples, however, now remain; and according to native tradition, they were demolished by Aurungebe, who built a mosque on part of the site. The falsehood of the tradition is, however, proved by an inscription on the wall of the mosque, attributing the work to the conqueror Baber, from whom Aurungzebe was fifth in descent. The mosque is embellished with fourteen columns of only five or six feet in height, but of very elaborate and tasteful workmanship, said to have been taken from the ruins of the Hindoo fanes, to which they had been given by the monkey-general Hanuman, who had brought them from Lanka or Ceylon. Altogether, however, the remains of antiquity in the vicinity of this renowned capital must give very low idea of the state of arts and civilisation of the Hindoos at a remote period. A quadrangular coffer of stone, whitewashed, five ells long, four broad, and protruding five or six inches above ground, is pointed out as the cradle in which Rama was born, as the seventh avatar of Vishnu; and is accordingly abundantly honoured by the pilgrimages and devotions of the Hindoos."

Cunningham's account in Archaeological report (1862-63):
"There are several very holy Brahmanical temples about Ajudhya, but they are all of modern date, and without any architectural pretensions whatever. But there can be no doubt that most of them occupy the sites of more ancient temples that were destroyed by the Muslims." AND "Close by is the Lakshman Ghat, where his brother Lakshman bathed and about one-quarter of a mile distant, in the very heart of the city, stands the Janam Asthan, or "Birth-place temple" of Rama."

P Carnegy was officiating Commissioner and Settlement Officer of the district. His 1870 account reads as follows:
"Ajudhia is to the Hindu what Macca is to the Mahomedan and Jerusalem to the Jews. The ancient city of Ajudhia covered an area of 48 kos (96 miles). After the fall of the last of Rama's line, Ajudhia and the royal race became a wilderness and it was converted into a jungle of sweet smelling keorah. Vikramajit restored the neglected and forest-concealed Ajudhia. Thereafter, it is mentioned that the most remarkable place was Ramkot "the strong hold of Ramchandar" which covered a large extent of ground and according to ancient manuscript it was surrounded by 20 bastions. The Janmasthan and other temples — It is locally affirmed that at the Mahomedan conquest there were three important Hindu shrines, with but few devotees attached, at Ajudhia, which was then little other than a wilderness. These were the "Janmasthan," the Sargadwar mandir" also known as "Ram Darbar" and the "Tareta-ke-Thakur". On the first of these the Emperor Babar built the mosque which still bears his name, A.D. 1528. On the second Aurangzeb did the same A.D. 1658-1707; and on the third that sovereign, or his predecessor, built a mosque, according to the well-known Mahomedan principle of enforcing their religion on all those whom they conquered. The Janmasthan marks the place where Ram Chandr was born. The Sargadwar is the gate through which he passed into Paradise, possibly the spot where his body was burned. The Tareta-ka-Thakur was famous as the place where Rama performed a great sacrifice, and which he commemorated by setting up there images of himself and Sita.

Babar's mosque – According to Leyden's memoirs of Babar that Emperor encamped at the junction of the Serwa and Gogra rivers two or three kos east from Ajudhia, on the 28th March 1528, and there he halted 7 or 8 days settling the surrounding country. A well known hunting ground is spoken of in that work, 7 or 8 kos above Oudh, on the banks of the Surju. It is remarkable that in all the copies of Babar's life now known, the pages that relate to his doings at Ajudhia are wanting. In two places in the Babari mosque the year in which it was built 935 H., corresponding with 1528 A.D. is carved in stone, along with inscriptions dedicated to the glory of that Emperor. If Ajudhia was then little other than a wild, it must at least have possessed a fine temple in the Janmasthan; for many of its columns are still in existence and in good preservation, having been used by the Musalmans in the construction of the Babari Mosque. These are of strong close-grained dark slate-colored or black stone, called by the natives Kasoti (literally touch-stone,) and carved with different devices. To my thinking these strongly resemble Budhist pillars that I have seen at Benares and elsewhere. They are from seven to eight feet long, square at the base, centre and capital, and round or octagonal intermediately. The Janmasthan is within a few hundred paces of the Hanuman Garhi. In 1855 when a great rupture took place between the Hindus and Mahomedans, the former occupied the Hanuman Garhi in force, while the Musalmans took possession of the Janmasthan. The Mahomedans on that occasion actually charged up the steps of the Hanuman Garhi, but were driven back with considerable loss. The Hindus then followed up this success, and at the third attempt, took the Janmasthan, at the gate of which 75 Mahomedans are buried in the "Martyrs' grave" (Ganj-shahid.) Several of the King's Regiments were looking on all the time, but their orders were not to interfere. It is said that up to that time the Hindus and Mahomedans alike used to worship in the mosquetemple. Since British rule a railing has been put up to prevent disputes, within which in the mosque the Mahomedans pray, while outside the fence the Hindus have raised a platform on which they make their offerings."

ACCORDING TO THONTON'S GAZETTEER, "THE MOSQUE IS EMBELLISHED WITH 14 COLUMNS OF ONLY 5–6 FEET IN HEIGHT, BUT OF ELABORATE AND TASTEFUL WORKMANSHIP, SAID TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN FROM THE RUINS OF THE HINDOO FANES, TO WHICH THEY HAD BEEN GIVEN BY THE MONKEY-GENERAL HANUMAN, WHO HAD BROUGHT THEM FROM LANKA OR CEYLON

H R Nevill's gazetteer of 1905 and 1928 states the following:
"This desecration of the most sacred spot in the city caused great bitterness between Hindus and Musalmans. On last occasions the feeling led to bloodshed and in 1885 an open fight occurred, the Musalmans occupying the Janamsthan in force and thence making a desperate assault on the Hanuman Garhi they charged up the steps of the temple, but were driven back with considerable loss. The Hindu then made a counter attack and stormed the Janamasthan at the gate of which 75 Musalmans were buried. It is said that up to this time both Hindus and Muslims used to worship in the same building, but since mutiny an outer enclosure has been put up in front of the mosque and the Hindus who are forbidden access to the inner yard, make their offerings on a platform which they have raised in the outer one."

WAS BABRI REALLY A MOSQUE? WAS RAM BORN ON DISPUTED SITE?

The Supreme Court would have to settle these and answer several such questions when the hearing in the case begins

BS WEB TEAM

Even as India's highest court gets set to hear the long pending Ayodhya land dispute case, it will have to settle a host of issues. These issues are not just legal in nature but also revolve around theology and historical aspects of the dispute. Here are some of the questions that have been raised by various petitioners in the case that would be deliberated on by the bench hearing the case.

1) Was the building described as mosque in the sketch map really a mosque as is being claimed?
2) When was the mosque built and by whom — whether it was built by Babar or by Meer Baqui?
3) Was the Babri mosque constructed on the site of a Hindu temple after demolishing the same?
4) Was the Ram temple allegedly destroyed by Babar existing at Nazul plot no. 583 of the Khasra of the year 1931 of Mohalla Kot Ram Chandra known as Ram Kot, City Ayodhya (also called Nazul estate) Ayodhya?
5) Was the mosque dedicated to almighty God?
6) Was the mosque used by the members of the Muslim community for offering prayers from times immemorial?
7) Was the Waqf board in possession of the property up to 1949 and was dispossessed from the same in 1949?
8) Whether the Hindus in general and the devotees of Lord Ram in particular have the right to offer prayers at the site because of continuous possession for a long period of time historically?
9) Is the disputed land in Ayodhya the actual site of birth of Lord Ram?
10) Were idols and objects of worship in place inside the mosque in the night intervening 22nd and 23rd December, 1949, or they have been in existence there since earlier?
11) Whether Hindus in general and Nirmohi Akhara in particular historically had the right to worship the idols and other objects of worship?
12) Have the Hindus been visiting the place in dispute considering it a sacred place of pilgrimage since times immemorial?
16) Were Muslims in possession of the disputed property from 1528 and whether Hindus were aware of this fact at that time?
17) Did the idols of Lord Ram and other idols continue to be kept inside the Babri mosque even after its construction?
18) Did Hindus continue to visit the Babri mosque to offer prayers to idols even though it was a mosque?
19) Was the Babri mosque land-locked and could not be reached except by passing through places of Hindu worship?
20) If Hindus were using a portion of the Babri mosque as a place of worship, do Islamic laws allow the construction of a mosque at such a site.
21) Since the Babri mosque did not have minarets, could it be really considered a mosque?
22) Since the Babri mosque was surrounded by a graveyard on three sides, could it be really considered a mosque?
23) Whether the pillars inside and outside the mosque contain images of Hindu Gods and Goddesses?
24) If the Babri mosque has images of Hindu gods and goddesses, could it be really considered a mosque according to Islamic laws?
25) Since the Babri mosque stands demolished, can it still be called a mosque?
26) Whether the outer courtyard of the demolished mosque contain Ram Chabutra, Bhandar and Sita Rasoi?
27) Whether Ram Chabutra, Bhandar and Sita Rasoi were also demolished on December 6, 1992, when the Babri mosque was pulled down?
28) Was the alleged mosque dedicated by Emperor Babar for worship by Muslims and subsequently made a public waqf property?
29) Is the Nirmohi Akhara, Panchayati Math of Rama Nand sect of Bairagis a religious denomination following its religious faith according to its own custom?
30) Was the idol of Lord Ram installed under the central dome of the Babri mosque in the early hours of December 23, 1949?
31) If the idols were placed in mosque after its demolition in violation of court orders, could they still be considered as idols of a Hindu god worthy of worship?

WERE MUSLIMS IN POSSESSION OF THE DISPUTED PROPERTY FROM 1528 AND WHETHER HINDUS WERE AWARE OF THIS FACT AT THAT TIME?

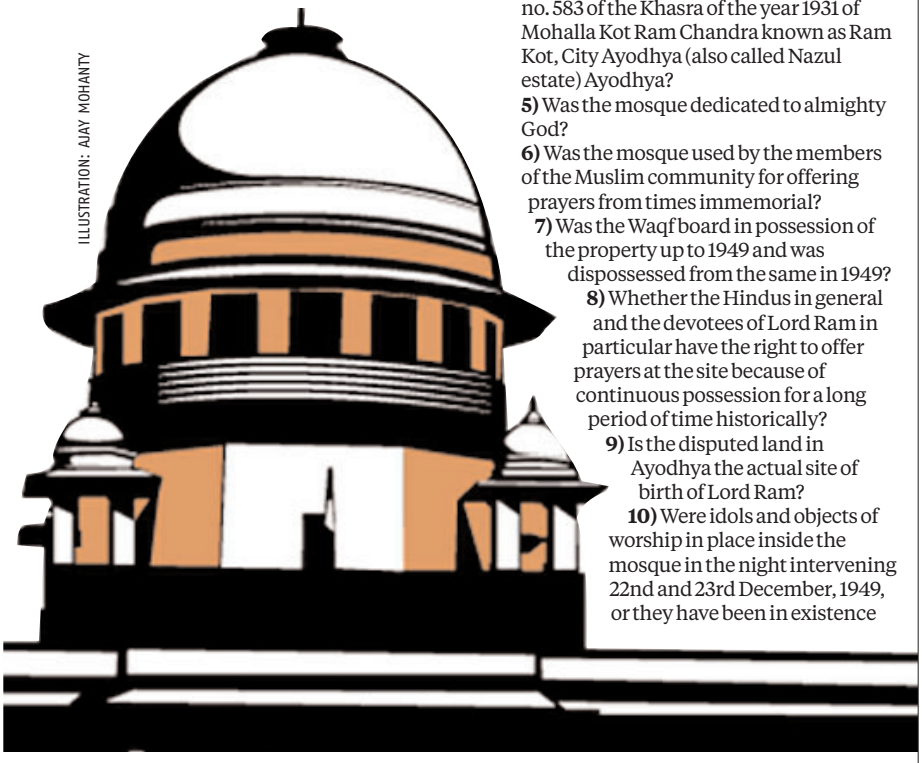


ILLUSTRATION: AJAY MOHANTY

FROM 1853 TO NOW, A TIMELINE OF THE AYODHYA DISPUTE

Do you know that the first suit regarding the controversial Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi structure was filed in 1885, when the Faizabad Deputy Commissioner did not let Mahant Raghubar Das build a temple on land adjoining the mosque? Here is a timeline of events before and after the 1992 incident to put the full story in perspective.



PHOTOS: REUTERS

1853: **The first recorded incident of violence** over the holy site takes place during the reign of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Awadh. Nirmohis, a Hindu sect, claim that a Hindu temple had been destroyed during Babur's times to build the mosque.

1859: **British colonial administration** erects a fence at the site to separate the places of worship. While the Muslims are allowed to use the inner court, the Hindus are allowed the outer court.

1885: **In January 1885,** Mahant Raghubir Das files the first case, seeking permission to build a canopy on the Ramchabutra (a raised platform) outside the mosque. The plea is rejected by the Faizabad district court.

1949: **Lord Ram's idols** appear inside the mosque, allegedly placed by Hindu groups. Both sides file suits; the government declares the area as disputed and locks the gates to the premise.

1950: **Gopal Singh Visharad** and Mahant Paramhans Ramchandra Das file suits at the Faizabad court seeking permission to offer prayers to the idols in the janamsthan. While the inner courtyard remains locked, prayers are allowed.

1959: **The Nirmohi Akhara files** a third suit seeking possession of the site and claiming to be the custodians of the Ram Janmabhoomi.

1961: **The Sunni Central Board** of Waqf files a case against the placing of idols inside the mosque and claim that the mosque and surrounding land was a graveyard.

1984: **Hindu groups** form a committee to spearhead the construction of the Ram temple at the Janmabhoomi site. The temple movement gathers momentum. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader L K Advani takes over the leadership of the movement.

1986: **A district court** orders that the gates of the mosque be opened and Hindus be allowed to worship there, on a plea by Hari Shankar Dubey. As Muslims protest the move to allow Hindus to pray in the mosque, a Babri Mosque Action Committee is formed.

1989: **The Vishwa Hindu Parishad** (VHP) lays the foundation of a Ram temple on the land next to the Babri Masjid. Justice Deoki Nandan Agarwal, former VHP Vice-President, files a case asking for the mosque to be shifted elsewhere. Four suits that have been pending at the Faizabad court are transferred to a special bench of the High Court.

1990: **Volunteers of the VHP** partially damage the mosque. PM Chandrashekhar intervenes and tries to resolve the issue through negotiations, but these fail. In September, Advani holds a rath yatra to educate people about the Ayodhya movement. He starts from Somnath in Gujarat, but arrested in Samastipur in Bihar during Lalu Prasad rule.

1991: **BJP becomes the** primary opposition party. And powered by the rath yatra, comes into power in Uttar Pradesh. The momentum for the temple movement increases as karsevaks (volunteers) pour into Ayodhya.

1992: **The disputed Babri Mosque** is razed to the ground by the karsevaks on December 6, with the support of Shiv Sena, VHP and BJP. This leads to some of the most deadliest riots across the country, leading to the deaths of more than 2,000 people. The central government, headed by P V Narasimha Rao, sets up a commission of enquiry under Justice M S Liberhan on December 16.



1992: In the aftermath of the Babri Masjid Demolition, Bombay (now Mumbai) witnessed one of the worst communal riots in the history of the country. Hundreds of innocent people lost their lives.

1993: Mumbai was rocked by 13 explosions in different parts of the city on March 12, 1993, leaving 257 dead and over 700 injured.

2001: Tensions arise during the anniversary of the Babri Masjid demolition. The VHP reaffirms its commitment towards building the Ram temple.

2002: In February, in an attack on a train from Godhra in Gujarat, believed to be carrying karsevaks to Ayodhya, at least 58 people are killed. Riots erupt across the state and over 1,000 people are said to have been killed during the riots.

The High Court orders the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to excavate the site to determine if it was earlier a temple. In April 2002, three HC judges start the hearing to determine who the site belongs to.

2003: The ASI begins the survey to determine whether a temple existed on the site. It finds evidence of the presence of a temple under the mosque. Muslim organisations dispute the findings. In September, a court rules that seven Hindu leaders should stand trial for inciting violence and the destruction of the mosque. Advani is the deputy prime minister, and does not face any charges.

2004: The Congress comes back into power at the Centre. A UP court rules that the previous order exonerating Advani should be reviewed.

2005: Suspected Islamic militants attack the disputed site. Security forces kill five alleged militants and a sixth unidentified person.

2009: In June, the Liberhan commission, which had been set up to investigate the events following the demolition, submits the report. Uproar in the Parliament as the report blames politicians from BJP for their role in the demolition.

2010: The Allahabad High Court pronounces its judgment on the four title suits relating to the dispute. In the landmark hearing, the HC rules that the disputed land be divided into three parts — one third to Ram Lalla, represented by the Hindu Mahasabha; one third to the Islamic Waqf Board; and the remaining third to the Nirmohi Akhara. In December, the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha and the Sunni Waqf Board move the Supreme Court, challenging the HC ruling.



2011: In May, the Supreme Court stays the High Court order to split the land, stating that the status quo remains.

2014: In a landmark win, the BJP, led by Narendra Modi, storms to power at the Centre. In September, Kalyan Singh, then chief minister during the demolition becomes the Governor of Rajasthan.



2015: VHP announces a nationwide drive to collect stones for the construction of the Ram Mandir. Six months later, in December, two trucks of stones arrive at the disputed site. Mahant Nritya Gopal Das claims there is a green signal from the Modi government that the temple will be built now. The Uttar Pradesh government led by Akhilesh Yadav says it will not allow the arrival of the stones in Ayodhya for the construction of the Ram Mandir.

2017: The BJP storms to power in Uttar Pradesh. The Supreme Court says charges against Advani and other leaders cannot be dropped in the 1992 Babri mosque demolition case and that the case may be revived. The Court also says the matter is sensitive and should be settled out of court. It asks stakeholders to hold talks and find an amicable solution.

Dec 5, 2017: The Supreme Court starts final hearing to adjudicate the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid title dispute.

PHOTOS: REUTERS



25 YEARS OF BABRI DEMOLITION: UNLEASHING OF THE MAJORITARIAN BEAST

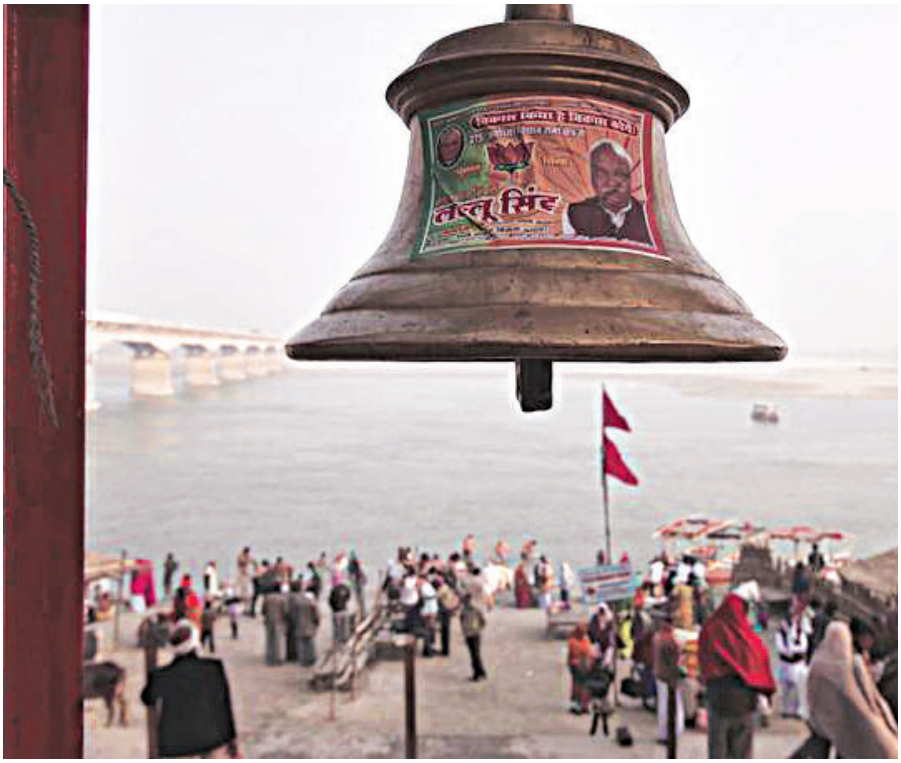
With mobs today going on a rampage, killing and lynching in the name of Mother India or Mother Cow or some mythical queen, the ideological agenda behind "unleashing the beast" seems to have taken centre stage

MRINAL PANDE

A quarter of a century later – having witnessed the Iraq war and the events like 9/11 – one has a clearer idea why the demolition of a 500-year-old mosque by kar sevaks continues to haunt India? Such moments signal the unleashing of a beast that lurks underneath all mixed societies and nations. And, it awaits hands to unchain and set it free. What happened in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 was no freak show. It was a violent, symbolic and well planned demolition of a structure at the hands of political manipulators. It systematically removed all the barriers of law and custom, one by one, and set the beast free.

It all began in the late 1960s, when political parties swearing allegiance to Gandhi and/or Marx allowed religion to encroach on politics and went on to form alliances with communal parties – the Congress with the Muslim League in Kerala, followed by the Communist parties; later similar alliances were forged with the Akali Dal in Punjab and the League in Bengal. The leaders of the parties might have remained secular in their personal capacities, but they began visiting places of religious worship, following rituals to inaugurate state projects and arguing in public how short-term minority communalism might be better and more effective in containing a majoritarian communalism in the long run.

The unlocking of the Ram Janmabhumi within the Babri mosque was an unmistakable signal for majoritarian appeasement in the name of Lord Ram. As has so often happened in our history, this was interpreted by interested parties as permission tacitly granted for acts of violence, and for plunder in the



name of a higher interest.

It is true that there had been concealed enmities, jealousies, religious intolerance, coarseness and cruelty among various communities. But there had also been courage, fellowship, and a respect for the law of the land; these had since 1947 restrained the coarser instincts within limits and ultimately calmed the communities down in favour of life lived together, as for centuries. After the unlocking of the mosque, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) began a systematic process of highlighting an imagined Hindu hurt over the pollution of their gods' birthplaces by Muslim invaders demolishing temples in Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi, and replacing them with mosques.

This simultaneous tinkering with the chains of the beast and the Hindu religious sentiment yielded spectacular electoral gains for the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1989. It increased its seat tally in the Lok Sabha from two to 86. As the beast lurched on the streets of Uttar Pradesh, inciting Hindus and lamenting their loss of izzat over the centuries, and the matter was referred to the courts, the veteran BJP leader L K Advani led a Rath Yatra all over India in 1990, whipping up support for building a grand Ram temple at the (historically disputed) site within the mosque.

The Rath Yatra not only resulted in 119 seats in the Lok Sabha for the party that now became the main Opposition, but also helped it form governments in four crucial northern states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh.

After the age-old customs and institutions of the secular state were effectively disarmed, times were ripe in 1992 for a rally of 200,000 kar sevaks, organised by the VHP. This saffron-clad mob assembled at the site of the Babri mosque, carrying rods and spades, and demolished the mosque the VHP insisted on calling the disputed structure (vivadit dhancha). In the following Lok Sabha elections (1996), the BJP went on to win 161 seats, and three years later 182.

One of the mysteries of the Babri demolition is why so many good members of the judiciary, the executive and its coalition partners from the legislature, just stood by and allowed the beast to gather more and more power till we were faced with a hair-raisingly communal brand of electioneering in 2014 that beat every other political party to a pulp. As mobs go on rampage all across the land now, killing and lynching in the name of Mother India or Mother Cow, or some mythical queen, the ideological agenda behind unleashing the beast seems to have taken centre stage.

It's a cliché to say that the silent majority and foreign potentates hugging and hand-holding India's leaders are those wishing for peace, stability and an end to corruption, high prices, joblessness, Pakistani intruders, and uncontrolled Pakistan-backed stone pelters who might lead to another partition. Amid an air of global Islamophobia, it is easy for world leaders to praise India's democracy. But make no mistake – the spectre of Islamic persecution is both a smoke screen against the beast and also a tool to enlarge the borders of their power for politicians all over the globe.

Our powerful allies in the west today, above all else, want to contain both Islamic terrorism and China. So, when diplomatic state visits take place, all are reluctant to raise the issues of human rights or express misgivings about victims of mob violence, blocking of foreign funding for suspect NGOs, periodic suspension of net connectivity and rising instances of attacks on whistleblowers and investigative journalists from Chhattisgarh to Croatia.

It is a fact universally acknowledged that when a multiethnic democratic state begins to promote majoritarianism, it needs a new own well-coded system of institutions and legal means to support its sovereign authority. So, we see an increasing insistence in states ruled by the BJP that the secular version of Indian history in school texts be sanitised, and that even non-Hindi speaking states accept Hindi as the national language. Also, its fringe groups and also several spokespersons and sitting ministers are allowed to publically justify wreaking bloody revenge against cow traders, meat sellers, filmmakers, creative writers and painters. Rewards of crores of rupees are announced for disfiguring and beheadings the offenders.

LEADERS MIGHT HAVE BEEN SECULAR IN PERSONAL CAPACITIES, BUT THEY VISITED PLACES OF WORSHIP AND FOLLOWED RITUALS TO INAUGURATE STATE PROJECTS, ARGUING HOW SHORT-TERM MINORITY COMMUNALISM MIGHT BE BETTER IN CONTAINING MAJORITARIAN COMMUNALISM IN THE LONG RUN

An unusual death notice inserted in the New York Times in 1994, when the West abandoned Bosnia to Milsevic's hordes, comes to mind. Bordered in traditional black and signed by many members of the western world's political and cultural elite, it read:

"IN MEMORIAM
Our commitments,
Principles and Moral values
Died: BOSNIA: 1994
On the occasion of the 1,000 day
Of the siege of Sarajevo"

Mrinal Pande is a journalist and author. She is the former editor of Hindi daily, Hindustan. She tweets as @mrinalpande1

WHEN A BORDER WAS CARVED ON A NATION'S PSYCHE

The demolition created two zones of sensibilities, a Hindu one and a Muslim one; it ensured that after that there would be little they would share



APOORVANAND

There are very few dates that evoke contradictory emotions in different communities living side by side in a nation. In Indian history, 6 December is a date Hindus and Muslims remember differently. It is a day that may even be called a border. A border which has created two distinct zones of sensibilities — one Hindu and the other Muslim. It ensured that from now on there would be little they would share. They don't intersect, they don't meet. They look at each other, not with interest but with suspicion.

On behalf of Hindus, 6 December is celebrated as the day of valour; Muslims remember it as a day of humiliation. The date 6 December assures Hindus that despite the proclamations of secularism India remains a Hindu state. They have and can exercise an extra-constitutional agency.

Twenty five years ago, on this day, thundreds of thousands of Hindus gathered in Ayodhya, immortalised by Tulsidas as the abode of Ram. They were persuaded by the leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party that their revered Lord Ram was born here and at the very same spot where a mosque, known popularly as Babri Masjid, stood. It was claimed the mosque was built by destroying a magnificient temple on the Janmabhumi of Ram by a Muslim invader called Babar.

Time had come, the leaders of the BJP said, to reclaim the land of the Lord and also the long lost dignity of Hindus. It

was a surreal scene. Thousands of Hindus descending on Ayodhya like the army of Lord Ram. Marching into an imagined past to fight a battle in which there was no army to answer them but only a memory and a symbol called the Babri Mosque. It stood between them and their long lost glorious past, to regain which this poor structure had to go.

It was more than that. Hindus, they said, had been emasculated by a 'fraud' called Gandhi, and had to get back their virility. He had feminised them and made them accept the dismemberment of their mother, Bharat Mata, into two countries – India and Pakistan. Had he not been there — he who masqueraded as a Hindu — India would have been a Hindu nation. He didn't allow Hindus to have their way in their own land.

Was it not Gandhi who emphatically denounced the idea of using public exchequer for the restoration of the Somnath temple? Didn't he say that the state funds could not be touched for what was a Hindu cause? Hindus should pay for it and not the state of India or what remains of the secular claims of the state.

And was it not Gandhi who sat on a fast, which was to be his last, to ask the Hindus and Sikhs to remove Hindu idols and the Tricolour from the mosque at Connaught Place and also facilitate the return of Khadims to the shrine of Mehrauli which was lying deserted?

And, who else it was if not Gandhi who very clearly told Babu Rajendra Prasad that there was no question of an anti-cow slaughter law in a secular India?

Hindus were made to endure this secular nonsense by this man and his disciples. He was long gone. The generation of Hindus who felt bounded by the commitment they had made to him to keep India a secular state was also not there.

What remained alive was an organisation which had dreamt of capturing and ruling a Hindu India. It had taken care not to squander its energies fighting the British. It didn't even fight the Muslim league. Patiently, it involved itself in creating a Hindu mind, which would be activated at an opportune time.

Not that it had not tried to win the sympathies of Gandhi. But the man who could smell violence in the discipline and order which the organisation wanted to inculcate in the Hindus could not be hoodwinked. He was too big to even oppose them but he told them that he was not impressed.

Wounded, the organisation waited, biding for its time. The pre-condition was to disabuse Hindus of the 'pseudo-Hinduism' which Gandhi had preached to them. For this patient education and regular rituals were necessary to convince Hindus that they were capable of violence. That they still had that martial element in them. Small and big acts of violence against Muslims were such ritualistic exercises.

Those with slightly longer memory remember the assault on the Indian Parliament in 1966. Independent India was not even twenty. Apparently, sadhus were leading this attack to force Parliament to outlaw cow slaughter. They were met with the force of the state. But, eventually a committee was formed to look into the demand. The demand which the great Hindu Gandhi had summarily dismissed became a matter of consideration.

The milk man Verghese Kurien recalls his discussion with Golwalkar, the chief of the RSS who found a place in the committee. He confessed that agitation for a law against cow slaughter was essentially political, there was no religiosity in it. The idea was to force the secular state to adopt the idea of the Hindu statecraft.

Nearly two-and-a-half decades after this discussion, the descendant and disciple of Golwalkar, Lal Krishna Advani, rode a Toyota 'rath' and asked Hindus to accept it as Ram's chariot and converge in Ayodhya to reclaim what was legitimately theirs — the land where Ram was born and on which stood an illegitimate structure called Babri Masjid.

THE MESSAGE OF DEMOLITION OF THE BABRI MASJID WAS THAT HINDUS DIDN'T CARE FOR THE MUSLIM SENTIMENT, LET ALONE SHARE IT. THE POLITY, TOO, WAS COLD TO THEM. THEY DID NOT MATTER. EVEN FOR THE COURTS THERE WAS NO URGENCY

The defenceless mosque was demolished by the army of this modern Ram. And he innocently claimed that he had asked them to build and not destroy. Tears fell from his eyes when the domes of the mosque fell, he said.

Later, like his guru Golwalkar, he confessed that the so-called Ram Janmabhumi Andolan was a political movement and not religious as many Hindus were given to believe.

It was the biggest mass ritual to forge a 'political Hindu' mind. We know who the priests and the kartas of this yajna.

Without the creation of this Hindu mind, the genocidal violence against Muslims in Gujarat would not have been condoned. Not only by the Hindus of Gujarat but by the Hindus of India. Without this ritual, 2014 would not have been possible.

The message of demolition of the Babri Masjid was that Hindus didn't care for the Muslim sentiment, let alone share it. The polity, too, was cold to them. They did not matter. Even for the courts there was no urgency to it.

Another quarter century had to pass to stitch a mandate that told Indian Muslims that it did not care for their concerns in the matters of statecraft. So, the border that was drawn by 6 December 1992 came alive again in 2014. There are definitely two Indias now. The Hindu India seems to be relishing this moment. A time will come, and it has to, when the Hindus would realise that instead of being freed they were enslaved by a wily gang which always knew that Hindutva was not a religious idea but a mere lever to propel it to power. Till then brace, brace....

Apoorvanand teaches in Delhi University