RAMifications of the Ayodhya Conflict

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The Ayodhya dispute has been one of the most contentious topics of debate in India in recent years. It encompasses varying aspects including political, historical and a socio- religious debate leading into the deep-seated violent communal issues and sentiments persistent in India. The majority opinion of the Hindu community is that Ayodhya located in Northern Uttar Pradesh was the birthplace of Lord Ram- one of the most revered deities in Hindu religion. When Mughal invaders led by the infamous Babur came to India, they demolished many Hindu places of worship and built mosques while forcing many people to convert to Islam. One of these mosques was the Babri Masjid which was said to be built after demolishing a temple. In September 1990 BJP leader L.K. Advani began a Rath Yatra to Ayodhya to generate support for the advocacy of this cause resulting in communal riots and Advani getting arrested. Karsevaks, also known as Sangh Parivar activists, reached Ayodhya and tried to attack the mosque but were stopped by the police and paramilitary forces resulting in a skirmish which killed many Karsevaks. On 6th December 1992, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and BJP organised a rally at the site of the mosque. Speeches were given by well known political figures like Advani, Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharati. The mob which had formed grew restless during the speeches and stormed the mosque shortly after. The police who were assigned to protect the mosque were heavily outnumbered. The mosque was attacked and brought to the ground.

This not-so-surprisingly occurred despite a commitment from the State government to the Supreme Court that it would not be harmed.

After the demolition of the masjid, hostile communal riots broke out in Bombay, Delhi, Bhopal and Hyderabad killing nearly 2000 people, most victims being Muslims. On 16th December 1992, the Liberhan Commission was set up by the Government of India to probe the circumstances that led to the demolition of the mosque. This was the longest-running commission in India’s history with several extensions granted by various succeeding governments. The report found several people culpable in the demolition such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Advani, Bal Thackeray and many more. It was said that they made provocative speeches in the rally and could have stopped the demolition. Many Muslim organisations continued to express outrage at the destruction of the disputed structure. In July 2005 the makeshift temple at the site of the destroyed mosque was also destroyed by a mob. In 2002, a title dispute was filed in the Allahabad High Court, a decade after the mosque was demolished. The case had three main contending parties, two Hindu groups and the Muslim Waqf Board which is responsible for maintenance of Islamic properties in India. The two Hindu groups consisted of Hindu litigants from the right-wing Hindu Mahasabha party and Nirmohi Ahhara, a sect of Hindu monks. The verdict in September 2010 was that the 2.77 acres of disputed land should be divided equally into three parts. However, control of the main disputed section where the mosque stood was given to Hindus.

This judgement made three key observations- It affirmed that the disputed spot was the birthplace of Lord Ram and that Babri Masjid was built after the demolition of a Hindu temple and that it was not built in accordance with the tenets of Islam. The Supreme Court of India suspended this ruling in 2011 when both Hindu and Muslim groups appealed against it. The 9th November 2019 verdict cited a report by the Archeological Survey of India as evidence that the remains of a building “that was not Islamic” were beneath the structure of the demolished Babri mosque. There was a unanimous verdict that the disputed land should be given to the Hindus for a temple dedicated to Lord Ram and the Muslims were given land elsewhere to construct a mosque. They directed the federal government to set up a trust to manage and oversee the construction of the temple. The court also added that the demolition of the Babri Masjid was against the rule of law. Conclusively, The main group of Muslim litigants said that they will not appeal against the verdict. Recently on 5th August when the Prime Minister of India attended the Bhoomi Pujan for the inauguration of the construction of the temple, he did not attend as a chief guest but as master of the ceremonies. He was the official Yajmaan during the ceremonies. Modi took an active part in these celebrations and said that 5th August should have equal importance as 15th August.

The Ayodhya conflict calls our attention towards the ingrained communal differences our country has and how politicians often use it to either appease a community or insult another. Whether it is riots taking place across the country such as the ones in Bangalore and northeast Delhi or the debates concerning the implementation of the uniform civil code. One needs to realise that in today’s time, with India being the third-worst affected country by the coronavirus along with a collapsing economy, religion should not be the main concern. One concern is that most of the people who were opposed to the Supreme Court verdict were opposed over the question as to whether a masjid or mandir should have been built and not on the fact that the large sums of money which will be going towards the construction of the temple could have been used for welfare purposes of the people. Our country has a fragmented healthcare system which has become crystal clear during the pandemic, a collapsing economy, increasing COVID cases and increasing rates of violence against women and children. The country and the governments need to put aside their differences regarding religion and need to deal with the larger problems at hand.

India needs to stop having such increasing amounts of internal conflicts and stand together as a united front to work for the welfare of the people regardless of their faith. The area which is being used to build the Ram Mandir could have been used to build hospitals, schools and homes for the people of Ayodhya. In the current state of the country, one may very well hold the opinion that it was foolish to have a large ceremony for the Bhoomi Pujan without nearly any safety precautions in place. With the Ram Mandir Trust Head who shared a stage with our Prime Minister testing positive for COVID-19, one worries as to what tumultuous state of affairs our nation would be in if during these trying times, the prime minister was to face the same fate.

One must also view with concern the large amount of attention and importance given by the Prime Minister and many politicians to one religion and how that impacts the secular status of our country. However, no other cause must divert their attention from the larger issue at hand- If India continues to prioritise religion and place appeasement of the people as its main concern instead of paying attention to the crucial global and domestic issues at hand then the only path laying in front of our country is one which leads us downhill. The discourse here should not be that mandir vs masjid but rather religion vs humanity.