



THE HINDU CENTRE

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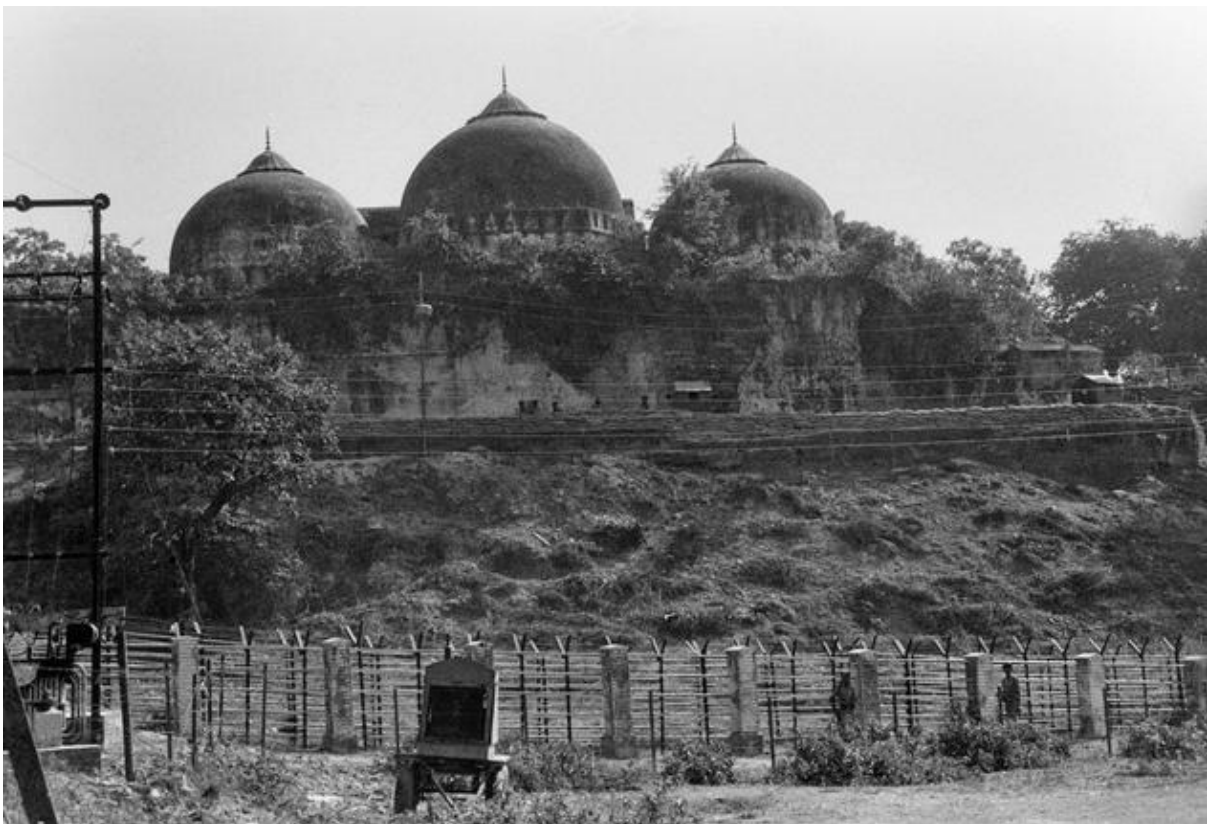
Politics and Public Policy



The Terrible Bequest of December 6, 1992

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Dec 7, 2017



December 6, 2017, several rallies and protest demonstrations were organised in country on the 25th anniversary of the demolition of the mosque. Photo: PTI

Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, Senior Associate Editor, Frontline, has covered the Ayodhya issue since 1986 when the locks of the makeshift temple inside the Masjid were opened. In this article, he recounts a clutch of journalistic experiences—starting from the last week of November 1992, through the cataclysmic demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6 of the same year, and its equally terrible aftermath. "The sequence of events as they unravelled from the last week of November to the demolition did not just forever alter the Hindu-Muslim equation, leading to the gradual normalisation of Muslim bashing and persecution. They also

helped the Sangh Parivar-led Hindutva forces establish their hegemony over all spheres, political, social, and cultural."

The very first thing that we—a small group of journalists hailing from Kerala—heard on the morning of December 6, 1992, as we stepped out of Hotel Tirupati in Faizabad, was the ‘azan’ from a nearby mosque. It was the call for the first Namaz of the morning around 5 a.m. and I immediately remembered the references to prayers that Mohammed Yunus Siddiqui, a leader of the All-India Babri Masjid Action Committee (AIBMAC), had made on the preceding evening. “Bhai is baar woh log zaroor masjid tod denge. Hume bachane wala koi nahi hoga. Hum sirf dua kar sakte hain ki kal kaa din shanti se guzre.” (Brother, they would certainly bring down the mosque this time. There would be nobody to save us. We can only pray that tomorrow passes off peacefully.)

Among the several AIBMAC leaders in the town, Siddiqui was undoubtedly considered the most affable and jovial. He was a study in contrast to Mohammed Hashim Ansari, the original litigant in the Babri Masjid dispute case, who was prone to emotional and volatile outbursts from time to time. But on the evening of December 5, we did not see the normally cheery Siddiqui Saab. In his place was a man whose countenance reflected only anguish and apprehension. The attempt by some of us to assure him by saying that things will be all right in due course was met with a smile, but one loaded with a completely uncharacteristic sadness. “This is a process of marginalisation of Muslims that began in Ayodhya in 1949, when the idols of Ram, Sita and Lakshman were surreptitiously installed inside the masjid in the dead of night. I know it in my bones that this ongoing process would reach new levels of persecution with the kar seva this time.” Siddiqui was proved right barely 24 hours later.

“*What he had told me sotto voce then was that a thorough engineering study of the Masjid had been completed and that special squads had been assembled and trained in order bring down all the three domes in a matter of hours. He had also added, rather proudly, that some of these special teams were “suicide squads” and would not even hesitate to lay down their lives to fulfil the task assigned to them.*”

A few hours before the meeting with Siddiqui, I had used the “personal advantage” I had acquired as a journalist covering Ayodhya for over six years, and managed to enter the “War Room” for the December 6 kar seva operating under the leadership of Vinay Katiyar, the then

chief of Bajrang Dal, the self-designated militant youth wing of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-led Sangh Parivar. Acharya Giriraja Kishore, a senior leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) was with Katiyar then. Asked how things were proceeding, Katiyar told me that everything was moving according to plan and almost exactly as he had told me privately in the last week of November. What he had told me *sotto voce* then was that a thorough engineering study of the Masjid had been completed and that special squads had been assembled and trained in order bring down all the three domes in a matter of hours. He had also added, rather proudly, that some of these special teams were “suicide squads” and would not even hesitate to lay down their lives to fulfil the task assigned to them.

Even as Katiyar was making these claims, VHP leader Swami Chinmayanand was giving an assurance to the Supreme Court that the December 6 kar seva would be peaceful and would comprise mainly bhajans and kirtans. Kalyan Singh, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, had also given a similar undertaking at the meeting of the National Integration Council (NIC). What Katiyar was saying was that the solemn assurance given before constitutional bodies would be bypassed. “Is there a power and constitutional authority bigger than Lord Ram?” Katiyar had asked rhetorically when pointed out that the implementation of the demolition plan as delineated by him would compromise the positions of leaders like Kalyan Singh, who had assumed office affirming allegiance to the Constitution; Based on this input, my copy for the *Frontline* issue that came out on December 5 had begun with the following question: “How far can one believe the words of the Hindutva combine?” This was in reference to the assurance given by Kalyan Singh and Chinmayanand. The copy, written on November 28, had also reported on the preparedness of the Sangh Parivar demolition teams, including the formation of special and even suicide squads. There was an additional information that I had that made me so bold as to write on these lines. This was what I had gathered from military intelligence sources about their assumption on the developments in Ayodhya in the last week of November. They had reported in that week that the number of kar sevaks was mounting everyday and the security wherewithal at the disposal of the forces would be found wanting in controlling the situation if the crowd turned aggressive. I also had come to know that this report had reached to the office of the then Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao.

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torn asunder by this vulgar brutality. As a Hindu, I can never live down the shame of this barbarism.” ”

Notwithstanding this concrete information from the Faizabad unit of military intelligence to the Union government, the physical demolition of the Babri Masjid happened before our eyes, symbolising also the wrecking of constitutional assurances given to the Supreme Court and the NIC. Even though Katiyar had given an inkling of the action plan, when it unravelled before our eyes the demolition was devastating, both emotionally and intellectually. *Indian Express* staffer, Rakesh Sinha, and our group were watching the violent proceedings from the Manas Bhawan top floor and, as the first dome fell around 2:55 in the afternoon, Sinha, unable to show his emotional tumult in any other way, wrote on a piece paper and passed it on to me: “I, as an Indian, am torn asunder by this vulgar brutality. As a Hindu, I can never live down the shame of this barbarism.”

By then, the barbarism had manifested as physical attacks on journalists, especially camera persons, and anybody who created visual evidence of the demolition of the Masjid and the havoc unleashed by the kar sevaks were being assaulted mercilessly. Women journalists such as Ruchira Gupta and Suman were cruelly manhandled as well. Ruchira would later reveal that she extricated herself from the clutches of kar sevaks somehow and reached the special dais set up in the precincts for leaders like Lal Krishna Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Ashok Singhal, and Uma Bharati with the request that Advani appeal to the kar sevaks to stop the assault on the media. The reply of the then “Hindu *hridaya samrat*” (emperor of hearts), Ruchira reported, was that he would not be able to attend to such personal inconveniences on a day when such a historic event was taking place. Around 3:15 p.m., after the fall of the second dome, Advani was heard exhorting the kar sevaks to block all entry points to the temple town, obviously to prevent any action by the security forces.

But later events proved that Advani’s exhortation was not really necessary. The forces that were present at the site did nothing to stop the demolition of the Masjid and stayed inactive not only till the last dome was brought down around 4:50 p.m., but also when the kar sevaks were cordoning off the area with their own fences, building a temporary structure and placing the Ram-Sita-Lakshman idols there. In fact, a substantial security movement towards the town started only the next day, around the evening of December 7. By this time, the Rao government had come to an understanding with the Sangh Parivar that the kar sevaks would be escorted out peacefully on special trains and buses. Through the night of December 7 and the day hours of December 8, the kar sevaks left Ayodhya shouting the slogan, “*Yeh toh sirf*

jhanki hai, ab kaashi, mathura baaki hain.” (This is only the trailer, now Kashi and Mathura are our targets). By the time this “peaceful evacuation” took place, these kar sevaks had attacked and torched around 100 Muslim houses of Ayodhya, forcing the residents to take shelter in the Sri Ramajanmabhoomi police station. Indeed, Siddiqui’s fears on December 6 about the persecution of Muslims of Ayodhya were being proved right by incident after bloody incident. The sequence of events as they unravelled from the last week of November to the demolition did not just forever alter the Hindu-Muslim equation, leading to the gradual normalisation of Muslim bashing and persecution. They also helped the Sangh Parivar-led Hindutva forces establish their hegemony over all spheres, political, social, and cultural. The manner in which the media was assaulted and women journalists were molested and gender shamed said a lot about Hindutva’s view of women and freedom in general. In fact, on December 9, three days after the demolition, Mahant Ramachandra Paramhans, the then President of the Sri Ramajanmabhoomi Nyas, (the VHP controlled trust to plan and oversee the construction of the Ayodhya Ram Mandir) underscored this hegemony angle blatantly yet figuratively. As a group of journalists went to see him at his headquarters of Digamber Akhara in Ayodhya that afternoon, he was playing the dice game of *Bagh-Bakri* with his disciples. Lifting his head from the game, his first comment to the journalists was: *“Is khel mein bakri jeet sakti hai. Lekin asli sansar mein kar sakti hai kya?”* (The goat can win in this game, but can it in real life?)

In later years, till he passed away in 2003, Paramhans would return to this metaphor as well as the “trailer slogan” raised by the departing kar sevaks as a consummate encapsulation of Hindutva politics and its ultimate goal of Hindu Rashtra. Elaborating the idea before friends and the media in long interactions, Paramhans would argue that the central aim of Hindutva politics was to unleash the political tiger embedded in the demographic advantage that Hindus had in India that is Bharat and convert that into political, social, and cultural hegemony. A year later, when I went back to Digambar Akhara, the Sangh Parivar and its political outfit, the BJP, had not made the substantive political gains it had expected from the demolition across Uttar Pradesh or India. The very first Assembly election after the demolition had witnessed the BJP being overtaken by the Dalit-Other Backward Caste (OBC) socio-political alliance formed by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP).

Questioned on this reverse, Paramahans was of the view that the unleashing of the Hindutva political tiger was a “work in progress” (Kaam Jaari hain) and that the Sangh Parivar had to work long and systematically to wrest geographical, social, and cultural control of even the temple town. “When the VHP first started focussing on Ayodhya as an important organisational destination in the early 1970s, Ayodhya was projected as a twin town of Faizabad and its hallmark was so-called secularism. But we have changed that in a matter of two decades,

sometimes through the method of step-by-step action and sometimes employing a flurry of fast-forward movements. These included enhancing our geographical space in the town by bringing more and more religious institutions under our banner, either by buying their property or by persuading them to ally with us. There were also mobilisations, campaigns, kar sevas, and, finally, the demolition.

“*Looking back in the context of the happenings of November-December 1992, it is evident that the Hindutva project has consolidated over the past 25 years. The aggressive manoeuvres it is unleashing for social hegemony is reflected in the restrictions that it is forcefully enforcing in diverse areas such as freedom of expression, food habits, and the creation of the climate for the brutal killings of dissidents.*”

But this is a work in progress. The identity and supremacy have to be strengthened further and we are working on that. In fact, even before reaching this point of success, we had gone through several operational levels characterised by success, partial successes, partial failures and major reverses. But the net result is that the project has moved on.” He would often come back to this explanation and add that the advancement of the larger Hindutva political plank in the country would also follow the same path. Looking back in the context of the happenings of November-December 1992 as well as the expositions of Sangh Parivar leaders like Paramahans, it is evident that the Hindutva project has moved on and consolidated over the past 25 years, building on the sectarian dividend derived from the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Its political power is redoubtable with a massive majority at the Centre and in Uttar Pradesh, the State that has Ayodhya and Faizabad. The aggressive manoeuvres it is unleashing for social hegemony is reflected in the restrictions that it is forcefully enforcing in areas as diverse as freedom of expression, food habits of the people, and the creation of the climate for the brutal killings of dissidents such as Gauri Lankesh, Govind Pansare, Narendra Dabholkar, Muhammed Akhlaq, and Hafiz Junaid. The domination of the cultural space is reflected in the arbitrary renaming and denial of exhibition rights to movies like *Sexy Durga* and *Nude*. Indeed, the communal and fascist politics of December 6, 1992 that first showed its frightful face 25 years ago, has since exceeded the worst fears and assumed gargantuan proportions and for proof we need only see the blatantly partisan agenda of the Narendra Modi Government.

(Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, Senior Associate Editor of Frontline is a journalist with 34 years experience in Print, Broadcast and Electronic media in leading regional, national and international organisations. Ramakrishnan specialises in reporting and analysing national politics, and comments on sociological trends and developments. Before joining The Hindu group of publications, he was associated with several media organisations including The Telegraph, BBC , Deshabhimani daily. Third Eye TV , and Indiavision TV.)

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