

[Doors of Disputed Rama Shrine Opened After 37 Years](#)

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On February 1 District Judge K.M. Pandey of Faizabad, India, ordered the Uttar Pradesh government to open the Ayodhya temple, Ram Janma Bhoomi, revered by Hindus as the birthplace of Rama. The temple, claimed by both Hindus and Muslims, was closed 37 years ago to defuse communal tensions and no one, Hindu or Moslem, has been allowed inside to worship. Its opening signalled a tremendous victory for Hindus in a concerted campaign led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

Several monks who had vowed self-immolation if the shrine were not opened by March 8 were thus spared. But on February 14th one Muslim died by police gunfire, and 9 policemen were injured as gangs of Muslims angry about the opening rampaged through Old Delhi, some 300 miles away. The trouble arose as 30,000 Muslims, many wearing black arm bands, marched through the streets from the Jama Masjid mosque protesting the Feb. 1 court order. Their claim to the shrine stems from the 16th century when the Mogul Emperor Babar built a mosque at the site after desecrating the existing shrine.

The "imprisonment of Sri Rama" has served as a rallying point for leaders of all sects of Hinduism, receiving unprecedented support since 1984. The move to force the government to open the shrine was interrupted briefly by the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Hindus in the U.S., Spain, U.K., West Germany, Kenya and the Far East lent support through signatures, letters to government officials and donation, VHP bulletins state.

A key point used by the VHP and the Dharm Samsad (comprising monastic leaders) in confronting the Uttara Pradesh government was that no court order had ever authorized the closing of the shrine in the first place.

Sri Har Mohan Lal, Secretary General of Parishad, said that the VHP has before it a

\$1 million plan to reconstruct the shrine and acquire 60 acres of adjoining land.

Similar demands to free two other Hindu holy sites-Shri Krishna's birthplace in Mathura and the Vishwanath temple in Varanasi - have not yet been met.

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