

Ayodhya Ram Mandir: The timeline from a conflict to a shrine

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Deep Dive



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By Nikhil Sen

The recent inauguration of the Ram temple has elicited widespread jubilation and pride throughout the nation. On January 22, 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi presided over the consecration ceremony, known as the *pran pratishtha*, of the new 5-year-old Ram idol. The ceremony was marked by grandeur and attended by thousands of devotees, as well as numerous celebrities, industrialists, and politicians. Televised live to the world, the monumental inauguration became the subject of discussion across various social media platforms throughout the day.

While the inauguration was filled with utmost joy and ecstasy, many people were crying while remembering the journey and the sacrifices that countless people had made to get to this day. The journey or should I say the “battle” for re-taking the sacred site was not easy as it got through a lot of conflicts and friction along the way.

Let us look through the whole timeline of this conflict from the beginning to this day.

1528: Demolition by Babar

In 1526, Mughal invaders led by Babar defeated Ibrahim Lodi of the Lodi Dynasty and conquered northern India in the battle of Panipat. To establish his power, Babur ordered his noble Mir Baqi to construct a mosque at the site where the ancient Ram temple was located. After encountering some resistance from the Hindu community, Mir Baqi demolished the temple and built a new mosque in its place.

1853: The first riot

Following the arrival of the British, the Hindu community was advocating for a temple on a disputed site. The British appointed Robert Montgomery Martin, a British administrator, to survey the area and produce a report. Martin's findings indicated the presence of a temple on the disputed site. In 1853, Bairagi sants from the Nirmohi Akhara went to the mosque to claim ownership after hearing the report's findings. In response, the Muslim community charged to nearby Hanumangarhi in 1856 but was unable to take control. This led to the first confrontation between the communities, resulting in casualties on both sides.

As a result of this conflict, the British constructed a wall that divided the site into two sections: the inner area designated for Muslims and the outer Chabutra region for Hindus. However, this solution only exacerbated the situation as both communities continued to pray simultaneously, leading to further tension and difficulty finding peace during their respective worship.

1885: Courts intervene

The mahant of the Ram Chabutra, Raghubar Das, submitted a request to the court for authorisation to construct a temple structure on the premises. However, the district court denied the request, citing that the mahant is not the rightful owner of the land and that such a construction could worsen existing community conflicts.

1934: Second round of riots

A significant communal conflict erupted following the slaughter of a cow allegedly by certain Muslims. Members of the Hindu community, in response, caused substantial damage to the mosque dome. The British government undertook the repair of the mosque. To cover the expenses incurred for the restoration, fines were imposed on the Bairagis, who are Vaishnavite Hindu priests, and on the rioters from the Hindu community.

1949: A Ram idol appears

On December 22, 1949, the Hindu community reported that an idol of Lord Ram had manifested in the mosque. This led to a significant influx of devotees who flocked to the site to witness what was being considered a potential miracle. However, the Muslim Central Waqf Board responded by filing an FIR, alleging that someone had placed the idol inside the mosque. They further contended that this was an attempt by the Hindu community to gain possession of the land.

Looking at the situation, the court directed closure of the gates of the mosque along with the outer part and passed an order under Section 144 of the CRPC restricting any gathering. The high court later found that the idol was in fact placed by some sadhu and this was upheld by the Supreme Court also.

1950: Suits by both sides

Following the imposed restrictions, numerous Hindu individuals and groups, including the Nirmohi Akhara, began to file suits to gain permission to enter the premises and pray, citing a violation of their rights. In response, the Sunni Waqf Board also filed suits, arguing that Babar was Sunni and the site exclusively belonged to their board. These suits were consistently filed and eventually compiled before being sent to the Allahabad High Court for further proceedings.

1980: Ram Janmabhoomi Movement

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad spearheaded the Ram Janmabhoomi Movement with the aim of reclaiming the site and building a temple there. The movement was led by LK Advani, who had just become the leader of the newly-formed BJP. It quickly gained traction and garnered significant support. However, the unlocking of the gate by the Allahabad High Court for Hindu worshippers was seen by some as a political manoeuvre, leading to the formation of a Babri Mosque Action Committee by Muslims.

1990: Rath Yatra

A significant event occurred when LK Advani embarked on a separate rath yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya, distinct from the VHP's efforts in the same direction. PM Narendra Modi was one of the organisers of the yatra as a BJP karyakarta. It won widespread attention from the public, cementing BJP's position on the national stage. Unfortunately, during this time, several riots broke out in areas where both communities resided.

1992: The demolition of Babri Masjid

During the full-fledged Rath Yatra, which was scheduled to pass through Bihar, the then Chief Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav, was apprehensive about riots spreading to the state. As a precautionary measure, he had Advani arrested. Subsequently, the immense popularity of the BJP led to their victory in the Uttar Pradesh legislative elections of 1991, and Kalyan Singh emerged as the Chief Minister.

At that time, the court had decreed a halt to any construction on the contested site. The Hindu community was growing increasingly frustrated and restless with the lack of action from any parties involved. Numerous meetings were held at Dharam Sansad between various Hindu community groups, and it was declared that a puja would take place on December 6, 1992. In the midst of this tense atmosphere, the Muslim community had speculated that the Hindu group intended to demolish the mosque. It was at this point that Kalyan Singh gave his assurance that the event would proceed without any harm befalling the masjid.

On December 6, 1992, a large crowd gathered at the location to observe the puja ceremony, which included the set-up of a pandal. Several karsevaks were also in attendance. By 11 AM, the karsevaks began to move towards the masjid, and by 4 PM, all three domes had been destroyed, and a temporary temple was erected on the premises.

1992: The aftermath of the demolition

Following the imposition of President's rule in Uttar Pradesh and Kalyan Singh's resignation, a wave of riots erupted across the country resulting in over 2000 casualties and drawing protests from countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh. Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao established the Liberhan Ayodhya Commission 10 days after the event to conduct a thorough investigation. The resulting report held numerous karsevaks and politicians responsible for the planning and execution of the riots, leading to the prohibition of certain organizations which were later reinstated.

An ordinance was passed by the government to acquire the 67-acre disputed land as both communities were engaged in a battle to purchase adjoining plots with an aim to acquire more land.

2003: High Court orders survey

During the hearing of this case, the Allahabad High Court issued directions to the Archaeological Survey of India to conduct a thorough scientific research and survey of the disputed site. The resulting report claimed to have found a non-Islamic structure beneath the mosque, although it was not definitively determined whether it was of Hindu origin. In a split

verdict, the High Court held that both Hindus and Muslims were joint holders of the land and divided it into three parts, allotting it to Shri Ram Virajman, the Nirmohi Akhara, and the Sunni Waqf Board.

2011: In the Supreme Court

The High Court's ruling was met with discontent from both communities and was subsequently challenged in the Supreme Court. In 2017, the Supreme Court ordered a stay on the HC decision. Despite its attempts to mediate the conflict, the Supreme Court was unable to find a resolution and proceeded to hold a hearing on the matter. After careful consideration of all facts and contentions, the Supreme Court delivered its verdict on November 9, 2019. The ruling awarded the site to Shri Ram Virajman and directed the state to allocate five acres of land in a prominent location to the Sunni Waqf Board for the construction of a mosque.

2024: Inauguration of temple

On August 5, 2020, Prime Minister Modi laid the foundation stone for the construction of a temple. The construction of the temple began soon after and is scheduled to be inaugurated on January 22, 2024. This grand event is expected to be a historic moment and will be remembered for years to come.

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