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Is Bharat (India) a Secular or a Religious State?: Focusing on BJP Politics about the Babri Masjid

Abstract

Constitutionally, India is a secular country and tries very hard to portray itself as such but the current trends, especially, in the vast arena of its regional and national politics based on radical reinterpretations of its history and culture reflect a country full of an open display of animus and hostility against non-Hindutva religious and political groupings. Muslims, which constitute top that list of targeted groups and one of the excuses by the Hindutvites against the Muslims which has caught fire amongst its extreme radicals during the past three decades is the 'architectural' version of anti-Muslim Hindutva. This was openly and wildly reflected in the terrorist act, from not only a Muslim point of view but also of non-Muslims of India and, in fact, of people of different faiths from throughout the world, of the historic Babri Masjid at Ayodha in 1992. Like any other large country and society, territorially and demographically, India consists of multiple, some social scientists use the word 'countless', local and regional identities of all kinds more than found in any other country or society in the world. All these identities generate internal and external challenges. Followers of Hindutva represent that extreme brand of anti-Muslim mindset which was in full and brazen display during the demolition in 1992 of the Babri Masjid, built by the first Mughal emperor Babar in 1528. The demolition was carried out to replace it with a temple for Ram which the Hindutva radicals claimed stood in its place and was demolished by Babar to construct the Babri mosque named after him. One of the latest trends in the BJP's extreme radical anti-Muslim 'architectural' Hindutva is the endless hatred of Muslims of India based on its claim that thousands of Hindu temples were demolished by Muslims and mosques or other structures representing their belief systems or preferences raised on those sites. BJP is raising a

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lot of hues and cry over what can be called its 'architectural Hindutva'. It is one potent and a seemingly endless process of keeping its followers worked up in high-pitched anti-Muslim fever for an unknown duration in the future so if its support flags for some reason in other areas there will always be the issue of Muslims demolition and desecration of Hindu temples and other buildings to keep its followers in tow. This research paper is related to the politics of BJP concerning the Babri Masjid incident. Primary and secondary sources have been consulted. Descriptive and analytical methods have been applied. Interviews, when required, have been conducted.

Keywords: BJP, Babri Masjid, Ram Birthplace, Extremism, Violence

Introduction

There are very few cities in a large country like India with hundreds or perhaps thousands of urban centers, large and small, that are considered as sacred, from the Hindu religious point of view, as Ayodha. Ayodhya is situated near Sarayuriver, 7km east of Faizabad and forms part of the Faizabad Metropolitan city and together both are known as the twin cities Ayodhya-Faizabad.¹

On December 6 1992, the sixteenth-century Babri Mosque was demolished by extremists from some Hindu right-wing parties, performing at least in part at the provocation of the political associations. This news was highlighted all over the world in news media. The action started riots in India. The destruction of the mosque was much more than hurting of emotions of one religion. Every blow that hit the stone structure was an assault on Indian secularism and its respected model of communal history. The assault has been generally ridiculed as disloyalty of the very principles of modernity and progressiveness, as a move back to medieval intolerance and barbarism.² Mughal emperor Babur built a mosque in 1528 and it was named Babri Mosque. However, some Hindus community claims that there was a temple of Ram on that place of the Babri Mosque.³ An ancient and leading king of Hindu mythology and an avatar of one of the main Hindu Bhagwans, Vishnu. According to this narrative, Babur was liable for ruining the birthplace of Ram to build the Masjid.⁴

The very first indication of trouble started between Muslims and Hindus in 1855, as this was just the commencement of communal conflict in India. During the British rule in India, the administration played an instrumental role to ignite the Babri Mosque issue. In 1859, a fence around the monument was built by the British government and Hindus were permitted to Muslims to enter the mosque from the North Gate and the East gate. Both Hindu and Muslim

parties were allowed to file a petition in the court which was a strategy of the government to remain this issue since 1859.⁵

After independence, Hindus ritually cleaned the Masjid and rededicated it as a Hindu temple. In 1949, the Hindu-Muslims dispute reappeared when the Hindu nationalist party forced Akhil Bharatiya Ramayana Mahasabha (ABRM) commenced the movement and attained the full control of Babri Mosque. The ARBM organized and started the recitation of the story of Bhagwan Rama within nine days. Finally, at the end of the worship, Hindu fundamentalists broke into the Babri Mosque and placed sculptures of Sita, Ram and Laxman.⁶

At the point when Hindus discovered statues of Bhagawan's, they trusted it a miracle. To deal with the circumstance, the PM of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, mentioned the central clergyman of the state, Shri GovindBallabh Pant, to get the statues evacuated, yet the solicitation was denied by Hindu Nationalists who opposed endeavours at their expulsion.⁷ Once again, Muslim and Hindu religious gatherings filed civil suits in for overseeing the site. Even though the Babri Masjid had been bolted by the administration the statues stayed inside its premises and the Hindu clerics kept on worshipping daily. However, another right-wing Hindu nationalist organization during the 1980s began a movement to take control of the premises to build a temple.⁸

In 1986, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) appeared in the front ranks of the political parties started a movement for building the temple. Later that year, a district judge ordered the opening of the premises' gates to allow the Hindus for praying inside the mosque. To see the accomplishments, a BJP pioneer organized a religious procession to Ayodhya to attain further assistance for movement.⁹ It prompted the vicious mutual uproars in numerous Indian urban areas. During that communal crisis, an enormous number of Hindu activists attempted to assault and possess the Babri Masjid when they needed to confront the police and their movement decrease the momentum.

In 1990 the top BJP leader and a former prime minister, L.K. Advani started a Rath Yatra (religiopolitical procession) from Somnath to Ayodhya in 1990. The purpose of this rally was to gain wide-ranging Hindu support for the proposed temple along with preparing the grounds for gaining Hindu votes in the coming elections.¹⁰ The government of Bihar arrested L.K Advani to prevent him from reaching Ayodhya. Despite this, a big crowd of extremists was able to reach

Ayodhya and attack the Masjid, where they faced paramilitary forces and in the resultant clash several BJP activists were killed.¹¹ As a result of all this BJP was able to stop facilitating the V.P Singh Government and created an atmosphere for a new election. In this situation, the BJP was able to receive widespread Hindu sympathy and enhanced its tally in the union parliament with winning a majority in the Uttar Pradesh assembly.¹²

The RSS, VHP, BJP and its offshoots sorted out a meeting on December 6, 1992, including an enormous number of activists, at the disputed area. However, they made speeches by BJP pioneers, for example, Murli Manohar Joshi, Advani and Uma Bharti. According to Mark Tully¹³ the former BBC South Asia Correspondent, on that day was present at the roof of a building from where he had a clear view of Babri Masjid. On that particular day, BJP and other supporting organizations wanted to start the construction of the temple.¹⁴ On the other hand, the courts and the government were satisfied as they were committed these parties that it would only be a very peaceful religious ceremony and there would not be any damage to the Masjid. A large crowd of around 15,00,000 people had gathered and they were listening to speeches delivered by the speakers. Trouble started when a group of young participants (extremists) broke through the hurdles placed by the police.¹⁵ These participants were wearing yellow-coloured hand-bands which showed them as committed workers extremist parties and then they started to climb the boundary fences unchecked by their organizers. The policemen present acted helpless in this situation. In this situation, the crowd felt emboldened and entered the premises and started demolishing everything. The crowd attacked the police and snatched their protective shields.¹⁶ As the police withdrew under pressure young men were able to climb on the rooftop and started damaging the building where they were joined by others.

As the telephone access lines were cutoff so Mark had to go to Faizabad to file his report. On his return, he along with other journalists were detained by the demonstrators and kept in a house. Later, they were released with the interference of some high officials and Hindu religious persons. When they arrived in Ayodhya, there was nothing but only debris.¹⁷

Archaeological Aspect

Several archaeological investigations have been made in the vicinity of the Babri Mosque in Ayudhya. The first archaeological investigations were conducted in 1969 & 1970, while the

second investigations were conducted under the supervision of B.B. Lal during the 1970s.¹⁸ Various statues were discovered in 1992 when there was some development underway near Babri Masjid and some different items were given during the destruction of the mosque, which isn't sure if were remaining of some temple.¹⁹

Interpretation of archaeological data is interpreted in different ways with varying conclusions. After the excavation, a comprehensive report was published by Lal in which he claimed that the medieval occupation (post-dating the 11th century A.D) was “devoid of any special interest”.²⁰ In 1990, an article was written by Lal in which he stated that he had found some remains of a temple beneath the Masjid. At the point when it was enquired from him, that does it imply that he asserts that a Hindu temple indicating Ram's origination existed at a similar place where Babri Mosque is, he answered that he didn't know but rather my excavating apparatuses do.²¹

Other scholars challenged Lal's statement on his data which was based on a single photo of his excavation trench, which seemed to show a purported columned room (Mandal 1993: fig . 1, pls. 1-3),(REF) as repeatedly requested by scholars after going through Lal's field notes. Lal said that apart from that single photograph the original documentation on the excavation could no longer be found.²² Several philomaths have contended that the features identified as column bases could not have fortified a structure of the sort envisioned by Lal. After the findings of some sculptures that isn't true, one archaeological group claimed that they come from an eleventh-century temple, on the other hand, the second group doesn't approve of this case because of nonappearance of date and archived archaeological setting.

The dispute over the differing opinions about the archaeological evidence spilt over into a meeting of the World Archaeological Congress that took place in Delhi December 4-12, 1994, two years after the destruction of the Babri Masjid. The Indian delegation consisted of B.B. Lal, who was the principal person for the excavations near the mosque, while the second person was S. P. Gupta, an archaeologist who was known for his close relations with an extremist organization RSS. Mr. Lal was serving as president of the Congress, while Gupta was acting as the liaison between the Indian organizers and the executive committee of the International Congress.²³ The meeting was boycotted by some Indian archaeologists and historians as a protest against the misuse of archaeological data being misused by politicians and government for

misguiding the people while others preferred participation for highlighting the issue on an international platform. However, the Ayodhya issue was deleted from the meeting. The president of the international executive committee, J. Golson, issued a statement that was issued under pressure from the government in power. Without debate on the real issue at hand a clear message to all those who were opposed to attending the congress from the beginning. The historians and archaeologists ended up at the, in brief, archaeologists explored that at the edge of an issue where everyone's eyes were on them, which could be exhibited before anybody in the support or against could prompt the lives of hundreds in danger. As one of the historians argued that, “those who feel that a historian’s critique of the VHP claims is illegitimate and misplaced, fail to understand the nature of the present political debate on the issue. The VHP rhetoric uses both the language of history and the language of myth; it seeks to authenticate its account by presenting it as history”²⁴.

Myth and history were combined very cleverly by VHP, as they knew how to combine the matters of faith and twisted reading of historical evidence to overwhelm the opinion of a community. They utilized the figure of Rama as proof of his birth. They knew how to make use of religious beliefs as no one, due to societal pressure, dares demand evidence for sacred beliefs. Nobody contends to discuss Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem, also nobody addresses the Christians right to the holy site. That's the reason the task was simple and they were not to evidence that Ayudhya was an origin of Ram, yet just to show the long history of the holiness of that spot and that there had been practices of adoring by Ram's adherents. Furthermore just to keep in mind of the people that there had been a temple underneath the Babri Mosque, and in conclusion to make them passionate that the temple was demolished by the Muslim heroes and built up a Masjid directly on that place. It needs to identify the root causes of a structure of belief that has been established which began from a narrative. It’s a fundamental right of everyone to express his or her views or claims. But belief needs strong evidence of proof and can only be accepted after a close examination of the evidence by professionals in the concerned field. Without that any archaeological evidence can be easily twisted to serve political ends through facile writings and appeals to emotions.²⁵

The Indian archaeology has consistently been disrespected by the experts as those archaeologists turned into the piece of a merciless intrigue. The strategies and extent of the subject they

embraced had no concern with the dispute. They simply left the field open for the lawmakers to decipher their discoveries for their filthy games, with all orderly foulness.

Conclusion

In 2009, a report published by Manmohan Singh Liberhan (an Indian justice), laid the blame for the destruction of Babri Masjid top leadership of right-wing Indian parties. He accused Atal Bihari Vajpayee, LK Advani, Joshi and Vijay Raje Scindia of the BJP for this act. According to the report, the bureaucrats and police officers deputed to Ayodha on the day of its demolition were professionally incompetent. As stated by Mark Tully, the BJP leaders made emotional speeches to incite the crowd. A police officer, Anju Gupta, who was in charge of Advani's security that day, stated that Advani and Joshi made provocative speeches that contributed to the crowd demolishing the mosque.¹¹ At the end of multiple lawsuits after the demolition of Babri Masjid, the Allahabad HC had ruled in 2010 that the 2.77 acres of land be divided into three parts, one each for-the Sunni Waqf Board, the Nirmohi Akhara, and Lord Ram Lalla. Thirteen appeals were filed against the 2010 judgment of the Allahabad High Court. Supreme Court of India gave numerous dates for hearing the case. In 2018, senior advocate, Kapil Sibal, who was representing the Sunni Waqf Board, told Supreme Court that the Babri Masjid issue should be heard only after the 2019 general elections as the matter had been politicized enough by the actions of the BJP government to render any judgment before the elections prejudicial. However, as BJP had the option to frame the legislature with the clear majority the SC gave their judgment on 9 November 2019 favouring Hindu fundamentalists and gave the guardianship of the contested land (2.77 acres land) to a trust to construct the Ram Janambhoomi temple. The Court additionally requested the administration to give another 5 acres of land somewhere else to the Sunni Waqf Board to construct a Masjid. (The choice itself is completely politicized as there is BJP government; even it was on record that BJP administration around then was responsible to propel the horde in the destruction of Babri Masjid).\The court gave the verdict that the 2010 Allahabad High Court's decision ordering division of the disputed land was incorrect. The Court observed that archaeological evidence from the Archaeological Survey of India shows that the Babri Masjid was constructed on a "structure", whose architecture was distinctly indigenous and non-Islamic. (The archaeological evidence referred by SC does not support its statement as Indian government in 1994, did not allow the discussion about the Babri Masjid for inclusion in

the agenda of the World Archaeological Congress held in Delhi. Lal and Gupta the members of Indian archaeological congress had close ties with RashtriyaSwayamsevakSangh). The demolition of Babri Masjid was pre-planned and well organized by RSS, VHP and BJP, and the then prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao handled the issue. On 4 April 2014, a sting operation by Cobrapost claimed that the demolition of Babri Masjid was not an act of “frenzied mobs” but that of “sabotage” planned with so much secrecy that no government agency got wind of it.

In short, India was a secular country because its constitution, judiciary and political system guaranteed it. But the verdict about Babri Masjid was announced on the 9th of November 2019 on the 550th anniversary of Baba Gurunanak and Pakistan had pronounced well in its advance of a visa-free entry for the Sikhs to the Kartarpur corridor as a good gesture, but the decision on the same day specifies the minority-hatred mind of BJP extremism. India has been covering its true face with its secular constitution, a continuation of the democratic process and an independent judiciary but BJP rise in power and policies regarding religious communities and foreign policy regarding Kashmir Issue by annexing and merging Kashmir into Bharat has posed a serious threat to its secular character and people believe that Bharat moving fast to become a fascist Hindu state. In light of the above facts, BJP has changed the Religio- political dynamics of the Indian politics, however. Despite all these indicators still, it is difficult to predict whether it emerges purely as Religious state or revive its Secular character.

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