

THE AYODHYA DEBATE

A REPORT ON THE GOVERNMENT-SPONSORED
EXCHANGE OF EVIDENCE BETWEEN THE SCHOLARS
MANDATED BY THE BABRI MASJID ACTION COMMITTEE
AND THE VISHVA HINDU PARISHAD
HELD IN 1990-91

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The North-Indian town of Ayodhya became world-famous in 1989-90 when Hindus and Muslims clashed over a mosque structure used by the Hindus as a temple but claimed by the Muslims. Hindus believe that the site of the building is Rama's birthplace, and maintain that a Hindu temple adorned the site until, in 1528 at the latest, Muslims forcibly replaced it with a mosque; Muslim leaders deny this. Contrary to what the international press has written, the dispute over the Ram Janmabhoomi/Babri Masjid site in Ayodhya is not a hopeless tangle of contending fanaticisms in which the historical truth is forever unknowable. A lot of scholarly work has been done, and the Government of India has provided the contending parties with an official forum in which experts could go through the evidence produced for both sides. This scholarly debate took place around the turn of 1991, and resulted in an unambiguous verdict. The Belgian scholar Koenraad Elst has reported on this debate at the International Ramayana Conference held in July 1991 in his own Alma Mater, the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. The present paper is an updated version of that report, dated 25 July 1992.

This paper is intended to fill the gap left by the general media in the information about the Ram Janmabhoomi/Babri Masjid dispute. I will give a brief report on an the government-sponsored scholars' debate about the historical claims concerning the Ram Janmabhoomi/Babri Masjid site in Ayodhya, which took place in December 1990 and January 1991. As the only non-Indian scholar to have followed this dispute closely, I will argue that the scholars' debate has ended in an unambiguous victory for one of the two parties.¹

¹ One of the first scholarly publications on the dispute was my *Ram Janmabhoomi vs. Babri Masjid, a Case Study in Hindu-Muslim Conflict* (Voice of India, Delhi, July 1990), partly a reply to the statement *The Political Abuse of History: Babri Masjid/Rama Janmabhoomi Controversy*, by 25 historians of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). A large part of my book has been included in Vinay Chandra Mishra ed.: *Ram Janmabhoomi Babri Masjid, Historical Documents, Legal Opinions & Judgments* (Bar Council of India Trust, Delhi 1990). My *Ayodhya and After* (Voice of India, Delhi, May 1991) contains a brief update, but mostly deals with other aspects of India's religio-political situation.

1. The object of the debate

As is well-known by now, on Rama's supposed birthplace in Ayodhya stands a disputed mosque structure. It is called the *Babri Masjid* because according to an inscription on its front wall it was built at the orders of the Moghul invader Babar in 1528. But until the beginning of this century, official documents (such as the revenue records) called it *Masjid-i-Janmasthan*, "mosque of the birthplace", and the hill on which it stands was designated as *Ramkot* (Rama's fort) or *Janmasthan* (birthplace). Since 1949, the building is effectively in use as a Hindu temple, but many Hindus, and especially the *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP)², are not satisfied with this. They want to explicitate the Hindu function of the place with proper Hindu temple architecture, which implies removing the present structure. On the other hand, the *Babri Masjid Action Committee* (BMAC) and its splinter, the *Babri Masjid Movement Coordination Committee* (BMMCC)³, want the building to be given back to the Muslim community.

Three questions. In December 1990 and January 1991, at the request of the Chandra Shekhar government, the BMAC and the VHP have exchanged historical evidence for their respective cases. A report on this debate should distinguish between three possible debating issues:

1. Is the present-day Ayodhya with all its Rama-related sites, the Ayodhya described by Valmiki in his Sanskrit Ramayana? In the course of this debate, no new facts have been added to prof. B.B. Lal's conclusion that Valmiki's Ayodhya and present-day Ayodhya are one and the same place.⁴ But this leaves open the possibility that Valmiki relocated the scene of a tradition coming from elsewhere in his own area. Therefore, the next question might be:
2. Is the present-day Ayodhya, and more specifically the disputed site, indeed the birthplace of a historical character

² The VHP ("World Hindu Council") was founded in 1964 by Guru Golwalkar, president of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS, "National Volunteer Corps") as an instrument for the spread of Hindu culture and religion. It takes its guidelines from an assembly of traditional religious leaders.

³ The BMAC consists of representative Muslim leaders, including Imam Bukhari of the Jama Masjid in Delhi. The BMMCC is the province of the controversial Janata Dal MP, Syed Shahabuddin.

⁴ Prof. B.B. Lal has formulated this conclusion on different occasions, including articles in *Puratattva* no.16, 1987, and in *Manthan*, October 1990. In a letter to the *Times of India*, published on 1/3/1991, he concludes that "what is known as Ayodhya today was indeed the Ayodhya of the Valmiki *Ramayana*".

called Rama? Assuming he has existed? The BMAC has argued that such a thing cannot be proven. The VHP has refused to consider this question, arguing that religions do not have to justify the sacredness of their sacred sites: if the site was traditionally held sacred (at least from Valmiki onwards), then that should be enough to command respect, regardless of the historical basis of this sacredness. Compare with the Muslim sacred places: there is no historical substance at all in Mohammed's claim that the *Ka'aba* in Mekka had been built by Abraham as a place of monotheistic worship. This story had to justify the take-over of the *Ka'aba* from its rightful owners, the "idolaters" of Arabia. And yet, in spite of the starkly unhistorical nature of the Muslim claim to the *Ka'aba*, this claim is not being questioned. Nobody is saying that the Muslims can only have their *Ka'aba* if they give historical proof that it was built by Abraham.⁵ Therefore the VHP insists that if the disputed site is a genuine traditional sacred site, this must be enough to make others respect it as such. In practice, then, a temple should have stood at such a sacred place, before the Babri Masjid was built. So, the third question is:

3. Was the Babri Masjid built in forcible replacement of a pre-existing Rama temple? The Muslim fundamentalist leader Syed Shahabuddin, convenor of the BMMCC (and initiator of the campaign against Salman Rushdie)⁶ agrees with the VHP that this is the fundamental question. He has said repeatedly: "If it is proven that the Babri Masjid has been built in forcible replacement of a Hindu temple, I will demolish it with my own hands."⁷ The authority claimed as basis for this

⁵ In 1985, prof. Kamal Salibi of Beirut has floated the theory that all the Biblical sites including Abraham's Hebron and king David's Jerusalem, were situated in the Hejaz area of Western Arabia (in his book *The Bible Came from Arabia: a Radical Reinterpretation of Old Testament Geography*). The double political motivation is obvious: undermining Israel's historical legitimacy and giving a foundation to Islam's claim on an Abrahamic heritage including the *Ka'aba*. Competent Bible scholars have dismissed this theory as ludicrous.

⁶ The Ayodhya dispute and the Rushdie affair are indeed connected. The ban on *The Satanic Verses* was part of a package of concessions by the Rajiv Gandhi government to calm down Syed Shahabuddin, who had threatened a Muslim "march on Ayodhya" on the same day when the VHP would hold a rally there.

⁷ Quoted for rebuttal from Shahabuddin's own monthly *Muslim India* by Harsh Narain in his article *Ram Janmaboomi: Muslim Testimony*, published in the *Lucknow Pioneer* (5/2/90) and in *Indian Express* (26/2/90). In the ensuing debate between prof. Narain, Mr. A.K. Chatterjee and Syed Shahabuddin, the latter has never denied nor cancelled his offer.

offer is the injunction in the *Fatawa-i-Alamgiri* (Aurangzeb's codex of applied Islamic jurisprudence): "It is not permissible to build a mosque on unlawfully acquired land. There may be many forms of unlawful acquisition. For instance, if some people forcibly take somebody's house and build a mosque or even a *jama masjid* on it, then *namaz* in such a mosque will be against the *shari'at*." As is clear from the Islamic law books, and as prof. Harsh Narain has shown, this injunction only applies to inter-Muslim disputes,⁸ but Shahabuddin generalizes its import to include *kafir* temples (some have even used this injunction as "proof" that mosques cannot have forcibly replaced temples)⁹. So, the subject matter of the debate can be limited to the question whether a Hindu temple had been destroyed to make way for the Babri Masjid.

Rajiv's letter. In a letter to the newly appointed prime minister Chandra Shekhar, the late Sri Rajiv Gandhi (whose Congress Party was supporting the new government) had also proposed to narrow down the debate to this one question. Mr. Gandhi suggested that the decision of whether to leave the disputed building to the Hindus (who presently use it as a temple) or to give it to the Muslims (who had used it as a mosque), should be taken on the basis of historical and archaeological evidence regarding the specific point whether the Babri Masjid had replaced a pre-existing Hindu temple. It is this letter from Rajiv Gandhi that prompted Chandra Shekhar to invite the contending parties to have a scholarly exchange of historical evidence.

Both parties met on December 1 and December 4 of 1990, and they agreed to submit and confront historical material supporting their respective viewpoints. On 23 December, the VHP and the BMAC submitted their respective bundles of evidence. Let us now have a look at these.

⁸ Harsh Narain: *Ram Janmabhoomi: Muslim Testimony*, in *Lucknow Pioneer* (5/2/90) and *Indian Express* (26/2/90).

⁹ Sushil Srivastava writes (in A.A. Engineer ed.: *Babri Masjid Ram Janmabhoomi Controversy*, Ajanta Publ., Delhi 1990, p.38): "...the Quran clearly states that prayers offered in a contentious place will not be accepted... Thus, the whole purpose of constructing a *masjid* on the site of a *mandir* would be self-defeating... it is highly unlikely that even the contentious mosques in Varanasi and Mathura are located on the *exact* sites of temples." In fact, the forcible take-over of non-Muslim religious places is a practice initiated by Mohammed himself. There are contemporary reports of the demolitions of the Kashi Vishvanath (Varanasi), Krishna Janmabhoomi (Mathura) and numerous other temples, and of their replacement with mosques.

2. The BMAC evidence

The BMAC presented a pile of some eighty documents, which can be divided into three groups.

Legal documents. The largest group consists of court documents, from court disputes over the Ram Janmabhoomi and other contentious places in Ayodhya, most of them from the British period, a few from after independence. However, all that these court documents prove is,

- firstly, that the Hindus kept on claiming the site;
- secondly, that the Muslim pleas always focused, not on questioning the temple destruction tradition, but on the accomplished fact that they had owned the place for centuries, long enough to *create* an ownership title no matter how and from whom they had acquired it;
- and thirdly, that the British rulers did not want any raking-up of old quarrels, and therefore upheld the status-quo, without questioning the common belief that the Masjid had replaced a Hindu temple.

British judges have explicitly not subscribed to the thesis, now defended by the BMAC and the BMMCC, that there had never been a Hindu temple on the contentious spot. On the contrary, in his verdict in 1886 a British judge observed: "It is unfortunate that a mosque should have been built on land held specially sacred by the Hindus, but as that happened 356 years ago, it is now too late to remedy the grievance." So, the court verdicts that upheld the Muslim claim to the site, by no means imply that the judges doubted the Hindu contention that a temple had been demolished to make way for this mosque. All the British sources, such as Edward Balfour in 1858 and Archaeological Survey of India reporter A. Fuhrer in 1891, confirm the tradition that the Babri Masjid had replaced a Rama temple.

One British source, Francis Buchanan's survey (written in 1810 and edited by Montgomery Martin in 1838), has been quoted by pro-BMAC historians (who have otherwise dismissed British testimonies as "prejudiced", "part of a British tactic to foment communalism" etc.) as calling the tradition of the Ram Janmabhoomi temple destruction "very ill-founded".¹⁰ However, Buchanan did

¹⁰ This text does not figure in the original BMAC evidence bundle, but its words "very ill-founded" are quoted by prof. Irfan Habib in a speech to the Aligarh Historians Group (12/2/1992, published in *Muslim India*, 5/1991). The paragraph

not denounce as ill-founded "the temple-destruction theory", as the BMAC historians claim, but only referred to the fact that "the destruction is very generally attributed by the Hindus to the furious zeal of Aurangzeb", which allegation was misdirected: as proof for Aurangzeb's non-involvement Buchanan cites the inscription attributing the mosque to Babar.¹¹ As the last large-scale temple-destroyer, Aurangzeb had become the proverbial representative of the old Islamic tradition of iconoclasm, which had already destroyed thousands of temples before his own time.

Buchanan opines that Babar had built the mosque not on empty land, but on the site of the Ramkot "castle", which to him may well have been the very castle in which Rama himself had lived. This claim only differs from the local tradition and the VHP position by being even bolder. According to him, the black-stone pillars (with Hindu sculptures defaced by "the bigot" Babar) incorporated in the Masjid had been "taken from the ruins of the palace", and at any rate from "a Hindu building". Obviously, the site was considered by the devotees as Ram's court, originally a castle and only later a temple.¹² At any rate, the quarrel over whether the Babri Masjid replaced a "castle" or a "temple" is a false problem, considering Rama's double-role as a god-king. Buchanan gives no facts supporting an alternative origin for the Babri Masjid, and upholds the essence of the local tradition, viz. that the Masjid has replaced a Hindu building.¹³ The British judges have consistently accepted the view of the British surveyors and scholars.

Statements of opinion. The second largest group of BMAC documents consisted of book excerpts and newspaper articles.

containing these words (but not the entire relevant passage) is quoted by R.S. Sharma, M. Athar Ali, D.N. Jha and Suraj Bhan, the historians for the BMAC, in their joint publication: *Ramjanmabbumi Baburi Masjid, A Historians' Report to the Nation* (People's Publishing House, Delhi, May 1992), p.20-21.

¹¹ Emphasis added. Father Joseph Tieffenthaler, whose 1767 testimony is included in the VHP evidence bundle, records that the temple destruction was being attributed to Aurangzeb by some, to Babar by others. This minor confusion did not affect the consensus that the mosque had forcibly replaced a Hindu temple.

¹² In 1608, William Finch (quoted in the VHP evidence bundle) had witnessed the "ruins of Ramkot", i.e. of the Hindu temple which kept alive the tradition that that very site had once been Rama's castle. The entire hill was called Ramkot, "Rama's castle", and the temple complex was certainly (as attested by B.B. Lal's archaeological findings) larger than the Babri Masjid, so that Finch may well have seen some leftovers still standing there beside the mosque.

¹³ Buchanan's report has been put into perspective by Mr. A.K. Chatterjee, in an article intended as an episode of his Ayodhya debate with Syed Shahabuddin on the opinion page of the *Indian Express*, sent on 14/8/1990 but not published (but included in *History versus Casuistry*, appendix 4).

They give the well-known or at least predictable opinions of politicians like Jawaharlal Nehru and Ramaswamy Naicker, of journalists like Arvind N. Das and Praful Bidwai, of Marxist intellectuals like the JNU historians and prof. R.S. Sharma (who was invited to lead the BMAC team only after this first round). In this collection of opinions, essentially four points have been argued:

- Rama was not a historical character;
- Rama may have been a historical character, but Ayodhya is not his real birthplace;
- Rama worship in Ayodhya is fairly recent, and hardly existed prior to the period when the Babri Masjid was built;
- The Babri Masjid was not built in forcible replacement of a Rama temple.

However, the cited opinions on each of these four points are not even convergent or in mutual agreement. For instance, several authors say that the Babri Masjid was built on empty land; others say it replaced a "Buddhist stupa"; yet others say it replaced a Jaina temple, or a Shaiva temple, or a secular building. About Rama's birthplace, one source cited says Rama was born in Nepal; another says it was in Afghanistan; yet another says it was in Ayodhya, but on a different spot; one writer says that Rama was in fact a pharaoh of Egypt. In all, the BMAC has given "proof" that Rama was born at 8 different places.

Methodologically speaking, these documents do not form a body of evidence supporting one hypothesis. The BMAC has merely collected all kinds of opinions which happen to be in conflict with the thesis that the Masjid replaced a Rama temple, without minding that these opinions are also in conflict with each other. Of course, this collection of contemporary, often politically motivated articles and statements does not have any proof value. At best, some of the names under the articles could constitute an "argument of authority", but even that is diluted by their juxtaposition with political agitators and plain cranks. More than an argumentation, this presentation of many conflicting opinions is a dispersionary tactic to keep the opposing party busy with refuting the weirdest viewpoints.

An important feature of the collected pro-BMAC opinions is that they have in fact limited themselves to an attempt to discredit the evidence cited in favour of the Ram Janmabhoomi tradition. They have not given any evidence (valid or otherwise) at all for an

alternative scenario that explains the presence of the Babri Masjid and the well-attested Hindu opposition against it. They have tried to explain away the Janmabhoomi tradition by means of a conspiracy theory: as the outcome of a 19th century rumour campaign by the British rulers, out to "divide and rule".¹⁴ In fact, such a rumour campaign is totally unheard of in the well-documented history of British India, and would have left testimonies which the pro-BMAC historians have not been able to produce.¹⁵ It is an *ad hoc* hypothesis based on nothing but the fond belief that India's "communal problem" is a British creation rather than a necessary result of Islamic doctrine.¹⁶

The only seemingly valid point scored by some of the BMAC sympathizers cited in the BMAC evidence bundle, is the *argumentum e silentio* that the temple destruction is not mentioned in near-contemporary sources, notably Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* and the poems of Tulsidas. However, neither Abul Fazl nor Tulsidas have written catalogues of demolished temples or even just devoted some pointed attention to the buildings of the cities mentioned in their works: they are not the sources that are supposed to carry the required information. Also, they are not really contemporary with Babar, but with his grandson Akbar (around AD 1600).¹⁷ For them too, the temple destruction was history, and the Babri Masjid just one of the thousands of mosques built on demolished Hindu temples.

Historical documents. The third part of the evidence bundle for the Babri Masjid side, is the historical evidence properly speak-

¹⁴ For instance, Syed Shahabuddin blames "propaganda by the British" (*Indian Express*, 12/5/1990), and according to Md. Abdul Rahim Qureishi, secretary of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, "the Britishers... planted false stories and succeeded in misleading the masses to believe that Babri Masjid stood in the premises of a Rama temple which was demolished by Babar" (*Indian Express*, 13/3/1990).

¹⁵ I have argued the untenability of the British conspiracy hypothesis in a two-part column, "Party-line history-writing", in the *Pioneer*, 19-20/12/1990.

¹⁶ It should be borne in mind that the *Qur'an* contains dozens of injunctions to wage war against the unbelievers, e.g.: "Make war on them until idolatry is no more and Allah's religion reigns supreme" (Q.2:193 and 8:39); "Those who follow Mohammed are merciless to the unbelievers but kind to one another" (Q.48:29); "Enmity and hate shall reign between us until ye believe in Allah alone" (Q.60:4), etc. In Indian history, these verses and the precedent set by Mohammed have been systematically invoked to justify persecutions and temple demolitions.

¹⁷ A.G. Noorani (A.A. Engineer ed.: *op.cit.*, p.65) claims that Tulsidas "was over thirty in 1528 when the mosque was built. He lived and wrote his great work [the *Ram Charit Manas*] in Ayodhya." In fact, he wrote it in Varanasi, on what is now called Tulsi Ghat, and he died in 1623, which means that he was definitely born after 1528.

ing. It consists of *three* pieces.

One is the text of the inscriptions on the Babri Masjid and its gate, declaring that the mosque was built in 1528 by Mir Baqi, who worked under Babar's command. Of course the Hindu side has no quarrel with that: the Babri Masjid was built, so it must have been built by someone. However, in spite of the inscription, the identity of the Masjid's builder happens to be disputable. It has been argued (by Sushil Srivastava and R. Nath, independently)¹⁸ that, judging from the architecture, the mosque must have been built during the preceding Sultanate period. Sushil Srivastava even claims that the inscription attributing the Masjid to Babar (or at least to his lieutenant Mir Baqi), is a 19th-century forgery.¹⁹ At any rate, the scenario that it was built under Babar is not in conflict with the thesis that it was built in forcible replacement of a Rama temple. This dispute is not about who built the mosque, but about what preceded the mosque.

The second piece is Babar's diary. In it, no mention is made of a temple demolition in Ayodhya. Unfortunately, the pages for the months when he must have been in Ayodhya and perhaps also ordered the demolition of a Hindu temple, are missing from the manuscripts. So we simply do not have Babar's own report on this matter. And if Sushil Srivastava and R. Nath are right, Babar was not the builder and his testimony is irrelevant, except insofar as it might explain why the already existing mosque got attributed to him. For instance, the Afghan rulers, against whom the invader Babar fought, and/or the city's inhabitants may have defended Ayodhya from the Ramkot hill, so that the existing mosque got damaged in the fighting (Babar used cannon), and was subsequently rebuilt by Babar's men. But all this will remain speculation, because the relevant part of Babar's report is missing.

¹⁸ Sushil Srivastava: *The Disputed Mosque*, Vistaar Publ., Delhi 1991, ch.5; R. Nath: *The Baburi Masjid of Ayodhya*, Historical Research Documentation Programme, Jaipur 1991. The latter has clearly stated that this revision of who built the Masjid, in no way invalidates the claim that it had replaced a Hindu temple: "I have been to the site and have had occasion to study the mosque, privately, and I have absolutely no doubt that the mosque stands on the site of a Hindu temple on the north-western corner of the temple-fortress Ramkot." (*Indian Express*, 2/1/91)

¹⁹ Srivastava (in A.A. Engineer ed.: *op.cit.*, p.36) quotes Shamsur Rehman Farooqui, a scholar of Persian. He considers the inscription written in a younger style of calligraphy common in the 19th century, and by someone not well-versed in Persian. The latter observation may as well be explained by the fact that Babar's Turkish scribes had only recently learned Persian; whereas most literate Muslims in 19th-century India were very well-versed in Persian.

The third piece of BMAC evidence is Babar's testament, in which he advises his son Humayun to practise tolerance, to respect Hindu temples, and not to kill cows. This statement of religious tolerance is very nice, but unfortunately it has amply been proven to be a forgery.²⁰ It is most bizarre that scholars trying to prove a point, discredit their own case by using a proven forgery. And even if Babar's testament had been genuine, it would only prove that at the end of his life, Babar had got tired of the *jihad* which he had been waging (on top of an inter-Muslim war), or that he had come to realize that a prosperous kingdom would be better served by religious amity than by the intolerance of which he himself had given sufficient proof during his life. Babar's emphatical concern on tolerance would certainly not prove that tolerance had been his way all through his life.

There are Hindu temple materials in mosques attributed to Babar in Sambhal (replacing a Vishnu temple, and dated by archaeologists to the Sultanate period, just like the Ayodhya "Babri" Masjid) and Pilakhana. Local tradition affirms that the Babri Masjids in Palam, Sonipat, Rohtak, Panipat, and Sirsa have replaced Brahminical or Jain temples. The contemporary *Tarikh-i-Babari* describes how Babar's troops "demolished many Hindu temples at Chanderi" when they occupied it. Some tough *jihad* rhetoric has been preserved from Babar's war against the Rajputs, such as the quatrain:

"For Islam's sake, I wandered in the wild,
prepared for war with unbelievers and Hindus,
resolved myself to meet a martyr's death.

Thanks be to Allah! A *ghazi* I became."²¹

It is quite plain that Babar, even when he had to fight fellow Muslims (the Afghan Lodi dynasty), never lost sight of his duty of waging war against the infidels.

Miscellaneous heap. So, these three documents do not prove that the Babri Masjid was built on something else than a

²⁰ Sri Ram Sharma: *Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors* (1940), p.24-25. The same position has been taken by Mrs. Beveridge, the translator of Babar's memoirs, and other historians. In a (so far unpublished) article, Prof. V.S. Pathak and Prof. J.N. Tiwari of BHU have explored several hypotheses of who forged this "testament" and why.

²¹ Mrs. Beveridge's translation of *Babar Nama*, p. 574-75. According to Islamic theology a *momin* (believer) becomes a *mujabid* (holy warrior) when he wages war against the infidels, and a *ghazi* when he slays infidels with his own hands.

Rama temple. The two other groups of documents are not even an attempt to give documentary or archaeological evidence, merely a collection of sympathizing statements of opinion. What is worse, the whole collection makes one wonder whether the BMAC experts had read it at all: not only are many of the documents unconvincing or beside the point, but some even support the VHP case.

Thus, a court ruling of 1951 cites testimony of local Muslims that the mosque had not been used since 1936, which means that in 1949 the Hindus took over an unused building — hardly worth the current Babri Masjid movement with its cries of “Islam in danger” and its hundreds of riot victims.²² Another court document shows that the ongoing court dispute (which is the only legal obstacle to the replacement of the present structure with a proper temple) was filed well past the legal time limit. While the BMAC wants to rule out the British Gazetteers as evidence (because they confirm that the Babri Masjid had replaced a temple), it cites court documents which reproduce excerpts from the Gazetteers as evidence, and declare in so many words that Gazetteers are admissible as evidence. A number of court rulings record that Hindus relentlessly kept on claiming the site, “most sacred” to them, and made do with as near a site as possible under prevalent power equations: this refutes the BMAC claim that the Ram Janmabhoomi tradition is a recent invention for political purposes (first colonial “divide and rule”, now Hindu “communalism”).

The leading political analyst Arun Shourie has commented: “On reading the papers the BMAC had filed as ‘evidence’, I could only conclude, therefore, that either its leaders had not read the papers themselves, or that they had no case and had just tried to over-awe or confuse the government etc. by dumping a huge miscellaneous heap.”²³

²² On 3/3/1951, the Civil Judge of Faizabad observed: “It further appears from a number of affidavits of certain Muslim residents of Ayodhya that at least from 1936 onwards the Muslims have neither used the site as a mosque nor offered prayers there... Nothing has been pointed to discredit these affidavits.” Prof. B.P. Sinha claims to know how this disuse of the Masjid came about: “As early as 1936-37, a bill was introduced in the legislative council of U.P. to transfer the site to the Hindus... the bill was withdrawn on an unwritten understanding that no *namaz* [be] performed.” (in annexure 29 to VHP evidence bundle).

²³ *Take over from the Experts*, syndicated column, 27/1/91, included in *History vs. Casuistry* as appendix 1. Arun Shourie was sacked as *Indian Express* editor, apparently under government pressure, after revealing that, in October 1990, prime minister V.P. Singh had aborted his own compromise arrangement on Ayodhya under pressure from Imam Bukhari, prominent member of the BMAC.

3. VHP evidence

The VHP's evidence bundle was not just a pile of separate documents.²⁴ It was centred around a careful argumentation, which can be summed up in three points:

Single hypothesis. Firstly, only one hypothesis is put forward, viz. that the disputed place was traditionally (since well before the Muslim period) venerated as Rama's birthplace, that a Rama temple had stood on it, and that this temple was destroyed to make way for the Babri Masjid. All the material collected goes to confirm this one hypothesis. Not a single piece of documentary or archaeological evidence contradicts it. The contrast with the anti-Janmabhoomi polemicists is striking: they have so far not produced any document that positively indicates a different scenario from the one upheld by the VHP scholars. The BMAC effort has been only negative, but the VHP has posited its own hypothesis that takes care of all the relevant data.

Temple foundations. Secondly, archaeological findings (part of prof. B.B. Lal's excavation campaign *Archaeology of the Ramayana Sites* 1975-80) as well as a large number of documents written *in tempore non suspecto* confirm the hypothesis. Findings of burnt-brick pillar-bases dated to the 11th century, a few metres from the disputed structure, prove that a pillared building stood in alignment with, and on the same foundations system as the Babri Masjid.²⁵ The written documents do not include an eye-witness account of the temple destruction, the way we have eye-witness accounts of the destruction of many other temples. But then, a wealth of documents, written from the 17th century onwards, by European travellers and by local Muslims, confirm unanimously that the Babri Masjid was considered to have been built in forcible

²⁴ The VHP evidence bundle, its rebuttal of the BMAC argumentation, a press brief, and some articles generally supporting the VHP viewpoint, have been published as *History versus Casuistry, Evidence of the Ramajanmabhoomi Mandir presented by the Vishva Hindu Parishad to the Government of India in December-January 1990-91*, Voice of India, Delhi 1991. The BMAC evidence bundle has not been published.

²⁵ In the Indian press, there has been a lot of quarrelling about these findings. The full Archaeological Survey of India report on the excavations has still not been published, and the brief version does not give any details because "the entire late period was devoid of any interest". An impression has been created that the excavations have disproven the existence of the pre-Masjid temple. But prof. B.B. Lal and dr. S.P. Gupta (who also participated in the excavations though not as an ASI staff member) have presented all the findings in a filmed BBC interview. Dr. Gupta's written presentation of the findings is a central piece in the VHP bundle.

replacement of a Rama temple. These witnesses also describe firsthand how the place was still revered by the Hindus as Rama's birthsite, and that Hindus always came back to worship as closely as possible to the original temple site: they would not reasonably have done this except in continuation of a tradition dating back to before the Babri Masjid.

Consistent with known patterns. Thirdly, no *ad hoc* hypotheses are needed to support the main hypothesis, no unusual scenarios have to be invented, no unusual motives have to be attributed to the people involved, no conspiracy theory has to be conjured up. The VHP hypothesis merely says that well-established general patterns of Hindu and Muslim behaviour apply to the specific case under consideration:

- Firstly, the fact that a temple stood on the now-disputed site, which is a hilltop overlooking Ayodhya, is in perfect conformity with a world-wide practice of putting important buildings, like castles and temples, on the topographical place of honour. By contrast, the hypothesis that the Babri Masjid had been built on an empty spot, presupposes an abnormal course of events, viz. that the people of the temple city Ayodhya had left the place of honour empty.
- Secondly, the demolition of Hindu temples and their forcible replacement by mosques has been a very persistent behaviour pattern of the Muslim conquerors. The historian Sitaram Goel has published a list of about 2000 mosques in India standing on temple sites; nobody has contradicted the facts presented by him.²⁶ These temple demolitions were consistent with the persecution of "unbelief" carried out by Islamic rulers from Mohammed bin Qasim (who conquered Sindh in 712) to Aurangzeb (the last great Moghul, d.1707), and more recently in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Kashmir. Though there is no lack of *negationists* who try to deny or conceal it, the historical record bears out Will Durant's assessment that "the Mohammedan conquest of India is probably the bloodiest

²⁶ Sitaram Goel: *Hindu Temples, What Happened to Them. Vol. I: A Preliminary Survey* (Voice of India, Delhi 1990). It also contains articles by Arun Shourie, Ram Swarup, prof. Harsh Narain and Jay Dubashi. The second volume, subtitled *The Islamic Evidence* (id. 1991), quotes hundreds of original descriptions of temple destruction and discusses the firm theological basis of this systematic Islamic iconoclasm. The 2000 cases mentioned are only the well-attested ones, not more than the tip of the iceberg.

story in history".²⁷ It is safe to say that the majority of pre-1707 mosques in India has been built in forcible replacement of Hindu temples. Outside India, the Islamic take-over of the most sacred sites of other religions was equally systematic, e.g. the Ka'aba in Mecca, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the Aya Sophia in Istanbul, the Buddhist monastery in Bukhara etc.

- Thirdly, the fact that Hindu temple materials (14 black-stone sculptured pillars) have been used in the Babri Masjid is not an unusual feature requiring a special explanation; on the contrary, it was a fairly common practice meant as a visual display of the victory of Islam over infidelity. It was done in many mosques that have forcibly replaced temples, e.g. the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi (in which a part of the Kashi Vishvanath temple is still visible)²⁸, the Adhayi-Din-ka-Jhonpra mosque in Ajmer, the Quwwat-ul-Islam mosque in Delhi, or, outside India, the Jama Masjid of Damascus (which was a Christian cathedral).
- Fourthly, the fact that Hindus used to keep on revering sacred sites even after mosques had been built on them, is attested by foreigners like Niccolo Manucci in the 17th and Alexander Cunningham in the 19th century.²⁹ By contrast, the hypothesis that Hindus started laying an arbitrary claim on a place firmly occupied by the Muslims (in other words, that they courted repression for no reason at all), is pretty fantastic.

²⁷ Will Durant: *Story of Civilization*, vol.1, p.459 (New York 1972). Prof. K.S. Lal (in *Growth of Muslim Population in Medieval India*, p.90-93 (Research, Delhi 1973)) estimates that the population of India (subcontinent) decreased by 80 million between the conquest of Afghanistan (including the *Hindu Kush*, i.e. "Hindu slaughter") in 1000 and the end of the Delhi Sultanate in 1526 (the subsequent Moghul period was less bloody). Thus, the provincial dynasty of the Bahmani Sultans made it a rule to kill 100,000 Hindus every year. Even if prof. Lal's figures are exaggerated, the Hindu victims of Islam certainly outnumber the Jewish victims of Nazism.

²⁸ This incorporation of Hindu temple materials in mosques is cynically held up as a showpiece of "composite culture" and a "living evidence of secularism" by the friends of Islam (such as Congress MP Mani Shankar Aiyar, cited to this effect by Swapan Dasgupta, *Sunday*, 10/5/1992).

²⁹ A testimony to the same effect is also given by the Portuguese historian Gaspar Correa, who describes how Hindus continued their annual procession to the site of the Kapalishwara temple on Mylapore beach (Madras), even after the temple had been forcibly replaced with a Catholic church (quoted in Ishwar Sharan: *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*, Voice of India, Delhi 1991, p.18-19).

No first-hand account. The VHP evidence bundle also contained a large number of quotes from ancient literature to prove that the Rama cult is not a recent development, and that the status of Ayodhya as a sacred city has been uninterrupted since at least 2000 years. The one thing that is missing is the ultimate clinching evidence: a contemporary description of the forcible replacement of the temple with the mosque. But even in the absence of this item of primary evidence, the amount of secondary evidence is so overwhelming, coherent and uncontradicted, that in another, less contentious historical search, it would be considered conclusive.

It may be recalled that, in the course of the public debate on the opinion pages of the newspapers, the pro-BMAC polemicists had at first demanded non-British evidence, because the whole Janmabhoomi tradition was merely a British concoction. In A.G. Noorani's categorical words: "The myth is a 19th-century creation by the British."³⁰

Next, they demanded pre-19th-century evidence, because Hindus and Muslims had already "interiorized the British propaganda" early in that century, as is clear from a number of writings by local Muslims, brought to light by prof. Harsh Narain. Thus, Mirza Jan, a Muslim militant who participated in an attempt to wrest from the Hindus another sacred site in Ayodhya, the Hanumangarhi, wrote in 1856 that "a lofty mosque has been built by *badshah* Babar" on "the original birthplace of Rama", in application of the rule that "where there was a big temple, a big mosque was constructed, and where there was a small temple, a small mosque was constructed".³¹ Therefore, Muslim leader Md. Abdul Rahim Qureishi has asked the pro-Janmabhoomi polemicists "to produce any historical evidence, not only independent of the British sources but also of the period prior to the advent of the 19th century".³²

But this type of evidence was also produced: most publicly the Austrian Jesuit Joseph Tieffenthaler's 1767 account, presented by mr. A.K. Chatterjee in *Indian Express*. Tieffenthaler describes how Hindus celebrated *Ram Navami* (commemorating Rama's birth) just outside the Babri Masjid, and recounts the local tradition that

³⁰ In A.A. Engineer ed.: *op.cit.*, p.66 ("The Babri Masjid Ram Janmabhoomi Question", originally published in *Economic and Political Weekly*).

³¹ Mirza Jan: *Hadiqa-i Shabada* ("The garden of martyrdom"), Lucknow 1856, included in the VHP evidence bundle.

³² *Indian Express*, 13/3/1990.

the mosque was built in forcible replacement of Rama's birthplace temple.³³

It was also pointed out that the Muslim writer Mirza Jan, already mentioned, had given an extensive quotation from an (otherwise unknown) letter by a daughter of Aurangzeb's son and successor, Bahadur Shah. He quotes her as writing in about 1710 that the temples on the sacred sites of Shiva, Krishna and Rama (including "Sita's kitchen", i.e. part of the Ramkot complex) "were all demolished for the strength of Islam, and at all these places mosques have been constructed". She exhorted the Muslims to assert their presence at these mosques and not to give in to Hindu compromise proposals.³⁴

Furthermore, a letter dated 1735 by a Faizabad *qazi* (judge) was shown, describing Hindu-Muslim riots in Ayodhya over "the Masjid built by the emperor of Delhi", i.e. either a pre-Moghul sultan or Moghul dynasty founder Babar (Aurangzeb moved the Moghul capital from Delhi/Agra to the Dekkhan). This is only a secondary indication for the actual temple destruction, but it is first-hand evidence for the existence of the Hindu claim on the Babri Masjid site well before the 19th century. Only when this type of evidence was shown, did the pro-BMAC polemicists move on to demand strictly contemporary evidence.

About this demand for eye-witness accounts, Arun Shourie has remarked: "Today a contemporary account is being demanded in the case of the Babri Masjid. Are those who make this demand prepared to accept this as the criterion — that if a contemporary account exists of the destruction of a temple for constructing a mosque, the case is made?" Shourie goes on to quote from Aurangzeb's court chronicles: "News came to Court that in accordance with the Emperor's command his officers had demolished the temple of Vishvanath at Benares (2/9/1669)... In this month of Ramzan, the religious-minded Emperor ordered the demolition of the temple at Mathura... In a short time by the great exertions of his officers the destruction of this strong centre of infidelity was accomplished... A grand mosque was built on its site... (January

³³ *Indian Express*, 27/3/1990. It is included, with the whole ensuing polemical exchange with Syed Shahabuddin, as appendix 4 in *History versus Casuistry*.

³⁴ The title of the princess's text is given as *Sabifa-i Chahal Nasaib Bahadur Shahi* (Persian: "Letter of the Forty Advice of Bahadur Shah"). It is included in the VHP evidence bundle.

1670)³⁵ These accounts are as contemporary as you can get. Shourie concludes: "If the fact that a contemporary account of the temple at Ayodhya is not available leaves the matter unsettled, does the fact that contemporary accounts are available for the temples at Kashi, Mathura, Pandharpur and a host of other places settle the matter? One has only to ask the question to know that the 'experts' and 'intellectuals' will immediately ask for something else."³⁶

Concealment of evidence. The VHP scholars have listed some attempts by BMAC sympathizers to conceal, obliterate or change evidence. Recent editions of Urdu books (by Maulvi Abdul Karim and by Shaikh Md. Azamat Ali Nami) have suppressed chapters or passages relating the temple destruction on Ramkot hill which were present in earlier editions or in the manuscript. In an English translation of a book by Maulana Hakim Saiyid Abdul Hai, the relevant passages present in the Urdu original had been censored out, and an effort was discovered to remove all the copies of the Urdu original from the libraries. On maps included in the Settlement Record of 1861, which describe the disputed area as *Janmasthan*, "birthplace", someone had added "Babari Masjid"; the interpolation was obvious after comparison with a copy of the document kept in another office. The fact that this official document could be tampered with, may well be related to the fact that the then Revenue Minister of Uttar Pradesh was an office-bearer of the BMAC.

In my opinion, these petty and clumsy attempts to tamper with the corpus of evidence, are child's play compared with the concealment of evidence by professional scholars sympathetic to the Babri Masjid cause. In their publications on this dispute, A.A. Engineer and prof. S. Gopal have simply kept all the inconvenient (mainly pre-British) testimonies out of the picture, and just acted as if these did not exist. In his reply to the anti-Janmabhoomi statement *The*

³⁵ Percival Spear has the effrontery to declare: "Aurangzeb's supposed intolerance is little more than a hostile legend". (*Penguin History of India*, vol.2, p.56) This puts him in the same category as Robert Faurisson and David Irving, who consider Hitler's crimes against humanity as merely a hostile legend. The contemporary records show Aurangzeb as a pious man who faithfully practised his religion and *therefore* persecuted the unbelievers (e.g. beheading the Sikh guru Tegh Bahadur who protested against forced conversion) and destroyed their temples by the thousands. About the denial of Islamic crimes against humanity, see my *Negationism in India* (Voice of India, Delhi 1992).

³⁶ A. Shourie: *Take Over from the Experts*, syndicated column, included in *History versus Casuistry* as appendix 1.

Political Abuse of History by 25 historians of JNU, prof. A.R. Khan shows grounds to accuse *the eminent JNU historians* of "not only concealment but also distortion of evidence".³⁷ It is not unfair to conclude that some of the pro-BMAC authors have committed serious breaches of academic deontology. (For me personally, seeing this shameless overruling of historical evidence with a high-handed use of academic and media power, was the immediate reason to involve myself in this controversial question.)

Old consensus. The VHP has also reminded the public that its own "hypothesis" on the Babri Masjid's history had been a matter of universal consensus until a few years ago. Even the Muslim participants in court cases in the British period had not challenged it; on the contrary, Muslim authors expressed pride in this monument of Islamic victory over infidelity. It is only years after the Hindu take-over of the structure that denials started to be voiced.³⁸ And it is only in 1989 that a large-scale press campaign was launched to deny what had earlier been a universally accepted fact. The present debate is between a tradition which numerous observers and scholars had found coherent and well-founded, and an artificial hypothesis based on political compulsions instead of on newly discovered facts.

4. The Outcome

On January 10, both sides submitted rejoinders to their opponents' evidence bundles. At least, the VHP scholars gave a detailed reply to all the documents presented by the BMAC. But the latter merely handed in yet another pile of newspaper articles and more such non-evidential statements of opinion. This created the impression that the BMAC was effectively conceding defeat.

On January 24, the parties met in order to discuss the evidence. But the BMAC team leader, a well-known Marxist historian, said that he and his colleagues had not yet studied the VHP material (to which the BMAC had agreed to reply by January 10). This is most remarkable, because the week before, he had led 42 academics in signing a much-publicized statement, saying that there was defi-

³⁷ *Indian Express*, 25/2/1990, and included, with rejoinder and re-reply, in *History versus Casuistry* as appendix 2.

³⁸ In the 1961 Faizabad Gazetteer, Mrs. E.B. Joshi, while not yet denying the traditional account relayed in the earlier Gazetteers, suppresses it without giving any reason for doing so, probably on orders of the Nehru administration.

nately absolutely no proof whatsoever at all for the pre-existing Rama temple. He had issued more statements on the matter, and even published a small book on it.³⁹ There he was, pleading a lack of familiarity with the very material on which he had been making such tall statements. The next meeting was scheduled for the next day, January 25. But there, the BMAC scholars simply did not show up. The unambiguous result of the debate was this: the BMAC scholars have run away from the arena. They had not presented written evidence worth the name, they had not given a written refutation of the VHP scholars' arguments, they had wriggled out of a face-to-face discussion on the accumulated evidence, and finally they had just stayed away.

Thus ended the first attempt by the Government of India to find an amicable solution on the basis of genuine historical facts. While the political struggle continues, genuine progress has at least been made at the level of the scholarly assessment of the relevant historical material. The doubts that had been sown in the last few years, have now been replaced with a restoration of the virtual certainty that the Babri Masjid has indeed been built on the ruins of a Hindu temple.

5. Reactions to the debate's results

The clear-cut result of the debate is still not widely known. Most of the Indian English-language papers, as well as the official electronic media, have all along been on the side of the BMAC, and they have strictly kept the lid on this information. Their reporting on the scholars' debate has been very partial and, from the moment the BMAC's defeat became clear, increasingly vague.

As if it never happened. If any proof is needed that the BMAC has been defeated in this debate, it is this: no one sympathetic to the Babri Masjid cause has made any reference to the outcome of this debate all through the subsequent year, eventhough

³⁹ Prof. R.S. Sharma: *Communal History and Rama's Ayodhya*, People's Publishing House, Delhi 1990. The other historians for the BMAC were Athar Ali, D.N. Jha and Suraj Bhan, apart from the office bearers of the BMAC itself. The four historians have published their argumentation some months later: *Ramjanmabhumi Baburi Masjid, A Historians' Report to the Nation*, People's Publishing House, Delhi 1991. They do not mention the outcome of the debate, but reiterate (p.4) the ludicrous demand they made while attending the debate as BMAC advocates, viz. that they be considered "independent historians" qualified to pronounce scientific judgment in a debate between their employers and their enemies.

the Ayodhya issue has frequently reappeared in the news. Politicians have made a show of their "secularism" and their opposition to "religious fanaticism" by organizing "fact-finding missions" to Ayodhya and issuing statements on the dispute, but they have not made any reference to the outcome of the scholars' debate at all, even though it had been a very official affair hosted by the Government of India. When reading about the subsequent course of the Ayodhya controversy, one might get the impression that the scholars' debate never took place. At the time when the debate took place, there have been some cases of crass disinformation, even in well-reputed papers which foreign correspondents use as their sole source of information on internal Indian issues, so that the foreign press has unknowingly spread a highly distorted picture of the Ayodhya debate.⁴⁰ Many people including sincere scholars have been over-awed by the Indian media's (implying by imitation the international media's) massive support to the BMAC viewpoint and the equally systematic vilification of the VHP and of the experts supporting it. This campaign of vilification has not even spared prof. B.B. Lal, generally acknowledged as one of the world's greatest archaeologists. On several occasions, well-known Marxist historians have insinuated that he has changed his conclusions about the pre-existent temple in order to satisfy the "requirements of VHP politics".⁴¹ The same people have also falsely accused dr. S.P. Gupta, former director of the National Museum at Allahabad and member of the VHP experts' team, of falsely claiming participation in the Ayodhya excavations. The allegations and insinuations have been repeated even after detailed refutations were published.

⁴⁰ For instance, in the article *No Pillar-bases at Ayodhya: ASI Report* in *Times of India*, 7/12/90, and in A.G. Noorani's *op.cit.*, it is claimed that B.B. Lal's brief report contradicts the VHP claim. The fact of the matter is that the full report of B.B. Lal's findings is still not published, and that the brief report which the journalists had seen, explicitly refrains from giving details of the medieval findings, let alone declaring: "No pillar-bases at Ayodhya". It is rather odd to use the brief version of the report to disprove the detailed version of the same report's relevant part which B.B. Lal himself had just made public.

⁴¹ Thus the JNU historians Romila Thapar, S. Gopal and K.N. Panikkar in *Indian Express*, 5/12/1990. Among those who came out in prof. Lal's defence and certified his statements are: K.V. Soundarajan (ASI), I. Mahadevan, R. Nath, prof. K.V. Raman, K.K. Mohammed (ASI, the only Muslim who participated in the Ayodhya excavations). In a speech to the Aligarh Historians Group (12/2/1991, published in *Muslim India*, 5/1991), prof. Irfan Habib has made personal attacks on prof. B.R. Grover, prof. B.P. Sinha, prof. K.S. Lal and dr. S.P. Gupta, who have represented the VHP in the scholars' debate, and on prof. B.B. Lal.

Vacant temple foundations. The only comment on the VHP evidence bundle (but not reporting the outcome of the debate either) published in the national press was a derogatory piece by Bhupendra Yadav in *The Tribune*.⁴² In his despair at finding that "proven secularists", like R. Nath and B.B. Lal, "are now nodding assent to the argument for Ram Janmabhoomi", he does try to propose an alternative to the temple destruction scenario. Acknowledging the crucial archaeological finding of 11th-century temple foundations underneath the Babri Masjid, he comes up with the following explanation: "After they occupied Ayodhya in AD 1194, the Turkish sultans found a vacant mound at Ramkot in which lay buried the burnt pillar bases. The sultans encouraged settlements of Muslims on the mound... To help these Muslims pray, officials of the Babar regime built a mosque in AD 1528."

So, after the cream of Muslim and Marxist historians has used all its resources to support the Babri Masjid cause, all that Bhupendra Yadav can come up with, is the hypothesis that: 1) the Hindus of Ayodhya had left the geographical place of honour "vacant", unlike the people of every other city in the whole world; 2) they had laid the foundations (the pillar-bases of burnt brick) for a pillared building which they never constructed, and waited for others to come and put these foundations to proper use. This hypothesis is pretty fantastic, and implies that Hindus are fools who lay foundations of buildings they will never build. But at least mr. Yadav has the merit of explicating what most people who deny the temple destruction scenario only claim by implication.

Debate dodgers. When asked in public forums about the results of the scholars' debate, both prof. Irfan Habib (historian at Aligarh Muslim University) and Subodh Kant Sahay (who was the Home Minister at the time of the debate) have declared that "the VHP has run away from the debate". Leading newspapers have refused to publish denials of this allegation. In fact, this unfounded allegation provides an interesting illustration of the psychology of lies. Liars are often not very creative, and they tend to say things that are partly inspired on the truth. Thus, prof. Habib and mr. Sahay are perfectly right in alleging that the debate has ended because one of the parties has "run away from the debate": to that

⁴² Bhupendra Yadav: "Temple issue built on weak base", in *The Tribune*, 7/3/1992.

extent, their version is transparent of the truth. Only, it is not the VHP but the BMAC which has turned its back on the debate.

Fresh evidence. In the first week of July 1992, a team of eight reputed archaeologists, including former ASI directors dr. Y.D. Sharma and dr. K.M. Srivastava, paid a visit to the Ramkot hill in Ayodhya. They went there to verify and evaluate the findings done by labourers who had been clearing the area around the Babri Masjid on orders of the Uttar Pradesh Department of Tourism. The findings included religious sculptures, among them a statue of Vishnu (of whom Rama is considered an incarnation), and a lot of rubble thrown together in a deep cavity in front of the Babri Masjid structure. Team members said the inner boundary of the disputed structure rests, at least on one side, on an earlier existing structure, which "may have belonged to an earlier temple".⁴³ They pleaded for a more systematic survey of the entire hill.

6. Conclusion.

Many outsiders still believe that the VHP case is based on "myth" and "concoction", as the BMAC and its Marxist supporters have kept on alleging.⁴⁴ Foreign correspondents have simply parroted the views of the Marxist JNU historians in support of the Babri Masjid cause (as well as their silence about the scholars' debate).⁴⁵ Many more people, including sincere but uninformed scholars, assume *a priori* that "the truth must lie somewhere in the middle", and that both sides are just equally unreliable hot-heads.

A scrutiny of the available historical material clearly shows that the truth does not lie halfway between the recent politicized hypothesis and the centuries-old consensus, and that the former is not half right, nor the latter half wrong. By all standards of historical method, the case for the thesis that the Babri Masjid has replaced a

⁴³ *Indian Express*, 4/7/1992.

⁴⁴ This stand is still taken by most contributors to Sarvepalli Gopal ed.: *Anatomy of a Confrontation, the Babri Masjid/Ram Janmabhoomi Issue* (Penguin, Delhi 1991), which probably contains the final Marxist position in this debate. The book (and the sycophantic reviews it has received) avoids mentioning the pre-British testimonies and carefully ignores the scholars' debate as well as other scholarly expositions of the Hindu case.

⁴⁵ For instance, in his review of S. Gopal ed.: *Anatomy of a Confrontation*, Edward Desmond adopts the JNU historians' contentions lock, stock and barrel (*New York Review of Books*, 14/5/1992). He conceals what they conceal: the findings which support the Hindu case, and the government-sponsored debate with its embarrassing outcome. Desmond also adds his bit to the slander campaign against prof. B.B. Lal by simply dismissing the latter's archaeological findings as "bogus".

pre-existent Hindu temple is strong, if not overwhelming. It should be accepted unless and until evidence to the contrary is produced — and that is precisely what the BMAC experts have failed to do when the government provided them with an official forum for doing so.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Other publications on this issue are: Surinder Kaur and Tapan Sanyal: *The Secular Emperor Babar* (Lokgeet Prakashan, Sirhind 1987); C. Rajeswara Rao and Shameem Faizee: *Babri Masjid Ram Janam Bhoomi Controversy* (Communist Party Publ., 1989); id. and Satyapal Dange: *Latest Situation of Ram Janmaboomi Babri Masjid Controversy* (id. 1990); Kamalpathi Tripathi, Mulk Raj Anand and Hiren Mukherjee: *Three Eminent Personalities on the Ram Janmaboomi-Babri Masjid Controversy*, (Communist Party Publ., 1989); L.K. Advani: *Ramjanmaboomi: Honour People's Sentiments* (BJP, Delhi 1989); J.C. Aggarwal and N.K. Chowdhry: *Ram Janmaboomi through the Ages* (S. Chand & Co., Delhi 1991); E. Chandran: *Ram Janmaboomi* (Cosmos Bookhive, Delhi 1990, English and Hindi); Santosh Kumar et al.: *Hindu Navotthan* (Suruchi Prakashan, Delhi 1991); Bhalu Pratap Shukla: *Sbilanyas se Shikhar ki Or* (Suruchi Prakashan 1990); Rajendra Singh: *Sikh Itibas mein Sri Ram Janmaboomi* (Bharat-Bharati, Delhi 1991).

Sri Rama Janma Bhumi

by

Justice Deeki Nandan Agarwala

The history of the liberation of Sri Rama Janma Bhumi from the tentacles of Muslim marauders is blood-stained. I shall not repeat it, but briefly recount the landmarks to place the matter in its proper perspective.

The indisputable facts are that there was a temple of the time of Maharaja Vikramaditya at Sri Rama Janma Bhumi. It had 84 pillars of touchstone, **Kasauti**, some of which are still extant in the building standing thereat. Babar, a Moghul invader, established his hegemony on Northern India, by winning the battle of Panipat in 1526 A.D. In 1528 A.D. he ordered Mir Baqi the commander of his forces, to destroy the Temple and build a mosque at Sri Rama Janma Bhumi.

According to the District Gazetteer of Faizabad', 1928 Edition, page 179-180—"It is locally affirmed that at the time of the Musalman conquest there were three important Hindu shrines at Ayodhya and little else. These were the Janmasthan temple, the Swargaddwar and the Tretaka-Thakur, and each was successively made the object of attention of different Musalman rulers. The Janmasthan was in Ramkot and marked the birthplace of Rama. In 1528 A.D. Babar came to Ayodhya and halted here for a week. He destroyed the ancient temple and on its site built a mosque, still known as Babar's mosque. The materials of the old structure were largely employed, and many of the columns are in good preservation; they are of close-grained black stone, called... **Kasauti**, and carved with various device. Their length is from seven to eight feet, and the shape square at the base, centre and capital, the rest being round or octagonal. The mosque has two inscriptions, one on the outside and the other on the pulpit; both are in Persian and bear the date 935 Hijri. Of the authenticity of the inscriptions there can be no doubt, but no record of the visit to Ayodhya is to be found in the Musalman historians. It must have occurred about the time of his expedition to Bihar.

"This desecration of the most sacred spot in the city caused great bitterness between Hindus and Musalmans. On many occasions the feeling led to bloodshed, and in 1855 an open fight occurred, the Musalman occupying the Janmasthan 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 Hindus then made a counter-attack and stormed the Janmasthan, at the gate of which seventy-five Musalmans were buried, the spot being known as the **Ganj Shahidan** or the martyrs' resting place. Several of the king's regiments were present, but their orders were not to interfere. Shortly afterwards Maulvi Amir Ali of Amethi in Lucknow organised a regular expedition with the object of destroying the Hanuman Garhi; but he and his

forces were stopped in the Bara Banki district. It is said; that up to this time both Hindus and Musalmans used to worship in the same building; but since the 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 "

Nawab Wajid Ali Shah who ruled Oudh in 1855, is reported to have silenced someone who protested against his direction to the armies not to interfere, with the following couplet-

हम इश्क के बन्दे हैं मजहब से नहीं वाकिफ ।
गर काबा हुआ तो क्या बुतखाना हो तो क्या ॥

It is thus established that immediately before the annexation of Oudh by the British, Sri Rama Janma Bhumi was in the possession of the Hindus and that it was after the first war of independence, miscalled the mutiny of 1857, that access to the inside of the building was prevented by the British by raising an enclosure; but the Hindus continued to make their offerings to **Bhagwan Sri Rama Lala Virajman** on the platform in the outer yard.

Minarets are essential for a mosque. According to Ganapathi Aiyar: 'The Law relating to Hindu and Mahomedan Endowments', 2nd Edition, 1918, Chap. XVII, at page 388: "After the first half century from the Flight there is no mosque with out a minaret" The reason given is that the muazzin gives the call for prayers, called **azan**, from the upper gallery of the minaret According to Baillie, "When an assembly of worshippers pray in a **masjid** with permission, that is delivery. But it is condition that the prayers be with **azan**, or the regular call, and be public not private, for though there should be an assembly yet if it is without **azan**, and the prayers are private instead of public, the place is no **masjid**." [Ibid, page 390]. And the call of **azan** could not be made and properly given to the faithful without a minaret.

The building at Sri Rama Janma Bhumi has no minarets. Whether one believes in the legends connected with the attempted construction of the mosque by Babar's hordes, which say that whatever was constructed during the day collapsed during the night, but the fact remains that the construction of the minarets was effectively prevented, or at any rate could not be completed. It cannot be assumed that Babar and his men, or at any rate the Faqir Fazal Abbas Qalander, for whose sake Babar is said to have ordered the demolition of the Temple and construction of mosque at its place, did not know that minarets are necessary before any building could be used as a mosque. Further, the premises of a mosque must be exclusively used as the house of Allah, for offering prayers to Him and for no other purpose. In the case of Sri Rama Janma Bhumi, the worship of **Bhagwan Sri Rama Lala Viraiman** there has gone on even after the destruction of the temple of Mahraja Vikramaditya's time, on the **Chabutra** in

the courtyard directly in front of the open arches of the building, and there are the **Sita Rasoi** and the **Charan**, which are also worshipped by the Hindus, within the courtyard of the building. The passage into the building is through that courtyard which has always been in the possession of the Hindus. The **Kasauti** columns still have Hindu engravings. The passage to a mosque must be exclusive and open to the faithful at all times. There can be no sharing of possession in the case of a mosque.

It is said that during the reign of Akbar, a temple was constructed over the **Chabutra** where **Bhagwan Sri Rama Lala** has been **Virajman** ever since the destruction of the **Vikramaditya** temple. That is said to have been destroyed by Aurangzeb, but even that fanatic iconoclast did not succeed in erecting minarets and completing the construction of the mosque at Sri Rama Janma Bhumi. Re-erection of the temple on the **Chabutra** was not allowed by the British, as would appear from a judgment of 1885 passed by the Sub-Judge Faizabad, in a suit for permission to do so, though the right of the Hindus to worship thereat was expressly upheld. Such a place cannot be a mosque. There is no evidence of any **azan** having been called or of any prayers having been said by the Muslim at that place within living memory. There is no evidence of any **Mutwalli** or **Imam** or **Muazzin**, or **Khatib** or **Khadim**, of that place, notwithstanding that the Muslims claim that it is '**Babari Masjid**' or the Moghul Emperor Babar's mosque.

Then the miracle occurred. On the third day of the bright phase of the Moon of the month of Paush of Vikram Samvat 2006, **Bhagwan Sri Rama Lala** manifested Himself under the central dome of the building and His Idol was consecrated and installed there with great eclat by His devotees who were present there in very large numbers. The event has been celebrated every year thereafter as the **Prakatya Diwas**. The worship of **Sri Rama Lala Virajman** under the central dome of the building has been going on ever since. The right of the Hindus to do so was recognized and has been protected by the Court of the Civil Judge, Faizabad, by an interim injunction issued in suit No. 2 of 1950 on January 16, 1950, against five Muslim individuals, and the Government of Uttar Pradesh and the District authorities, prohibiting them from removing the Idol of Bhagwan Sri Rama Chandraji installed under the central dome of the building and interfering in **His Puja** by the Hindus.

Another identical suit No. 25 of 1950 was filed shortly thereafter and the suits were consolidated. The interim injunction was confirmed by the Court of Civil Judge on March 3, 1951, after hearing the defendants, who appealed therefrom to the High Court. A Division Bench of the High Court dismissed the appeal on April 26, 1955, and affirmed the interim injunction. The High Court also directed the trial Court to decide the suit speedily, but the matter lingered on. The Sunni Central Board of Waqfs, U.P., filed on December 18, 1961, a suit No. 12 of 1961 in the Court of Civil Judge, Faizabad, for a declaration that the place called '**Babari Masjid**' is a mosque and its surrounding area a grave-yard of the martyrs called **Ganj Shahidan** and for delivery of

3

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possession by the removal of the Idol installed therein on the night of December 22/23, 1949. This suit was made the leading suit. The suits have remained pending in the trial court. The youngest of them now celebrates the silver jubilee of its pendency. Such is the **Lila** of Bhagwan Sri Rama.

A Muslim Havaladar named Abdul Barkat who was on duty at the Police outpost situated at Sri Rama Janma Bhumi made a statement before the District Magistrate that he saw a flash of a Divine Light inside the building round about 2, o' clock during the night of December 22/23, 1949, the colour of which was golden and in which he saw the figure of a gold like child of four five years, the like of whom he had never seen in his life, which sent him into a trance, and that when he recovered his senses, he found that the lock on the main gate was lying broken open and an innumerable crowd of Hindus had entered the building and were performing the **Arti** of an Idol placed on a **Singhasan**, reciting भये प्रकट हुआला दीन दयाला A formal report recorded in the Police Station of the town on December, 23, 1949, by the Station Officer Incharge, also records the fact of installation of the Idol of Bhagwan Sri Rama inside the building of Babari Masjid by a very large crowd who had entered therein by breaking open the locks, and that a crowd of about five to six thousand Hindus had collected there who were chanting '**Kirtan**' and were simultaneously trying to go inside but nothing untoward happened because of the existence of proper arrangements

The worship has gone on unabated and uninterrupted ever since. But in course of these long years, it appears that sometimes after 1955, when the interim injunction, issued by the Civil Judge, was confirmed even by the High Court, and all that the Government and the local administration could do was to honour the injunction and strictly implement it, the Police Force which was posted thereat for preserving law and order placed locks on the doors of the inner courtyard and did not allow all and sundry to enter the inner courtyard or the inside of the building for offering puja. That gave the impression to the general Hindu public who flocked there to offer puja that Bhagwan Sri Rama Chandra Ji Maharaj had been locked behind iron bars by the Government, as His **Darshan** could be had only through the iron grating of the main gate of the inner courtyard which had a pedlock hanging over it. This was a National shame for the Hindus.

At its session held at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi, on April 7 & 8, 1984, the Dharma Sansad of the Vishva Hindu Parishad gave a call for the removal of the three mosques built by Muslim marauders after destroying the ancient Hindu temples at Sri Rama Janma Bhumi Ayodhya, and Sri Krishna Janmasthan at Mathura, and the old Vishwanath temple at Kashi. The so called Babari Masjid' at Ayodhya was taken up first. **Sri Rama Janma Bhumi Mukti Yagna Samiti** was formed with Sri Dau Dayal Khanna as its convener and Gorakshapeethadishwar Mahant Sri Avedya Nathji as its President. In order to create National awareness and arouse public opinion in support of the cause of liberation of Sri Rama Janma Bhumi, the Vishva Hindu Parishad

organised a **Ratha-yatra** of **Sri Rama Janakiji Virajman** on a motorised chariot, which started from Sitamarhi in Bihar on September 25, 1984. The **Ratha** passed through important towns of Bihar and reached Ayodhya on October 6, 1984. October 7, 1984 was observed as the **Sankalp Diwas**, when thousands of people assembled on the banks off the river Saryu at Ayodhya pledged all support for the liberation of Sri Rama Janma Bhumi by peaceful means. Similar meetings were held at other places too like the banks of Ganga at Triveni Sangam, Prayag.

On the morning of October 8, 1984, **Sri Rama Janki** started on its **Dharma-yatra** from Ayodhya to Lucknow. It reached Lucknow on October 14, 1984, and a public meeting was held there that day. It is said that such a large gathering of people had never before assembled at Lucknow. A delegation met the then Chief Minister of U.P., later in the evening, and placed before him the demand for the liberation of the said three places of Hindu worship and their return to the Hindus. The motorised **Ratha** of **Sri Rama Janki Virajman** wended its way through Nemisharanya and Chitrakoot and was yet to reach Delhi when the news of the gaestardly assassination of Indira Gandhi was flashed on October 31, 1984, and the **Ratha** was there-upon garaged at Delhi and its **yatra** discontinued for the time being. The **Ratha-yatra** of **Sri Rama Janki Virajman** was again started on the following **Vijaya-dashmi** day, October 23, 1985, on seven **Rathas**, six in Uttar Pradesh and one in Bihar.

On October 31, and November 1, 1985, the Dharma Sansad met at Udupi. The leading Saints and Mahatmas of India assembled there. They re-iterated the call for the liberation of Sri Rama Janma Bhumi and handing over of its management to Jagadguru Swami Ramanand-acharya Sri Shivaramacharyaji Maharaj of Kashi, and they resolved that if that was not achieved latest by Shivaratri, March 8, 1986, they would resort to a country wide satyagraha thereafter. Paramhans Mahant Sri Ramachandradas of Digambar Akhara, Ayodhya, who had instituted the suit for injunction: Suit No. 25 of 1950 in the Court of Civil Judge, Faizabad as the Plaintiff way back in the year 1950, and is still going strong at the age of 75, publicly declared his resolve to immolate himself on the Ramanavmi if Sri Rama Janma Bhumi was not liberated by then.

The impact of the **Ratha-yatra** of **Sri Rama Janki Virajman** on the public consciousness was electrifying. The issue caught the imagination of the Hindu Public, and the pressure of public opinion was mounting everyday. On December 19, 1985, Sri Veer Bahadur Singh, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh visited Ayodhya on the occasion of a **Ramayana Mela** sponsored by the Government Agencies. A few of us headed by our President Justice Shiva Nath Katju, had assembled at Ayodhya to press the demand for liberation of Sri Rama Janma Bhumi on the occasion of the Chief Minister's visit that day. To avoid confrontation we met the Chief Minister in a delegation and brought to his notice that the locks on the gates of the inner courtyard at Sri Rama Janma Bhumi had not been put under the orders of any Court or Magistrate, but

were wholly unauthorised and interfered with the free exercise of their Constitutional Right of worship of Bhagwan Sri Rama installed inside the Building by the Hindus. The Chief Minister did not then give any reply but quietly listened to all that was said before him in an impassioned plea for the removal of the said locks and the bar placed thereby on the entry of the general public into the inner courtyard and inside of the building for having a better darshan of their Deity of **Bhagwan Sri Rama Lala Virajman** there. But a close search of the records appears to have been ordered, for when the matter was taken to Court by a Hindu Lawyer, the District Magistrate: Faizabad, candidly admitted before the District Judge, on February 1, 1986, that there was no order of any Court of Magistrate for the locking of the premises, and that he could not say as to when and under what circumstances the locks came to be placed on the two gates of the inner courtyard at Sri Rama Janma Bhumi. The locks, he said, were not necessary for preserving public peace at the place. The Senior Superintendent of Police, Faizabad, who was also examined by the District Judge, the same day, was more specific. He said very confidently that he could maintain law and order at Sri Rama Janma Bhumi, whether the locks were there or not there. The District Judge, Faizabad, thereupon, promptly allowed the appeal of the Hindu Lawyer Sri Umesh Chandra Pandey, and ordered the removal of the locks forthwith. That order was instantaneously carried out by the District Authorities; indeed, in as much time as it took a Police Officer to reach Sri Rama Janma Bhumi at Ayodhya, from the Court room of the District Judge at Faizabad.

The date February, 1, 1986 equivalent to the seventh day of the dark phase of the moon of the month of Magh of Vikram Samvat 2042 was incidentally the Jayanti of Sri Adi Ramanandacharyaji Maharaj. A Trust called "Sri Rama Janma Bhoomi Nyas," for the renovation, reconstruction and development of Sri Rama Janma Bhoomi, the Temple of Bhagwan Sri Rama situate thereat, its premises and the surrounding area had already been set up and declared by Jagadguru Ramanandacharya Swami Shivaramacharyaji of Kashi by deed dated the seventh day of the bright phase of the moon of the month of Margashirsha of Vikram Samvat 2042 with himself as the Pramukh, and Jagadguru Varishtha Shankaracharya Sri Swami Shantananda Saraswati, Sri Goraksha peethadhiswara Mahant Avidnathji Maharaj of Gorakhpur, Sri Mahant Nritya Gopal Dasji Maharaj of Maniram Chhawni (Ayodhya), Santapravara Sri Prabhudutt Ji Brahmachari of Sankirtan Bhavan, Jhusi, Prayag, Sri Mathant Ramkewal Das Ji Maharaj of Nirmohi Akhara, Ayodhya, Shri Vishnu Hari Dalmla, Sri Ashok Singhal and Sri Dau Dayal Khanna, as the Trustees.

At a meeting of the Sant Samaj held at Ayodhya on the 11th day of the bright phase of the moon of the month of Chaitra of Vikram Samvat 2043, all the rights of management of the places of worship in the outer courtyard of the premises of Sri Rama Janma Bhoomi and the **Katha Mandap** with all its appurtenant land, situate in front there of, were surrendered in favour of Sri Rama Janma Bhoomi Nyasa. The dispute that remains now is with U.P. Sunni Central Board of Waqfs

that is pending adjudication before the Civil Courts at Faizabad, in the aforesaid suits of which Suit N: 12 of 1961 filed by the U. P. Sunni Central Board of Waqfs though filed last, is the leading suit. The reliefs claimed in that suit are for a declaration that the building is a Mosque and for removal of the Idols of Bhagwan Sri Rama Chandra Ji Maharaj which was installed therein on the night between December 22 and 23, 1949. On the face of it that suit appears to be barred by limitation and the deity who sits there can not be ordered to be removed as He has not even been made a party to the suit. That may be the reason why the U. P. Sunni Central Board of Waqfs is not effectively prosecuting it. A writ petition was filed by one Mohammed Hashim before the Lucknow Bench of Allahabad High Court for quashing of the Faizabad District Judge's Order dated February 1, 1986, in pursuance of which the locks on the gates of the outer courtyard of the building were ordered to be removed. That has not been admitted yet. Notice was issued to Shri Umesh Chandra Pandey to show cause why it should not be admitted. The U. P. Sunni Central Board of Waqfs thereupon filed another writ petition. That was also not admitted and time was taken to file certain documents, but they have not been filed. Mohammed Hashim then applied for amendment of his writ petition by adding a prayer for removal of the Idol of Bhagwan Sri Rama Chandraji installed inside the building at Sri Rama Janma Bhumi. The matter is being contested by Paramhans Mahant Ramachandra Dasji who is the plaintiff of suit No. 25 of 1950. The matter is thus awaiting adjudication before the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court and the Faizabad Civil Court. But the stance adopted by Muslim communalists is disturbing. Instead of having faith in the Rule of Law, they deliberately fanned communal passions and disturbed the public peace. Hindu Temples were destroyed in Kashmir and Pakistan. A Babri Masjid Action Committee was formed and a vicious propaganda is being carried on for handing over the place to the Muslims on the ground that it was a Mosque. It has been shown above that though the ancient Vikramditya Temple at Sri Rama Janma Bhumi was destroyed by Babar's hordes, the attempt to establish a Mosque at that place never succeeded. The right of the Hindus to restore the Temple to its pristine glory, by demolishing the structure, called Babri Masjid, and rebuilding a Temple befitting the birthplace of Maryada Purushottam Sri Rama Chandraji Maharaj, can't be denied to the Hindus who had dreamed of establishing Rama Rajya after independence of Bharat, even at the cost of partition of the Motherland and creation of a separate homeland for the Muslims, called Pakistan. The fact that we are a democratic republic and recognise and protect the rights of the Minorities, particularly the Muslims, does not mean that the Muslims can be permitted to rely on the atrocities perpetrated by them in the past. The moves of the Babri Masjid Action Committee are plainly mischievous. We only hope and pray that better counsel will prevail with them, and nothing will be done to destroy the unity and integrity of the Bharatiya Rashtra.

The worship of the Deity of Bhagwan Sri Rama Lala Virajman inside the building at Sri Rama Janma Bhumi has been going on admittedly since before December 23,

1949, without interruption and prayers have not been offered there by the Muslims long since before that, The building is not a Mosque at all. The Deity of Bhagwan Sri Rama Lala sits there. The place where the Deity sits is His Temple. The sanctity of the place is hallowed by tradition, for that is the place where Maryada Purushottam Sri Rama was born, or appeared in human form. The removing of the Deity from there hurts the religious sentiments of the Hindus; and our Saints have declared that they would sacrifice their all, even their lives, before that could happen.

The matter whether the place is Mosque is pending adjudication before the Civil Court in the suit filed by the U. P. Sunni Central Board of Waqfs. Although the Vishva Hindu Parishad and that Deity are not parties to the suit, the Vishva Hindu Parishad does not propose to alter or destroy the building in which the Deity is housed at present. Instead of disturbing the public peace, let the Babri Masjid Action Committee impress upon the U. P. Sunni Central Board of Waqfs to take steps for the speedy disposal of their suit No. 12 of 1961 of the Court of Civil Judge, Faizabad. Let them not make a tense situation worse by holding out threats of the kind they have chosen to give out from time to time. We are a democratic people wedded to secularism and Rule of Law. But our love for peace does not mean weakness. We are fully competent and prepared to defend our faith and liberty. We shall maintain the unity and integrity of the Nation at all costs. We shall not allow a new threat of communalism to grow. Let us all join in upholding the Rule of Law and Reason and suppress religious bigotry and passions fanned by some selfish people for narrow sectarian ends. Let us all be true children of Bharat Mata and loyal citizens of India, that is Bharat, and not draw inspiration from outside the country, or work for outside powers for the lure of money. Let us not be misguided, and let us not misguide ourselves. Let us cherish and maintain the freedom of religion and worship guaranteed by our Constitution and so carefully preserved in our democratic Body Politic. Let us help our Government do so. It is our own Government. Let us not destroy the efforts made by the Government for maintaining peace. By disturbing Law & Order, we shall only destroy ourselves.

Indian Moslems Seek Return Of Shrine Handed to Hindus

Special to The New York Times

NEW DELHI, March 30 — More than 150,000 Moslems marched through the capital today to demand the restoration of a disputed shrine that was turned over to Hindus last year.

The shrine, the Babri Masjid, in the northern Indian town of Ayodhya, is revered by Hindus as the birthplace of the god Rama and have vowed to oppose any move to give it to Moslems.

Moslems say the place is a mosque built in the 16th century. It was shut down to both sides when the controversy flared 30 years ago but last year a local judge ordered that it be opened to Hindus.



הקונסוליה הכללית של
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CONSULATE GENERAL
OF ISRAEL IN LOS ANGELES

May 18, 1993

Dear Ramesh,
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visited India. The following
communique may interest you and
your colleagues. *Tsurial Raphael*
With Compliments

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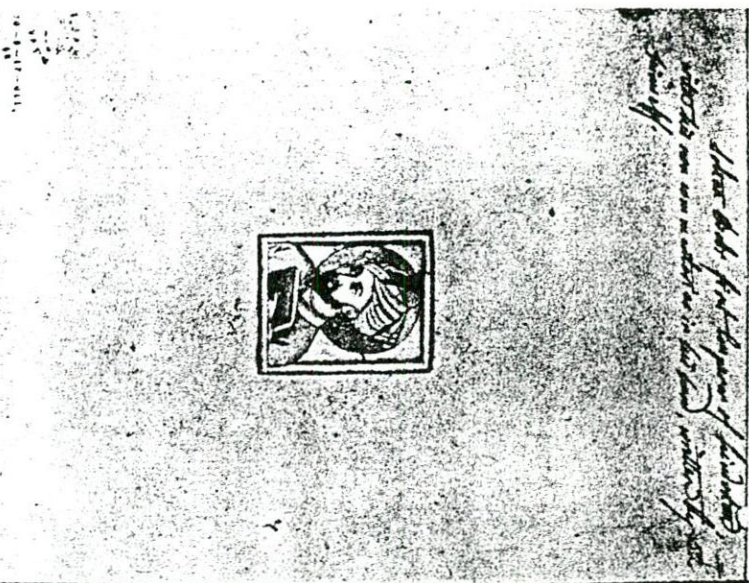
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Rushketh Shahn

BABUR: Diarist and Despot
By S. M. EDWARDES, C.S.I., C.V.O.



LONDON: A. M. PHILPOT LTD.
69, GREAT RUSSELL STREET, W.C.1



BABUR

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PREFACE

THIS sketch of the character of Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur Padshah is based almost entirely upon the most recent English translation of the *Babur-nama* (Memoirs of Babur) by Mrs. A. S. Beveridge, which was published by the Royal Asiatic Society in four fasciculi between 1912 and 1921. As Mrs. Beveridge translated the record direct from the original Turki, her rendering reflects the Emperor's style more faithfully than the earlier translation by Leyden and Erskine of a Persian copy of the *Memoirs*. I have also consulted S. Lane-Poole's excellent study, *Babar*, in the Rulers of India Series (Clarendon Press). The quotations, the main facts, and the various episodes illustrating Babur's character are taken direct from Mrs. Beveridge's work, including her illuminating notes and appendices.

My thanks are due to the authorities of the British Museum, to the Secretary and Director,

Preface

Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington,
and to the Librarian, India Office, for permission
to reproduce the portraits of Babur and the
pictures of his grave and burial garden in Kabul.

S. M. E.

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applied himself to building, and summoned from Constantinople pupils of the famous Albanian architect Sinan, who had designed many important buildings in the Ottoman empire. He states in the *Memoirs* that 680 Indian masons worked daily on his buildings at Agra, and that nearly 1,500 were daily employed on his buildings at Sikri, Biana, Gwalior and other places. Two only of his buildings now survive—a mosque built at Panipat in 1526 to commemorate his victory, and another mosque erected on the site of an ancient temple of Rama in Oudh, which he destroyed in 1528 as a symbol of paganism. The latter mosque bears an inscription, which runs thus:—

By order of the Emperor Babur, whose
justice is an edifice reaching to the very
height of heaven,

The good-hearted Mir Baqi built this
alighting place of angels.

May this goodness last for ever! The
year of building was likewise made
clear when I said—*Buvad Khair baqi*
(= A.H. 935)!

Brahm Agnew

HYPOCRISY NOT A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM

Quit a few Hindus have been quick to express their regret and unhappiness because of the Babri Structure being demolished by some people. This fact in itself show greatness of Indian Culture, Muslims didn't express any shame or regret when several temples were destroyed and Hindus were killed in Kashmir. None of these people expressed any annoyance and unhappiness when Muslims damaged or burnt temples (not one but many and not 400 years ago but under our own nose) and forced 200,000 Hindus to flee Kashmir. They are still living in Refugee Camps in Jammu in poverty.

Is it greatness or Hypocrisy or double standard of Hindu Culture that so many Hindus are expressing unhappiness about the unfortunate incident in India. But, ignore the damaging of Temples in U.K., Dubai, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh. In India the Government reacted immediately and arrested (although the wrong people) thousands of people and no mosque was touched anywhere else in the country. Charity begins at home? One has to be National before being International, starting with welfare of self, family, community, country and then the world. Somehow all Hindus are Philosophers and some of them will worry about either the self or the world, nothing in between. They can either see God in the temple at home, or the Mosque and Church but not in the other Hindu Temples. They can see Divinity in Christ and Mohammed but not in other Hindu swamis or Rish's.

Let us visualize and try to imagine the agony and frustration Hindus must have suffered 400 years ago when Mughal Invaders and recently some Muslims in Kashmir demolished thousands of temples in India. Actually, as a lesson to present and future generation, any feeling or show of respect or association with an invader, should be treated as treason and dealt with as such. The structure carried the name of the Invader so it hurt the self esteem of the people the most. Hindus have had a continuous struggle to recover their self esteem and reestablish their place of worship.

Hindus, in India after allowing for separate countries for muslims to follow their own way of life, have to still struggle for their rights. Creation of east and west Pakistan was supposedly meant to solve the problem forever. If we still have the problem, would it be better to do away with unnatural Partition, like germany did. If we presume that the two Communities can live peacefully without these outbursts of violence off and on then where is the justification for Pakistan and Bangladesh. If we put all the three countries, artificially created by British for their vested interests, together, Kashmir problem, infiltration of Bangladeshis into Assam, water distribution problem, Punjab problem, the ongoing animosity between all the countries can be taken care of. If 100 million muslims that is more than the total population of Pakistan can live in India there is no reason for a separate country for the rest of the Muslims. Some riots off and on and 1200 deaths in a

population of 800 million is not a bad track record. Mahatama Gandhi was very much against Partition of India and it seems he was right, there can not be peace by accepting the 2 nation theory.

Most of the Muslims are converts from Hindus, so they do share a Common culture. It is only the selfish Politicians who exploit the ignorance of people for their self interest. While these riots can not be condoned, must be condemned, such incidents take place in Western Countries because of economic reasons, racism, several events in Germany, U.K. and U.S.A. are vivid examples. Ignoring the Problem or reacting to the symptoms is never a solution to the problem, one has to look for the cause or reasoning for the problems to be able to find a solution. As we know the problem has been there for a long time, since 1949 no "namaz" was read there, the place has been locked up till Rajiv Gandhi opened it for the Hindus to worship their deity in the structure in 1985, no muslim objected to it. V.P. Singh and Mulayam Singh provoked the Muslims, accepted Imam of Jama Masjid as "Guru" and in order to appease Muslim Mullahs, (just as he did to activate Mandal Commission to appease Harijan elite for vote Bank) the whole affair of Babri structure became a "sacred cow" a national issue over night.

I am told Islam preaches, one God, one Human family, tolerance, brotherhood, love and compassion for all, examples from Mohammed's personal life are quoted to prove that. One I most like is where a woman throws a lot of trash on Mohammed every day while he passed her home, without any anger or retaliation by Mohammed. One day she does not throw out anything on him so he goes into the house to enquire if she was alright without any malice in his heart for her actions. Of course from then on, she repents her actions and becomes his disciple. If this is true let the Muslims set an example, show through action. Taking into account the history of Muslims over the centuries, George Bernard Shaw once said "Islam is the best religion but is being practiced by wrong people." Can we think of one Muslim country where one can experience respect, tolerance, for other faiths. In an article in the Washington Post it was said that in a country where Muslims are in minority they demand, protest for democratic rights but as soon as they come in Majorities or in Power, no democratic rights, or freedom is allowed to people of non-Muslim faith.

I am also told that Hindus believe that a) the whole world is one Big Family, b) there is only one God but people call it different names, c) Love, truth, compassion is God, d) Every atom is permeated by Him. If the above is true the Love and compassion can not be conditional. Let both the communities show to the world greatness of their scriptures and their prophets (who must be together somewhere in heaven) by living up to the teachings.

We owe it to our children and future generations, let the ancient civilization of India be a model of peace for the rest of the world. Let us stop finding faults with each other and look for virtues and common grounds for co-existence. Way of worship may

be different, if we look for differences then there are hundreds of different denominations amongst the followers of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism. Europe has gone through several wars because of ignorance of true Religion for hundreds of years. Now they are all coming together to achieve a common goal of a better life. However, their reason is not an ideal model to follow because they have replaced their God with MONEY and PLEASURE which though alleviates animosity between different faiths and countries but creates and promotes competition, jealousy, indulgence, selfishness between individuals, neighbors and friends in the same faith and country. It is like converting churches or places of worship into restaurants or night clubs, of course there is no difference of opinion in these places of enjoyment.

Let us show them that there can be higher ideals based on the true teachings of Christ, Mohammed, Moses, Krishana, Buddha, Mahavir and Nanak, that there is more in Common than there are differences. If we see differences it must be because of ignorance and lack of understanding. All the teachings by these Great souls must have been revelations from the same Source for different countries at different times and in different circumstances.

Let us forget the differences and seek Common teachings based on reasoning and logic, love and compassion for the common good of all in the country. Let us start a dialogue of bringing down the "Berlin Wall" of partition between Pakistan, India and Bangladesh to bring back peace to the subcontinent, because all these people belong to the same culture, languages, heritages having relatives across the borders.

Sincerely,

Braham R. Aggarwal
7636 Apple Tree Circle
Orlando, Florida 32819

**Crisis in Ayodhya:
A Background Report Presented to
Houston Chronicle Editorial Board
December 15, 1992**

Hinduism has been in existence for over 5000 years, primarily as a way of life in the Indian subcontinent. Unlike most major world religions, there is no single founder or single dogma that is followed by the adherents of the religion. As enunciated in our Vedic heritage "EKAM SAT VIPRAH BAHUDHA VADA NTHI" which in translation is "Truth is one. Sages describe it in many different ways." Due to the lack of understanding and spread of misinformation, Hinduism has been perceived by many Westerners as a polytheistic religion whose followers worship thousands of Gods.

The attitude of Hindus in respecting other religions is very much evident in the history of the subcontinent. Dating back to the period of Christ, what is today India has given shelter to many and its people allowed, or even accepted, the teachings of many different philosophers very peacefully. India, and Indians, can take pride in having Thomas the Apostle live and preach in their land. India became home to Jews as early as AD 70. The Zoroastrians who fled religious persecution in Persia found a home in India. History is replete with many such examples.

Propagation of religion has taken place throughout the history of mankind. Violence has been used as a means of the spread of some religions. In Indian history unfortunately the spread of Islam was accomplished, not by convincing the population of the virtues of Islam, but by means of wars and forcefully converting the people to accept Islam. For over 900 years Islamic invaders perpetuated the subjugation of Hindus. There were very few exceptions to this pattern. The fact that India has the second largest Islamic population in the world is an excellent testimony to the religious tolerance in India and of Hindus. However, the destruction of over 60,000 Hindu temples and the rebuilding of over 3000 of these as Moslem religious structures and the continuing destruction of Hindu temples in Kashmir has had a very deep impact on the Hindu psyche. This impact is partially responsible for the assertiveness now being witnessed in some segments of Hindu society. As members of the Jewish religion have said after having gone through many holocausts, so some Hindus are now standing up and saying "Never again."

Places of worship were built by Hindus over the period of two to three thousand years to honor individuals who were thought to have been manifestations of the supreme God. These temples are extremely important for the Hindu society to fulfill its emotional and spiritual needs. There existed such a temple at Ayodhya dedicated to Rama at a place that was his birthplace. It has been one of the most important temples for Hindus for thousands of years. There is very compelling evidence, including archaeological evidence, accepted by many Hindu and non-Hindu scholars, of the placement of the temple at the location of Lord Rama's birthplace. In 1526 Babar, a descendant of Ghengis Khan, invaded what is now India and established the Mughal rule. In 1528, he destroyed the temple at Ayodhya and built a Moslem religious structure at the site of the Rama temple. There is ample historical evidence to prove this. Although there was no reason according to his faith for the location of Islamic structures at any particular sites in India, he chose to destroy Hindu temples located at places of the most significance to Hindus and to build Moslem religious structures in their place. Even though a Moslem structure was then created at the Rama temple location, according to many scholars it has never met all the specific requirements of the Koran for it to be considered a mosque, or masjid. Thus the name by which it has been referred "Babri Masjid" is a misnomer. Because it is not a masjid, it has not been a place of

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worship for Moslems. Over the past 466 years, Hindus have tried many times to regain control of this place. Depending on the means available, these attempts have been both military and civil (legal). Since 1949 permission has been given through the legal system for the worship of Lord Rama to be performed on a daily basis by a Hindu priest. This worship, however, was not available to Hindu pilgrims until 1986 when the Faizabad Court gave permission for Hindus to enter the temple for worship. Moslems in the area have prayed at a number of masjids, but not at the structure which is the basis of the controversy. Thus there appears to be no reason based on religious traditions for the Moslems to retain any claim on the controversial location. In fact the Moslems in the area have not been in disagreement with Hindus on this matter; it is only the influence of persons from outside, including from other countries, which has caused this to continue to be a point of difference between Hindus and Moslems.

It must be emphasized that Hindus have never desecrated or destroyed any place of worship. Neither have they tried to proselytize others. The "Babri-Masjid" structure which was recently destroyed has not been used as a place of Moslem prayer in over fifty years and as discussed above is not technically a mosque. On the other hand, Moslems in India and throughout the world have destroyed many temples, churches and synagogues. Even in the last three years Moslems have destroyed forty-five Hindu temples in Kashmir.

Of the 3000 temples which were converted to Moslem structures, Hindus have only asked that three holy places be returned to them. These three are temples at Ayodhya, Mathura and Varanasi which are as important to Hindus as Mecca and Medina are to Moslems or Bethlehem is to Christians. Even then and in spite of the historical background, Hindus and Hindu leaders have always called for a dialogue with the adherents of Islamic faith and asked for the return of the site to Hindus, in exchange for a rebuilding or relocation of the Moslem structure to a nearby area of the Moslems' choice. Hindus have patiently waited for the judicial and governmental authorities to take action in an area in which faith often supersedes any narrow legal definitions.

Secularism is not synonymous with atheism or absence of religion. It just means that the governmental or societal functioning is not to be governed by any single religion. The Indian constitution was written in a way to allow people of all religions to coexist without fear. The successive governments have distorted the meaning of the word "secularism" and have played into the hands of a few Moslem zealots. This has allowed the formation of laws that have no justification in a secular government. For example, Moslem educational institutions are not subjected to governmental control as Hindu educational institutions are. Similarly, while Hindus, Christians, and Zoroastrians are required to follow a uniform civil law, Moslems follow a separate Islamic code. While monogamy is the law of the land, Moslems are not subject to this requirement.

The government policy of appeasing minorities while neglecting the majority Hindu community has created doubts about the government's intention of providing justice. The delay on the part of the government in taking any decision has added to the frustration felt by many Hindus. The Hindu leadership very openly said that the construction of the temple was to take place without any encroachment of the "masjid structure" until the dispute was resolved. The newspaper accounts of statements by leaders of several national organizations identified with Hindu causes are testimony to this fact.

However a sizable group of devout Hindus took matters in their own hands and, ignoring their leadership, proceeded to remove the deity from the temple, destroy the Moslem

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structure, and then bring the deity back to the temple where the daily worship by the priest continues. All this was accomplished without any injury or killing of any Moslems. The only deaths at the site were due to the falling of debris. If Hindus had wished to do harm to Moslems of the area or destroy any of the other twenty six mosques in Ayodhya, they could have easily have done so as Hindus were in the clear majority. But there was no such intent and when the Hindu activists had completed their objectives they left peacefully. The damage done to the building identified as "Babri Masjid" was unfortunate. The violence that has followed and the damage and destruction that has been brought on places of Hindu worship in India, in neighboring countries and even in Great Britain is very regrettable. It has been noted that much of the violence reported in India has been in localities in which there was a majority or very sizable minority of Muslims. Historically there has been very little inter-religious/sectarian conflict where Muslims were in a minority (which might have been expected as under these conditions the Hindu majority could easily have mistreated their Moslem neighbors.) This is strong evidence of Hindu tolerance and respect of persons of minority religions. In spite of the propaganda to the contrary, Indian Hindus do not want to drive the Moslem minorities from India. Hindus want all citizens to be treated equally regardless of their religious affiliation.

As representatives of the Hindu community land as citizens and residents of Houston, we request more accurate and more balanced reporting on events such as those surrounding the recent, and continuing, crisis. We will be glad to assist you in providing such coverage.

HISTORY AND POLITICS OF RAM JANMABHOOMI

- Ashok Chowgule

With the pronouncement of the Prime Minister on July 14, the Ram Janmabhoomi issue has come back to the centre stage. This issue has revolutionised the politics of the country. A fragmented Hindu *samaj* has been united to an extent unheard of in recent times. While many intellectuals have reacted to the phenomenon in a negative manner, some like Shri V.S. Naipaul and the late Shri Girilal Jain have seen the depth to which it has permeated in the *samaj*. The former observed that "what is happening in India is a new historical awakening.....Indian intellectuals, who want to be secure in their liberal beliefs, may not understand what is going on. But every other Indian knows that a large response is emerging even if at times this response appears in his eyes to be threatening."

While the Prime Minister has said that the temple will be constructed, he has not indicated where the *Garbha Graha* of the temple will be. According to the plans of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the location of this is the same spot where Ram Lalla had been worshipped since December 1949 and where the present make shift temple exists. In addition, he has to make a definitive statement as to where the mosque will be built. The Prime Minister should also clarify how the trust which has been sponsored by the government does not make it a political trust. These questions should also be addressed by the Shankaracharyas particularly in context of their role at the time of the October 1990 *Kar Seva*.

If there has to be an enduring solution to the Ram Janmabhoomi issue, the history of the case must be clearly stated. Only if it can be established, beyond a reasonable

doubt, that in 1528 A.D. a temple was destroyed with the express objective of constructing the mosque, a new temple should be constructed. Otherwise, permitting such an event to come to pass will lead to opening a Pandora's box. For any sane society, it is necessary to ensure that unreasonable demands by any sections should not be acceded to.

In December 1990, the Chandrashekhar government had asked the VHP and the All India Babri Masjid Action Committee (AIBMAC) to give proof to justify their respective cases. This was done, and each side was expected to give a rejoinder in early January 1991. The government minutes of the time say, "The VHP submitted the rejoinder in which it tried to refute claims of the AIBMAC point wise. The AIBMAC did not react to the evidences put forward by the VHP. Instead it submitted photo-copies of more evidences in support of its claims. Since the AIBMAC did not give comments on the evidences put forward by the VHP, it is not possible for the government to decide the areas of agreement and disagreement."

The proof that the VHP has given is based on the archeological investigations, historical records and literary sources. These include pre-British sources as well as writings of Muslim authors. The archeological evidence was part of the *Ramayan* project which was undertaken by the Archeological Survey of India between 1975 to early 1980's.

Even though the AIBMAC did not give the rejoinder, VHP decided to have a meeting of experts on January 24 and 25, 1991, as part of the exercise initiated by the Chandrashekhar government. During the first meeting, the AIBMAC experts said that they have not studied the evidence given by VHP nor did they visit the site. For the second meeting they chose not to come.

The behavior of the AIBMAC experts, four people considered to be respected academicians, is indeed strange since the VHP evidence was submitted about a month before hand. In addition, these experts have been writing for quite a long time that the mosque was built on a vacant site, that is, no temple was destroyed in 1528 A.D.

In July 1992, an Ayodhya cell was formed with the ex-Cabinet Secretary, Shri Naresh Chandra, as its head. The objective of this cell was to evaluate the evidence that was given by VHP and AIBMAC - in particular to verify that the submissions made by the two parties had come from authentic sources and were reproduced in the right context. In addition they also had to make a report regarding the archeological findings. This compilation would in no way commit the Government in passing a judgement on the claims made by the two parties. It is necessary that the evaluation should be made public, since it will inform an impartial observer whether the VHP has been able to establish its case.

If the historical case is established, the natural question to be asked is if it is necessary to build a temple. After all, *Ram Rajya* will not be automatically achieved by mere construction of a temple. *Ram Rajya* has many more components to it, which needs to be put in place by additional efforts. The question can be answered only by looking at the whole question of the practice of secularism and the politics of vote bank. In a secular society, a government only recognises an individual, but not his caste or creed. It should institute programmes which will help all the poor people. The politics of vote-bank makes all this unnecessary. And the politics of vote bank can only succeed in a divided Hindu *samaj*.

For the VHP, as Shri Swapan Dasgupta has said, "Ram temple was never a narrow religious issue. It was consistently projected as an aspect of a wider national reintegration." It was this vision that enabled it to bring together religious leaders of the larger canvass of Hinduism, consisting of Shaivites, Vishnuites, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, etc. If this is not done, the fissures in the Hindu *samaj* will once again occur. The loser will be not only Hinduism, but also India as we know it today.

The historicity of the case is particularly important in the context of Hindu - Muslim relationship. Muslims should not feel that their religious site, irrespective of its importance to them, has been unjustly taken away, for the purpose of converting it to a place of worship of another religion. Considering the mood of the Muslims in India, this is in fact what he feels. He also feels that the Government is succumbing to obscurantist pressure of the Hindu *Samaj*. This does not augur well for future relationship.

The Ram Janmabhoomi issue has been politicised precisely because the history has been kept in the background. This is not the time to look at the issue from the context of who would benefit from it politically. If the truth is known, irrespective of which political party benefits, the nation will gain. If truth is hidden, irrespective of which political party benefits, the nation will lose.

August 94.

विवाद की ऐतिहासिक पृष्ठभूमि

बाबर की भूमिका: जिसे आज "बाबरी मस्जिद" कहा जाता है, उस इमारत को मीर बाक़ी ने बाबर की आज्ञा से १५२८ ई० में बनवाया था। बाबरनामा, जो बाबर की डायरी और आत्मकथा दोनों ही हैं, यह स्पष्ट उल्लेख करता है कि बाबर अयोध्या, जिसे उस समय "औध" कहा जाता था, २८ मार्च १५२८ को बागी हुए स्थानीय अफ़ग़ान राजा का पीछा करते हुए आया था और उसे हराकर यहां के राज्य का बन्दोबस्त करने हेतु अपने उस स्कन्धावार में ठहर गया था जो सरयू की एक सहायक नदी पर उसने बनाया था। यहां वह २ अप्रैल १५२८ तक तो अवश्य ही रहा। दुर्भाग्य से उसकी डायरी के वे पन्ने, जिनमें ३ अप्रैल से और १२ सितम्बर १५२८ तक का वर्णन था, १५२९ की उस एक आंधी में उड़ गये जिसने उसके तम्बू उखाड़ दिये थे। अतः उन दिनों के इतिहास के बारे में कुछ भी निश्चित रूप से नहीं कहा जा सकता।

औरंगज़ेब के बाद: बाबर के उत्तराधिकारियों ने इस भू-भाग पर १८वीं शती के प्रारम्भ तक कब्ज़ा बनाए रखा। किन्तु औरंगज़ेब की मृत्यु (१७०७ ई०) के बाद इस इलाके में कानून की व्यवस्था बहुत बिगड़ गई। १७३५ ई० में, जब अवध में मुहम्मद शाह गद्दी पर था और बुरहान-उन-मुल्क सादत अली खां गवर्नर था, अयोध्या नगर में हिन्दू और मुसलमानों में एक भयानक उत्पात हुआ जिसमें हिन्दुओं ने जन्मभूमि पर अपना दावा किया। आज दिन तक यही सबसे पहला कानूनी मुकदमा ज्ञात हुआ है।

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE CONTROVERSY

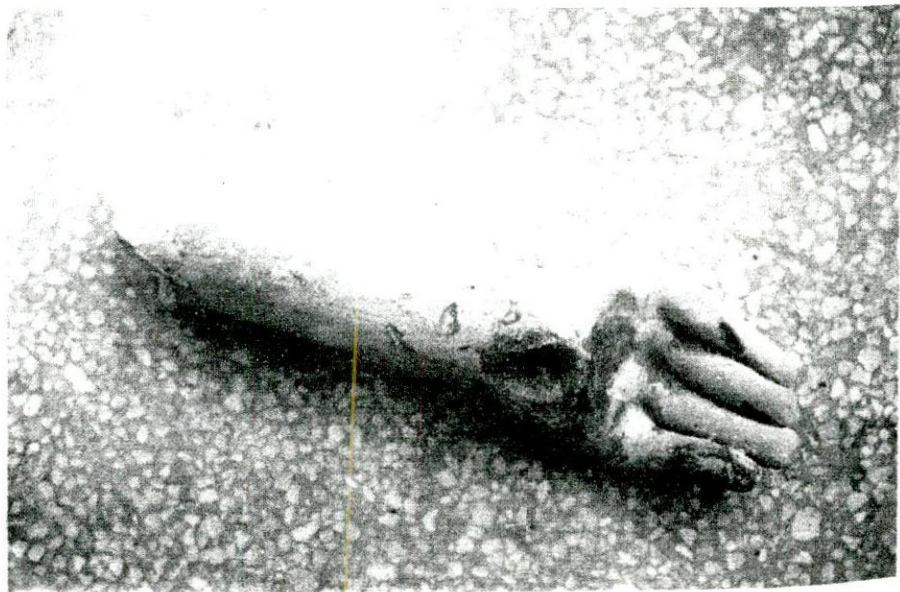
Babar Stayed at Ayodhya: The so-called 'Babari Mosque' was built in 1528 A.D. The **Babarnama**, Babar's diary of everyday events and autobiography, mentions that on March 28 in the year 1528 Babar came to Ayodhya, called 'Oudh' in those days, and camped on the river-side of a tributary of the Saryu, flowing near the township. Here he stayed for a few days, till April 2nd, 1528, after defeating the then Afghan ruler of this place who had rebelled against him. He may have stayed here longer, but no one knows exactly how long since the original pages of his hand-written diary pertaining to the period between April 2nd and September 18 of 1528, were lost in a storm that overtook Babar's tents in 1529.

After Aurangzeb: The successors of Babar continued to rule over this place till the early 18th century. After Aurangzeb's death (1707 A.D.), the territories of Awadh were marked by lawlessness. During the reign of the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah and the tenure of the governorship of Burhan-un-Mulk Saadat Ali Khan, a serious riot took place between the Hindus and the Muslims (1735 A.D.), the former claiming their right over Ramajanma Bhumi. This is the earliest judicial reference available in this regard so far.



एक विशाल ईंट का भाग जिस पर समानान्तर वर्तुल उभारे गए हैं।
Piece of a moulded-brick with design of concentric circles.

एक मृण-मूर्ति
Terracotta figurine





मृण-मूर्तियाँ : देवता का सिर एवं यक्ष का घड़ Terracotta figurines: the head of a devata and the bust of a yaksha.

यूरोपीय पर्यटकों ने क्या देखा और क्या लिखा? १७६७ ई० में जेस्यूट मतावलम्बी पादरी टाइफेंथलर भारत आया और अयोध्या में कुछ समय के लिए रहा। जो उसने यहां देखा उसी का वर्णन उसने लैटिन भाषा की अपनी पुस्तक में किया है। उसके अनुसार मुगल बादशाहों के भरसक प्रयासों के बावजूद हिन्दुओं ने इस धरती पर अपना कब्जा कभी छोड़ा नहीं, मस्जिद के आंगन में उन्होंने एक 'राम चबूतरे' का निर्माण किया और वहां पर पूजा करते रहे। वे इसकी तीन बार परिक्रमा करते थे और फिर साष्टांग दण्डवत् करते थे। वे इसके साथ ही गुम्बद के नीचे भी पूजा करते रहे। रामनवमी के दिन वे लाखों की संख्या में यहाँ आते थे। इसका वर्णन मोन्टगोमरी मार्टिन, एडवर्ड थार्नटन, पी. कारनेज़ी तथा अन्य लेखकों की लेखनी में भी मिलता है।

भीषण उपद्रव: १८५५ में एक बार फिर ऐसा ही भीषण दंगा हुआ जिसमें कितने ही लोग मारे गए। वास्तव में इस तरह के उत्पात और हत्याओं का सिलसिला कभी रुका ही नहीं, इस विषय पर प्रमाण के लिए कितने ही ऐतिहासिक, कानूनी और मालगुजारी के काराजात सुरक्षित हैं।

What the Europeans Saw and Wrote? In 1767 itself, a Jesuit missionary, Joseph Tieffenthaler, who stayed at Ayodhya for a number of days and left behind his account written in Latin, found that in spite of the Mughal Kings' efforts to prevent them, the Hindus had re-occupied the courtyard, raised a 'Rama Chabutara' thereon and worshiped there by circumambulating it three times and finally prostrating before it. On the Rama Navami day they congregated here in lakhs. Significantly, they continued to worship under the domed structure as well. More details are available in the accounts of Montgomery Martin, Edward Thornton, P. Carnegie and others.

Serious Riots: In 1855 once again a big clash took place in which scores of men were killed; such riots and killings never subsided: there are several historical, judicial and revenue records to prove their occurrences.

नया उत्खनन

पक्की ईंटों की बड़ी दीवार: २२ तथा २३ जुलाई को डा० एस० पी० गुप्त एवं डा० के० एम० श्रीवास्तव अयोध्या रहे और वहां उन्होंने उस १२ फीट गहरे कटाव अथवा सैक्शन का फिर से अध्ययन किया जो पूर्व की ओर स्थित है। यहां वे दो फीट और भी गहरे गए। सैक्शन को फिर से देखा। इसी प्रक्रिया में उन्हें १ दर्जन से भी अधिक पर्तों में जमाई पक्की ईंटों की एक विशाल दीवार भी मिली। इसके नीचे भी एक और ऐसी ही दीवार मिली। बड़ी दीवार के बहुत ऊंचे चूने और कंकड़ की कूटी हुई दो भिन्न स्तरों पर स्थित फर्शें मिलीं।

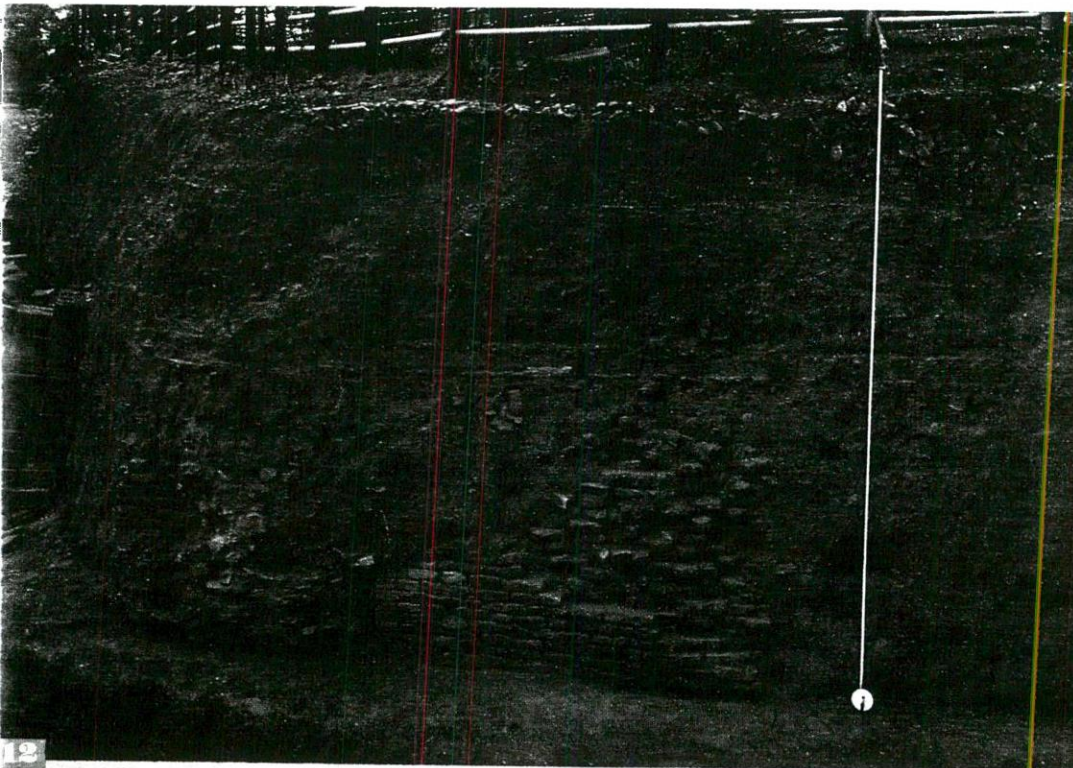
विनाश के चिन्ह: दीवार के एक ओर एक बड़ा वह गडढा भी मिला जो निश्चय ही इस स्थान पर हुए तहस-नहस का असंदिग्ध प्रमाण है। इनमें टूटे ईंटें, चूने, गारे और मृद-भाण्डों के नमूने मिले हैं।

इस साक्ष्य से प्रो० ब्रजबासी लाल के उस कथन की पुष्टि होती है जिसमें उन्होंने कहा था कि जन्म-भूमि पर ईंटों के आधार-स्तम्भों पर रखे पत्थर के स्तम्भों पर खड़ा एक विशाल भवन था। सम्भवतः ये प्रस्तर-स्तम्भ वे ही थे जो 'मस्जिद' में अभी भी लगे हैं।

यह नवीन पुरातात्विक साक्ष्य डा० स्वराज्य प्रकाश गुप्त के १९९० के उस कथन की भी पुष्टि करता है जो उन्होंने जन्मभूमि ढांचे में लगे काले पत्थर के १४ खम्भों के और एक द्वार-शाखा के साक्ष्य के परिपेक्ष में कहा था कि यहां ११वीं शती का एक वैष्णव मन्दिर था और ये स्तम्भ उसी के हिस्से हैं। दो ऐसे और स्तम्भ थोड़ी दूर ही उल्टे रखे हैं।

पूर्वी कटाव में दिखते हुए कई भवन-स्तंभों, ईंटों की दीवारों एवं फर्शों के अवशेष।

Close-up of the section facing east with several structural remains, including brick walls and floors of different periods.



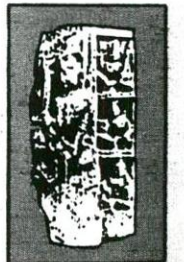
FRESH EXCAVATIONS

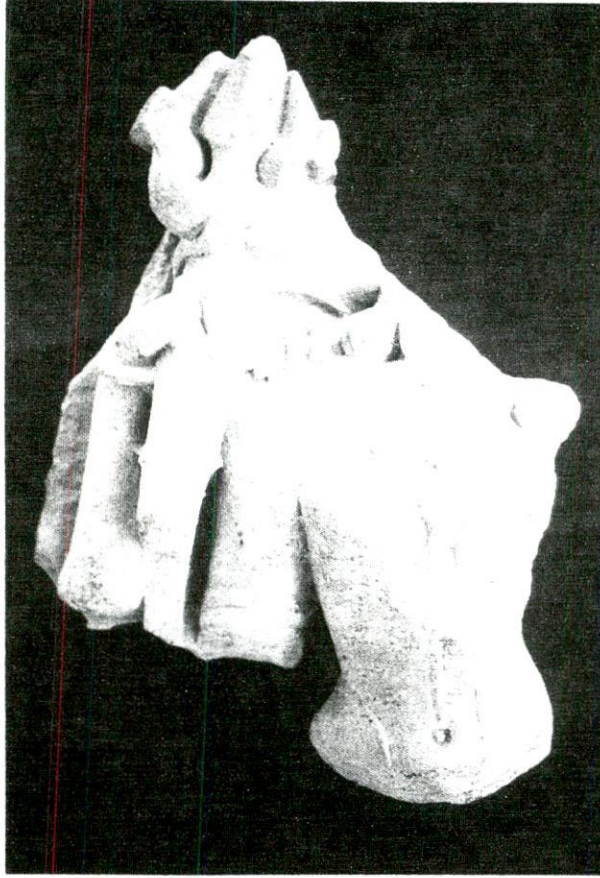
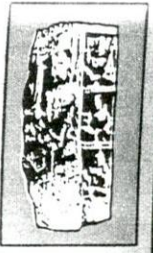
Huge Brick Walls: On the 22nd and 23rd of July Dr. K.M. Srivastava and Dr. S.P. Gupta went to Ayodhya and scraped the section facing east and also dug at least two feet still deeper in a small area along this section. They discovered a huge burnt-brick wall of more than a dozen courses running along the section and beyond it. Below this, after a little break, the remains of another brick-wall have been found. At two different pre-Islamic levels, there are the remains of brick-laid floors.

Mass Destruction: There are clear-cut marks of massive destruction of the huge wall mentioned above since brick-debris and large pits have been located here. Further, there are two hard rammed floors of **chunam** and **kankar**, laid one above the other with a significant break in between but over the level of the brick-wall.

There is, therefore, enough new archaeological material which conclusively proves what Prof. B.B. Lal, the previous excavator of this site, has been repeatedly saying that here at the Ramajanma Bhumi there was an impressive structure of 11th-12th century built on pillars standing on a series of parallel burnt-brick bases which was destroyed in the early 16th century; in all likelihood the bases carried on them the same temple-pillars which are fixed in the 'mosque'.

These new archaeological findings also confirm the views expressed earlier in 1990 by Dr. S.P. Gupta that the 16 black stone pillars and one piece of door-jamb with carvings of gods and goddesses existing in the so-called 'Babari Mosque' structure and also the adjoining areas, belong to a 11th century Hindu temple, possibly Vaishnavite.





शिव-पार्वती की भग्न प्रतिमा ।

The image of Shiva-Parvati, largely broken.

मुस्लिम साक्ष्य: यह नई खोज उन तमाम मुस्लिम लेखकों के भी उस कथन की पुष्टि करता है जिनके अनुसार जन्मस्थान पर बने मन्दिर को तोड़कर एक मस्जिद बनाई गई थी। उदाहरण के लिए औरंगजेब की पोती ने एक ऐसी पुस्तक लिखी थी जिसमें उसने कई नसीहतें दी थीं जिसमें अयोध्या के मंदिर को तोड़ कर जो मजसिद बनाई गई थी उसमें मुस्लिमों को जाना चाहिए, ऐसा कहा गया है। इसको जिस पुस्तक में उद्धृत किया गया है उसका नाम **सहीफ़ा-ए-चहल नासाइह बहादुर शाही** है। एक ऐसी ही पुस्तक मिर्ज़ा जान ने लिखी थी जिसका नाम **हदीका-ए-शहदा** है। १८, १९ और २० शताब्दियों में अनेक मुस्लिम लेखकों ने ठीक इसी बात का बारबार जिक्र किया है, यहां तक कि वर्तमान काल-खण्ड में श्री अब्दुल हई ने भी यही वर्णन दिया है।

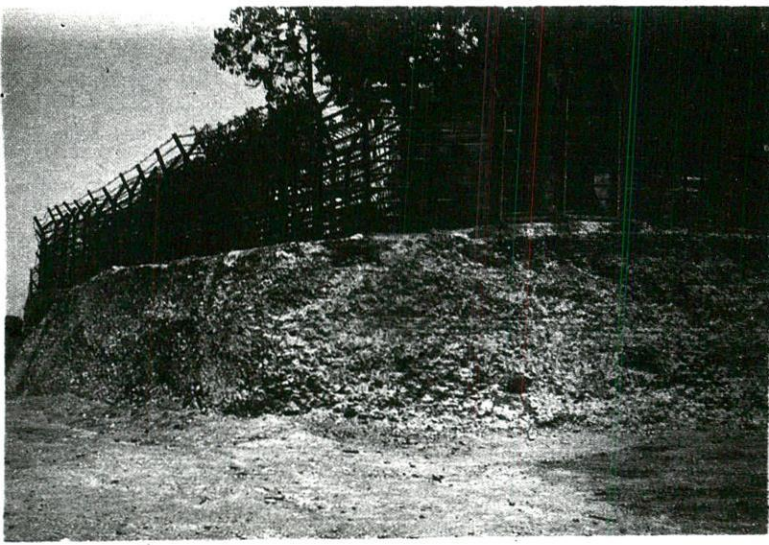
मीर बाक़ी का कथन: इस साक्ष्य के द्वारा मीर बाक़ी का कथन भी अपरोक्ष रूप से प्रमाणित होता है। उसके द्वारा खुदवाये फारसी भाषा में दो लेख आज भी जन्मभूमि भवन में लगे हैं जिसमें वह स्पष्ट लिखता है कि उसने बाबर की आज्ञा और इज़ाज़त से ही इस स्थान पर फरिश्तों के उतरने की एक जगह बनवाई।

हिन्दू साक्ष्य: इस खोज से हिन्दू साक्ष्य भी प्रमाणित होता है। बाल्मीकीय रामायण; विष्णु आदि कई पुराण; सिक्ख, जैन और बौद्ध ग्रंथ, तथा संस्कृत काव्यों, जैसे कालिदास के रघुवंशम्, में बार बार यह कहा गया है कि सहस्रों वर्षों से राम जन्मभूमि पर बस्तियां बनी और उजड़ीं। 'राम कोट' के भीतर, एक समय में एक महल तथा अन्य भवन और पूजास्थल थे। सभी की अपनी अपनी कथा है। इसका वर्णन हैन्स बेकर ने अपनी पुस्तक **अयोध्या** में तथा कोएनराड एलस्ट ने अपनी पुस्तक **राम जन्मभूमि एवं बाबरी मस्जिद**, दोनों अंग्रेजी में, किया है।

Muslim Testimony: The new discovery further confirms the claims of all early Muslim authors, like the grand-daughter of Aurangzeb whose writing was cited in **Sahifa-i-Chihal**, **Nasaih Bahadur Shahi**. Mirza Jan, the author of **Hadiqa-i-Shahada** and a large number of other 18th, 19th, and even 20th century scholars like Shri Abdul Hai, have repeatedly mentioned that anciently here, at this very site, called 'Janmasthan', there was an imposing Hindu temple which was destroyed by the Muslims and a mosque was built over its debris.

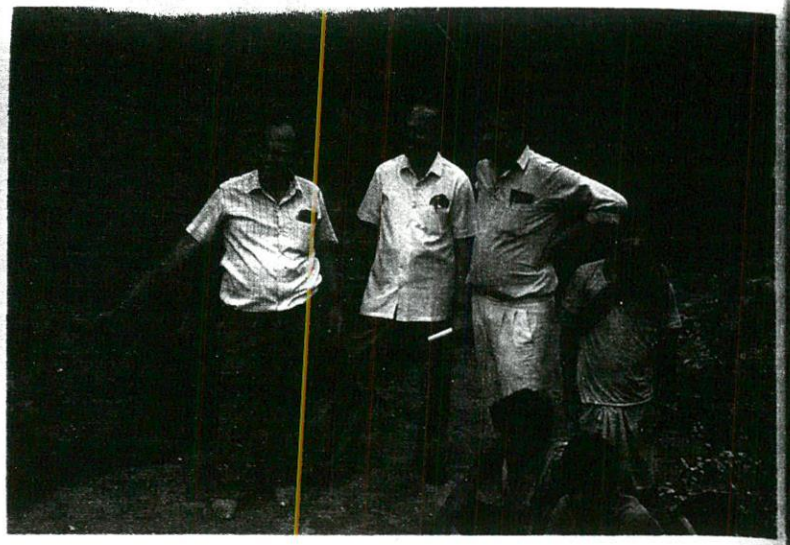
Mir Baqi's Claims: Indirectly though, the newly acquired archaeological evidence also equally confirms the statement made by Mir Baqi in his inscriptions, still found fixed in the structure of the 'mosque', that at this very place he built a structure for the angels to descend, specifically at the command and permission of Babar.

The Hindu Testimony: And finally, it lends full support to a long standing Hindu tradition of the Valmiki's **Ramayana**, the **Vishnu** and other **Puranas** and a host of other works of the Sikhs, Jainas and Buddhists as well as the Sanskrit classics like Kalidasa's **Raghuvamsham**, according to which for thousands of years this ancient settlement with Rama Kota was occupied and reoccupied following desertions and destructions, the story of which has, however, been recollected in two important monographs, one is entitled **Ayodhya** by Hans Bakker and the other is **Ram Janmabhoomi vs. Babri Masjid** by Koenraad Elst published in English in recent years.



रामजन्मभूमि का ऊंचा टीला जिसे १२ फीट नीचे तक, समतलीकरण के दौरान, काटा गया।

General view of the high mound of Ramajanna Bhumi cut down to 12 ft. depth



पुरतत्ववेत्ता जुलाई १९९२ में उत्खनन कर्मियों के साथ वार्तालाप-रत।

Archaeologists with labourers during excavations in July 1992 discussing the nature of various layers.

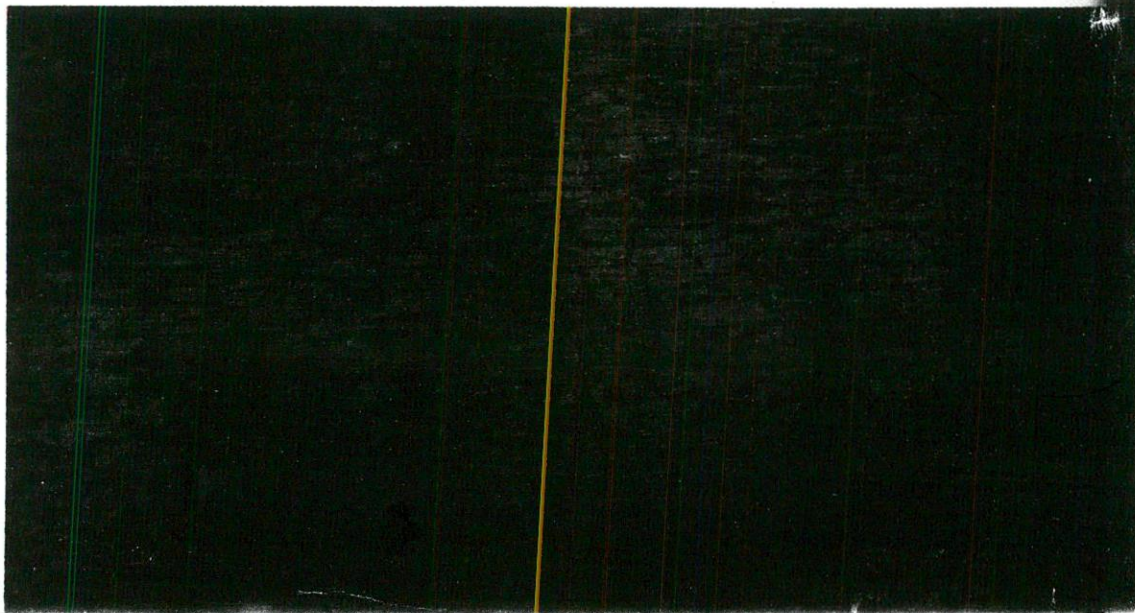
छज्जा: मन्दिर की सीधी ऊंची दीवार के अंत में, जहां से शिखर आरम्भ होता है, एक 'छाद्य' अथवा छज्जा होता है जिससे धूप और वर्षा के पानी से भवन का बचाव होता है। यह पतले प्रस्तर-खण्डों से बनता है और आधुनिक मैंगलौरी टाइल जैसा लगता है जिसके मध्य में एक उभरी पट्टी होती है। वास्तव में प्राचीन काल में यह लकड़ी का होता था जिसकी शकल को पत्थर में ज्यों का त्यों उतार लिया जाता था। मंदिरों में ऐसे एक या अधिक आच्छादन हो सकते थे। यह उसी का एक खण्डित नमूना है।

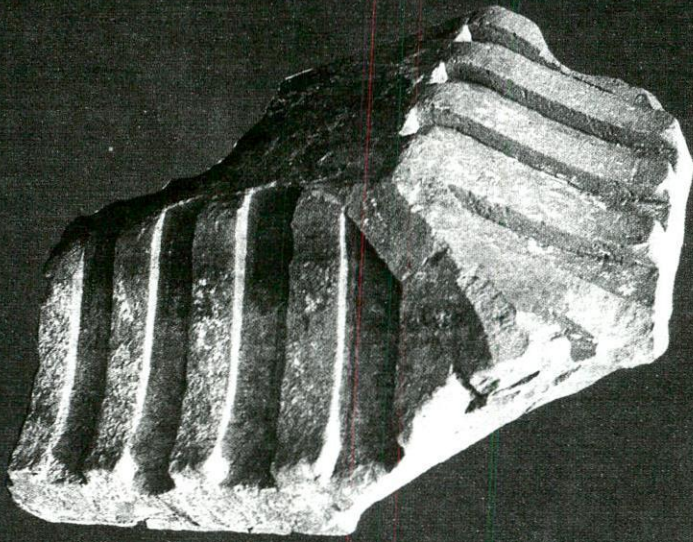
पत्तेदार लम्बी आभूषित कतार: इस समूह में एक ऐसा प्रस्तर-खण्ड है जिसके ऊपर कमल पंखुड़ी अथवा पान की शकल की एक लम्बी कतार है। इसका प्रयोग मंदिर के जगती के ऊपर कई स्थानों पर होता रहा है।

The Cornice: The fourth example of stone sculptures belongs to the most characteristic member of the Nagara style of temples—it is called **Chhadya**, and in Hindi **chhajja**, sun-shade, where the straight wall over the high plinth meets the base of the **shikhara**. It is carved and shaped like rectangular Mangalore tiles to serve not only as a sun-shade but also allow the rain water to run off quickly and protect the structure. It is a corner-stone of the cornice.

Floral frieze: There is one frieze of continuous leaf-moulding which decorates one of the top lines of the high plinth of the temple.

बड़े विशाल क्षेत्र में फैले ईंटों का फर्श। The remains of an extensive brick-flooring.





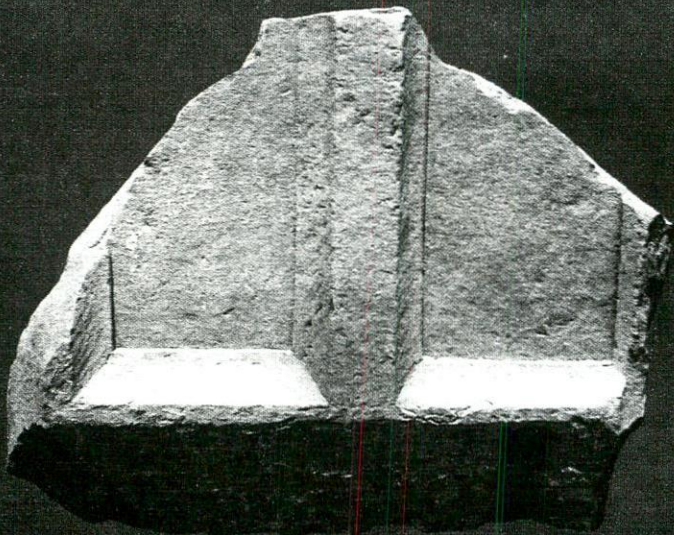
कोने का छज्जा जिस पर सांकेतिक-कमल पट्टिका अंकित है।

Corner chhajja or sun-shade with stylised lotus-petal mouldings.



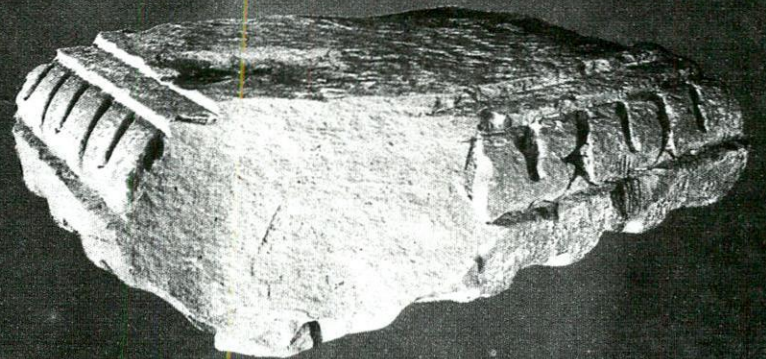
दूसरे प्रकार का कोने का छज्जा जिस पर कमल की पंखुड़ियाँ और मनके अंकित हैं।

Another type of corner cornice or chhajja with near-natural lotus petals and beaded border.



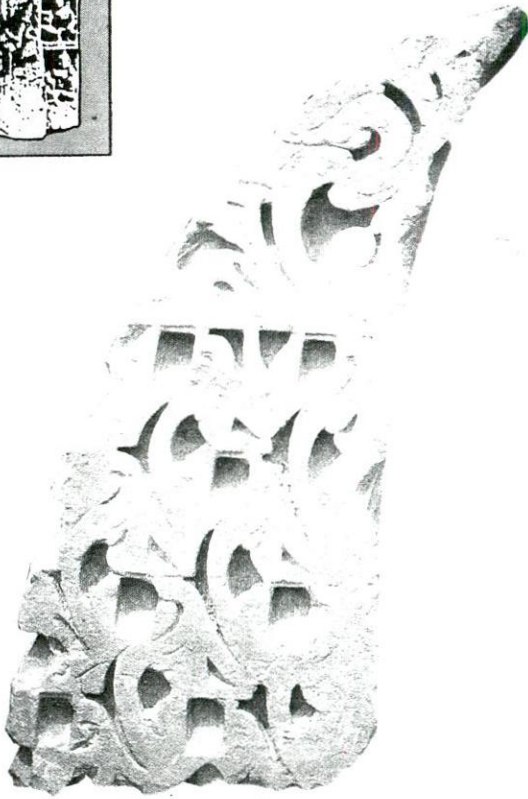
टाइल की शकल का छज्जे का पत्थर जिसके मध्य में उभार-रेखा है।

Part of the chhajja or cornice stone carved like a tile with central rib, apparently a copy of the wooden architecture.



एक स्तम्भ-शीर्ष

The capital of a pillar.



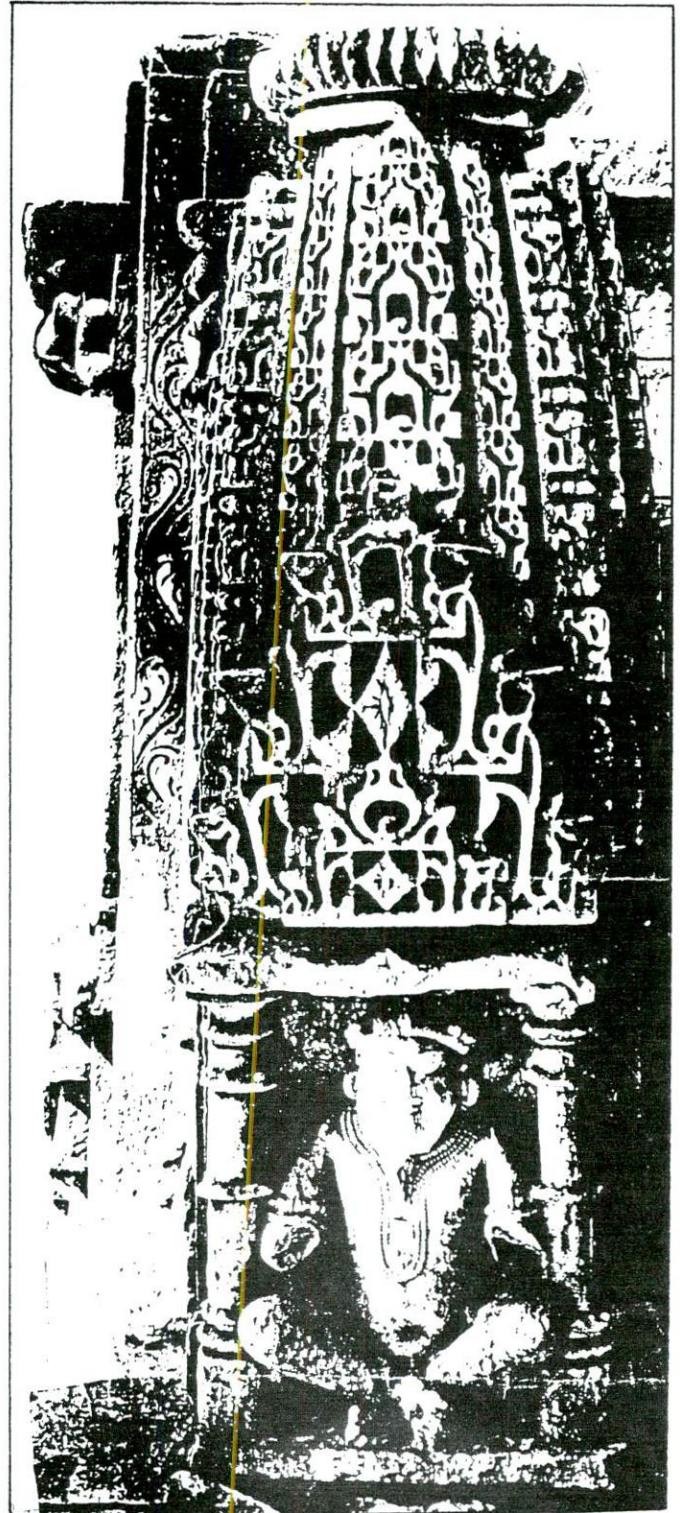
जाल के ऊपर का बायां प्रस्तर-खण्ड जिस पर स्टेन्सिल तकनीकी से अलंकरण किया गया है।

Top-left member of the jala or mesh like shikhara decoration.



मन्दिर के शिखर के मध्य में 'जाल' नामक अलंकरण की एक पट्टिका, स्टेन्सिल तकनीकी से बनी।

A fragment of the jala showing floral motif carved by the 'stencil' technique.



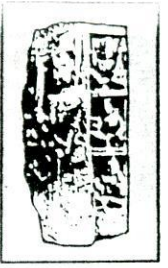
उत्तरी भारत का एक छोटा मन्दिर जिसमें जाल को स्टेन्सिल तकनीकी से उकेरा गया है। केवल उदाहरण के लिए।

A small north Indian temple showing jala carved in 'stencil style.'



द्वार-चौखट का भाग जिस पर 'स्टेंसिल तकनीकी' से घुमावदार लता अंकित है।

Door-jamb with meandering floral pattern carved in the 'stencil' technique.



एक लम्बी अलंकरण-पट्टिका का हिस्सा जिस पर कमल पंखुड़ी अथवा पीपल के पत्ते के चित्र उकेरे हैं।
Fragment of a border with lotus-petal or pipal leaf frieze.



एक अलंकरण का भाग।
Fragment of a moulding.

HOW INDIA TREATS HER MINORITIES?

Any vandalism and destruction of a place of worship should always be regrettable. As for the mosque in Ayodhya, no Muslim has prayed in it since 1949. It has been in a depleted state since then. It may be pointed out that this is the site where Hindu God Rama was born and there was a temple on this site until 1528 when it was demolished by a foreign Muslim invader Babar and forcibly converted into a mosque. This hurt the Hindu psyche so much that Hindus have been fighting for restoration of the temple since then. This is a 460 years old fight and did not start recently.

It may also be pointed out that since 1949 it has not been a functioning mosque and no Muslim has prayed in it. On the other hand, during this period the place has been a functioning temple having an idol of Rama and daily worship was performed by a priest and hundreds of Hindu devotees from all over India used to visit daily and offer prayers.

On the basis of demolishing of just one depleted, old, and non-functioning mosque, those who are throwing stones at India and Hindus must try to understand some facts related to how minorities are treated in India.

It is always easy to understand a distant situation if it is

compared to a nearby situation with which one is familiar and can relate to. It may be pointed out that the percentages of population of Hindus and Muslims in India is essentially same as the percentages of population of whites and Blacks in the United States, both are - around 82-84 percent and 11-12 percent respectively. In over two hundred years since its independence, US has still to elect its first Black, or even minority, as its president. How about India? Since its independence in 1947, India has already elected not one, but two Muslim presidents.

Is there any major country in the entire world which can claim to have elected a minority as its head of state during the last twenty-five years? India has elected not one, but two. How can Hindus in a country who have twice elected Muslims to the highest office of the land be accused of discriminating against Muslims?

In the part of the world where the religious and political freedom, as measured by the Western standards, is still evolving, India is the only country which provides total political equality and religious freedom for all citizens. This is so because India is predominantly Hindu. Any one who disagrees with this observation must look at the religious freedom and political rights available to non-Muslims in the Islamic countries in that part of the world. How many of these countries have elected a non-Muslim as their head of state? Not a single one of them. Even in the predominantly Christian countries, how many non-Christians have been elected as

head of state? US, Canada, UK, Germany, France, Italy or any other predominantly Christian country has yet to elect its first non-Christian head of state.

In many Islamic countries, the non-Muslims don't even have the basic religious freedom. For example, in Saudi Arabia, the headquarter of Islam, law does not permit non-Muslims to build any place of worship, believe it or not, not even in their homes. If one takes the Bible, Gita, or any other scripture into Saudi Arabia, it will be confiscated by customs at the airports. The treatment of minorities in Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other Islamic countries is not much better. They are all theocratic states where non-Muslims have neither equal political rights nor full religious freedom.

In retaliation of demolition of just one depleted mosque, over thirty functioning Hindu temples and Christian churches have been destroyed in the last few days in Pakistan. Temples have also been destroyed in Bangladesh, UK, and many other countries by Muslim fanatics. Isn't ironic that those who are attacking India and Hindus for demolition of a non-functioning, old and depleted mosque are themselves destroying functioning temples and churches?

During the last few years, over forty temples have been destroyed in the Kashmir state of India and ninety percent of the Hindu population has been forced out of their homes and are living

as refugees in pathetic conditions in Jammu and Delhi. In spite of this very grave provocation, Hindus have not retaliated against Muslims in the other parts of India. Isn't this a perfect example of tolerance of Hindus? As a matter of fact, in the words of Evangelist Billy Graham, Hindus have been tolerant to fault.

India has always provided total and complete freedom to all religious faiths. The history of Jews tells us that India is the only major country in the entire world which has never persecuted or discriminated against Jews. When Persia (now Iran) was brutally overrun by Islam and the entire population was forcibly and violently converted into Islam, many parsis, who did not want to change their religion under the threat of sword, fled to India, where they have prospered and enjoyed full religious freedom. As a matter of fact, one of the most powerful industrial families (Tatas) in India is a parsi.

As long as India is predominantly Hindu, it will remain a secular country. Theocracy is against the history, tradition, and culture of India.

- Haku Israni

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