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Riots Follow Destruction of Babri Masjid; Unforeseen Discovery of Stone Inscription Verifies Structure Was Built on Ruins of a Rama Temple

It had happened all of a sudden - as if lightening had struck the mosque and razed it to the ground. The old, domed structure was disassembled in a mere five hours. Today one can see lying around only rubble of what was a bone of fierce contention between the leaders of the militant Hindus and Muslims. As the building was demolished, dozens of Hindu artifacts were found hidden within the walls. Most stunning was an 11th-century sandstone slab stating a temple was built there to mark the site of Lord Rama's birth - convincing evidence of the Hindu claim that Muslim invaders built the mosque after destroying a temple.

The December 6th event was the culmination of a movement launched in 1885 which became militant in the last five years. The movement called for the demolition or relocation of the Babri Masjid which was built in 1528. The event was also the beginning of a series of Hindu-Muslim riots, brutally rocking every state of India for several days. In terms of lives lost, injuries caused and property destroyed, the riots are second only to those following the painful partition of India in 1947.

Before the ensuing violence could be contained, it had swept over many towns and cities all over India claiming at least 2,000 lives of both Hindus and Muslims by December 15th, 1992. This is an officially announced figure. Unofficially, the figure is believed to be much higher. The Washington Post said that "according to Naresh Fernandes, a police reporter who has been covering the riots for The Times of India, 'Ninety percent of the people who have died are Muslims, and 95 percent of them

were killed in police shootings."

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao addressed the nation on December 6th expressing deep sorrow on the demolition of the mosque. Quite unexpectedly he promised that his government would rebuild it at the same site. This immediately polarized the country. On one side are those who strongly condemn the demolition of the mosque and blame organizations like the BJP, VHP, RSS and Bajrang Dal for it. The other, and majority, condemn the demolition, but hold that the December 6th event was an "outburst" of a long pent-up anger of the Hindu masses against the failure of the government and courts to decide the dispute even after 40 long years. According to opinion polls in India, only 29% of the people support the demolition, while a full 72% do not want the mosque rebuilt. Those who hold this opinion either do not voice it for fear of government action against them, or, if they do so, it is played down by the media. Girilal Jain, a former editor of the Times of India, remarks: "One must be out of one's mind to believe that the mosque can be rebuilt." On December 27th the government seized ownership of the area surrounding the mosque site and vowed to build both a temple and a mosque. The president of India has requested the Supreme Court to give an opinion on the ownership of the mosque site, which should be received in a few months. Neither Hindus nor Muslims were pleased with the decision. The government also decided to open the site to Hindu pilgrims wanting to worship at the makeshift temple erected by the kar sevaks.

The government ordered on December 8th the arrest not only of some top leaders of the BJP, the main opposition in the country, including L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti, but also the VHP leaders including Hari Vishnu Dalmia and Ashok Singhal. They were charged with having incited violence at Ayodhya on December 6th. They and their followers were apologetic about the demolition of the mosque and had publically said so. All major newspapers had reported on December 7th that Advani had tried his best to check the kar sevaks from demolishing the mosque and when he failed he had broken down and wept. The government also banned the VHP, RSS and Bajrang Dal on December 11th declaring them "communal" and holding them responsible for the events that had led to the demolition of the mosque. Two minor Muslim organizations were also banned. The two-year ban prohibits the organization from holding meetings, having offices and keeping bank accounts.

The order to outlaw the communal organizations came four days after the government announced it. This gave all the senior leaders an opportunity to go underground, remove all papers from their offices and even withdraw cash from

various banks. Only those who had deliberately stayed on in their offices because of their leadership's decision were arrested. The Joint Secretary of the RSS, Rajendra Singh, got tired of waiting for the police to come and arrest him. He passed his time in his office in Delhi holding press conferences to criticize the government action. About 10,000 members of the banned organizations were arrested by December 23rd. A large number of them were later released on bail.

Was the Attack Preplanned?

Enough evidence has come to light to support the claim that the demolition of the mosque was pre-planned. A few thousand kar sevaks were trained for this work. They had even held rehearsals near the mosque on December 4th and 5th as photographs taken by Delhi newspaper cameramen prove [see page 25]. They had brought with them pick axes, shovels and iron rods to carry out the job in a few hours. It is also being admitted that senior BJP and VHP leaders were kept in the dark about this plan lest they prevail on the kar sevaks to not earn it out. This is clear from the statements made by L.K. Advani, Atal Behari Vajpayee of the BJP and Rajendra Singh, H.V. Seshadri and Moropant Dingle of the RSS deeply regretting the demolition of the mosque and saying that it had not served their "cause."

Advani, however, told HINDUISM TODAY before his arrest that the blame for the demolition lay squarely on the Narasimha Rao Government as it had taken no interest in solving the dispute. When the kar sevaks assembled in Ayodhya in July, 1992, for the construction of the Ram temple close to the disputed structure, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao promised at a meeting with a number of religious leaders that he would resolve the dispute within three months. The saints had agreed to give him time as they wanted a peaceful solution. Negotiations were organized, but they did not produce any result. The government minister for parliamentary affairs, P.R. Kujaramanglam, says that sincere efforts were made to solve the dispute during the negotiations and just when they were coming to a fruitful end, the Dharma Sansad announced a fresh date - December 6th - for the temple construction. He claimed the VHP leaders were themselves not keen to solve the dispute. According to him, at one of the negotiation meetings, VHP leader Ashok Singhal had told the Muslim representatives of the AIBMAC, "If you have to live in India, you will have to chant the name of Shri Ram."

It is now a well-known fact that the senior officials of the government's own intelligence department knew about the plan to demolish the mosque. They

submitted a detailed note by November 27th to the Prime Minister's office on how the disputed site should be taken over by the government in a swift military action to avoid what they were sure would happen on December 6th. Even an Associated Press wire service report filed in America on December 4th stated that the demonstrators gathering on December 6th intended to demolish the mosque.

None of the senior leaders of the BJP, VHP, RSS or Bajrang Dal has publically admitted that the demolition of the mosque was preplanned. Many of them, however, in private express happiness at what happened. There are many others who feel that the removal of the mosque was a must to help the Hindus protect their identity which has been at stake for some decades because of the government's consistent policy of appeasement towards the Muslims. They say India is the only country where a minority community has a veto power in all national matters. They ask, "Does any minority community in a Muslim country enjoy such a power as the Muslims in India?" But they do not want to come out in the open for fear of a crackdown.

Those who do not approve of the demolition of the mosque but are firmly against its rebuilding - 72% of Indians - have found a great supporter in the Sankaracharya of Kanchi Kama Koti Peetam, Sri Jayendra Saraswati. He issued a statement on December 10th saying the government's decision to rebuild the mosque would amount to "reviving an issue closed fortuitously." Swami Anand Bodh Saraswati, the president of Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, and close to the government has also opposed rebuilding of the mosque and strongly criticized the banning of the VHP, RSS and Bajrang Dal. He asked, "Why did the government not take the same action against the Muslim League, which had advocated division of the country?"

Even moderate Muslims do not favor the mosque's being raised once again. Shahda Haidri of New Delhi fears the rebuilding of the mosque "will once again start the whole controversy." Some eminent Muslim leaders are against the mosque's being built again. Tahir Mohmood, Dean of Law, Delhi University, is one of them. He says, "I am not against building a mosque in Ayodhya per se. If people's feelings are assuaged by this, then certainly do it. However, personally I do not see much point in building it." But the hardline Muslim leaders like the Indian Muslim League chief, Ebrahim Sulaiman Sait and Sultan Salauddin Oswaisi, chairman of the AIBMAC, are vociferous in their demand that the mosque be rebuilt at the same site at the earliest.

Only time will reveal how India emerges from the biggest ever crisis it has faced since its independence in 1947. But the thought uppermost in the minds of most Hindus and Muslims is how to find a way to live together in peace and amity because, as a professor of Urdu said, "We are both human beings - first and last."

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