



Centuries of Perseverance: Ayodhya's Ram Janmabhoomi Temple

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The Pran Pratishtha, also known as the inauguration ceremony, of the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya on January 22, 2024 marks the end of a centuries-long wait. The wait began in 1528-29 CE with the construction of the Babri structure atop Shri Ram's temple by the Mughal ruler Babur, and will finally culminate in the construction of the majestic temple. This journey has been filled with perseverance, resilience and maturity, demonstrating the enduring spirit of the Bharatiya people. It is a testament to the fact that the drive to build a brighter future for Bharat is rooted in the principles of peace, rule of law and mutual respect.

At its core, this narrative is woven around Ayodhya, the glorious capital of the Ikshvaku dynasty and the birthplace of Bhagwan Shri Ram to King Dasarath and his wife Kausalya during their rule in Treta Yuga. The profound symbolism of virtue prevailing over vice and illumination dispelling darkness permeates this timeless narrative. As recounted in historical Hindu scriptures of Ramayana and Skanda Purana, this tale encapsulates the theme of the victory of good over evil. Shri Ram's exile, the abduction of Mata Sita, and his triumphant return to Ayodhya after defeating Mata Sita's abductor Ravan serve as powerful metaphors for the eternal struggle between righteousness and malevolence, casting Ayodhya as a sacred stage where the forces of light were destined to overcome shadows of darkness.

During the Islamic occupation of Bharat, a systematic destruction of numerous temples occurred across the country, including in Ayodhya. Mir Baqi, the General of the Mughal tyrant Babur, carried out the demolition of the Shri Ram temple—a site of great significance as the birthplace of Bhagwan Ram. In its place, he erected a structure named the "Babri mosque" on the temple's ruins. Historical records suggest that Babur might have ordered the construction of the Babri structure, even though he never personally visited it, purportedly in the name of Baburi Andijani—a young male lover slave he had rescued from an Uzbek camp bazaar in 1499. Babur openly expressed his affection for Baburi in the Baburnama, his autobiography.

Furthermore, the Babri structure did not emerge as a place of prayer; rather, it stood as a deliberate attempt to humiliate Hindus—a calculated endeavour to obliterate their cultural and religious heritage. The strategic placement of this structure atop the Ram Mandir encapsulated a historical injustice, embodying a tumultuous period that aimed to suppress and undermine the deeply rooted

beliefs of the Hindu community along with millions of Shri Ram's devotees around the world. The occupation of the Hindu holy site marked a significant turning point, altering the city's landscape and laying the groundwork for centuries of denial to Shri Ram's birthplace, hindering their access to their sacred temple.

This narrative is not confined to one perspective; scholars, travellers, and historians, including the revered Sikh Guru Nanak, who lived during the same period as the tyrant Babur, documented these events in Guru's Baburvani. Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang echoed similar sentiments in his travelogs, and the accounts were further corroborated by Arabs, Persian scholars like Maulana Abu l-Hasan 'Ali Nadawi, alias Ali Mian, the son of Maulana Hakim Sayyid Abd al-Hayy, and Abu-Al-Fadl. This sentiment found resonance in the works of Scottish Surgeon General Edward Balfour, British Surveyor Montgomery Martin, and German indologist A. Fuhrer. Them amongst hundreds of others whose accounts converged on the occupation of the Ram Janmabhoomi by Babur's construction of the Babri structure, reverberating the story of Shri Ram's temple and yearning among Bhagwan Ram's devotees for the restoration of his sacred birthplace.

In contemporary times, the legal saga surrounding the Ayodhya Ram Janmabhoomi issue began 168 years ago. The first case was filed on November 30, 1858, by Mohd Salim against a group of Nihang Sikhs for installing their Nishan and inscribing "Ram" inside the Babri structure claimed to be a mosque. Sheetal Dubey, the thanedar of Avadh, verified the complaint, marking the first documented evidence of Shri Ram's devotees presence both in the outer and inner courtyards, establishing their claim to the Ram temple.

The legal battle officially commenced in 1885, with Mahanth Raghubar Das filing a suit (No. 61/280) against the Secretary of State for India in Council in the civil court of Faizabad. Das, claiming to be a Mahanth located at the chabutra in the outer courtyard, sought permission to construct a temple there. However, the suit was dismissed. In response, a Civil Appeal (No. 27) was filed in 1886 against the 1885 judgment. District Judge FER Chamier of Faizabad decided to visit the site before passing an order. He noted, "...the masjid built by Babur stands on the border of the town of Ayodhya, that is to say to the west and south, it is clear of habitations. It is most unfortunate that a masjid should have been built on land specially held sacred by the Hindus, but as that event occurred 356 years ago, it is too late now to remedy the grievance...." This visit marked a critical point in the legal proceedings, acknowledging the historical grievance but asserting the difficulty of addressing it after centuries had passed.

Post-Independence India witnessed a significant development in the Ayodhya case in December 1949 when the deity of Shri Ram was discovered beneath the central dome of the Babri Structure. This event, revered as a divine occurrence by Shri Ram's devotees, escalated the situation as Muslims falsely accused Hindus of placing the idol. In response, the government enforced a ban on the entire area, prohibiting both Hindus and Muslims from accessing it. Subsequently, both groups filed various civil cases to lift the ban and gain control of the area, further intensifying the situation. Notably, Mahant Paramhans Ramchandra Das, the chief of Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas, and Gopal Singh Visharad filed suits in Faizabad, seeking permission to pray before the installed idol. In 1959, Nirmohi Akhara, a key party in the then ongoing case, along with others, filed a case seeking permission to conduct prayers. On the other hand, the Sunni Central Board of Waqfs in Uttar Pradesh filed a case claiming ownership of the Babri structure claiming it to be a mosque and contended that the surrounding area was a graveyard in 1961. In 1984, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) formed a group lead by Lal Krishna Advani to continue the movement and on February 1, 1986, the Faizabad district judge ordered the opening of the gates of the structure for Hindus to offer prayers. Conversely, the Muslims formed the Babri Masjid Action Committee which started campaigning for the Babri structure by claiming it to be a mosque.

Following this, the Shri Ram Mandir movement, led by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), gained momentum in 1989 with the foundation stone-laying ceremony near the Babari structure. Subsequently, the Ayodhya Dispute Title Suit was transferred to the Allahabad High Court for hearings. On September 25, 1990, Advani initiated a Rath Yatra (pilgrimage procession) from Somnath to Ayodhya to garner nationwide support for the movement. Discontented by years of waiting and inadequate governmental actions in the pursuit of justice, on December 6, 1992, thousands of Kar Sevak's (volunteers) dismantled the Babri structure, replacing it with a makeshift Bhagwan Ram temple. The incident resulted in the tragic loss of over 50 Kar Sevak's lives as the PV Narasimha Rao-led government attempted to suppress the mass movement against the illegal occupation of the birthplace of Bhagwan Ram, marking a transformative moment in the nation's history.

Following the Babri Structure's deconstruction on December 16, 1992, the Indian Prime Minister established the Liberhan Commission on December 26, 1992, to investigate the events and communal riots. The commission, initially given three months, aimed to uncover the circumstances surrounding the demolition. On January 7, 1993, the Narsimha Rao Government issued an ordinance acquiring 67.7 acres of land in Ayodhya, later formalized as the Acquisition of Certain Areas at Ayodhya Act, 1993. In 1994, the Supreme Court's Ismail Faruqui Judgment upheld the

constitutionality of the Act, determining that offering namaz at a mosque was not integral to Islam. No reviews were filed against this judgment.

The Ayodhya Title Dispute Case resumed in April 2002 at the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court, which in 2003, directed the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to excavate the site, revealing concrete evidence of a temple dedicated to Bhagwan Ram. The verdict on September 30, 2010, by Justice Sibghat Ullah Khan, Justice Sudhir Agarwal, and Justice Dharam Veer Sharma, distributed the Ayodhya title in a 2:1 ratio. The Supreme Court stayed the Allahabad High Court order in 2011, and despite suggestions for an out-of-court settlement in March 2017, the case continued. On September 27, 2018, the Supreme Court rejected a plea for a five-judge Constitution Bench, opting to maintain a three-judge bench. Chief Justice Dipak Misra retired on October 2, 2018, and on January 8, 2019, Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi reassigned the Ayodhya Dispute to a five-judge Constitution Bench, including CJI Ranjan Gogoi, Justice SA Bobde, Justice DY Chandrachud, Justice Ashok Bhushan, and Justice S Abdul Nazeer. The bench initiated mediation efforts on March 8, 2019, lasting eight weeks; however, on July 9, 2019, one party reported unsuccessful mediation attempts. Final arguments commenced in August 2019, and in October of that year, the judgment was reserved. The case, spanning nearly seven decades post-independence, navigated various legal channels in its pursuit of justice. Initially filed in a District Court, later transferred to the High Court before the Indian Supreme Court finally heard the matter. The apex court introduced the idea of mediation, and eventually, the case was transferred from a three-judge Constitution Bench to a five-judge Constitution Bench for the final verdict. On November 9, 2019, the historic final judgment awarded the title to Shri Ram. Additionally, an alternative site in Ayodhya was granted to the Sunni Waqf Board for the construction of a mosque.

The Court mandated the establishment of a trust to supervise the construction of the temple, leading to the formation of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust for the construction and management of the Shri Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. Subsequently, people from across the nation voluntarily contributed funds for the construction of the Ram Mandir, and the temple's development has been solely financed through crowdfunding. No public or government funding has been utilised for the temple's construction.

While the Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board established the Indo Islamic Cultural Foundation (IICF) in accordance with the Indian Supreme Court decision. Apart from the mosque, the site is planned to feature a library, museum, and publication center dedicated to Ahamadullah Shah, a 300-bed multi-specialty hospital, a community kitchen providing 2,000 meals daily for the

underprivileged, and a research center. It has been reported that 40% of the funds gathered for the Dhannipur mosque in Ayodhya were contributed by Hindus.

As the inauguration of the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple approaches, it holds a special place in the hearts of millions of devotees. More than just a physical structure, the temple is a sacred space that reinstates the centrality of Bhagwan Ram in the hearts of his devotees worldwide. The global effort to build the temple in Ayodhya has received support from various corners of the world, with countries devoted to Ram, such as Nepal, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia, contributing stones, soil, and water for its construction. These international donations not only underscore the broad historical and cultural connections to Lord Ram but also highlight the respect and significance he holds across different regions and communities. The temple symbolises a long-awaited triumph of faith over adversity and the restoration of cultural and religious heritage intentionally erased centuries ago. Scheduled for consecration on January 22, this grand temple is more than just an architectural marvel; it serves as a beacon of hope for a united and inclusive Bharat. It echoes the sentiments of millions who, like Christians in Bethlehem and Muslims in Mecca, consider Ayodhya and the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple as a spiritual epicentre of their faith. This momentous occasion is a powerful testament to the enduring spirit of a nation that, after nearly a 500-year wait, stands ready to embrace this historic moment with reverence and joy.

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