

Babari Mosque Demolition : Archaeology and History against BJP-VHP-RSS Falsification

The Babari Mosque has been demolished. Even if goodwill be restored enough in suitable places and minds to reconstruct a similar mosque in the same place (or elsewhere), it is not possible to get back the original, ancient monument. Hence it may appear somewhat irrelevant today to look back at the disputes over the mosque from a historical-archaeological background. But the relevance will become apparent if one keeps in mind the pending and intermittently repeated threats by the BJP-VHP-RSS clique over the mosques at Benaras and Mathura as well as the tomb of Tajmahal at Agra. The lies, frauds, forgeries and duplicities in an admixture of mythology and fanaticism with which this rabid communal fundamentalist axis is building their cases and trying to mislead the people should be exposed with the case study of the Babari mosque at Ayodhya, before further damage can be done to the historical monuments.

In the previous Bulletin (No. 3) the question of historicity of Rama has been examined. The BJP people also know that no such historicity exists. That is why in all such discourses they raise the bogey that "Rama and Ayodhya are matters of religious beliefs of the Hindus : any attempt to question their veracity amounts to injuring their religious sentiments." The implicit suggestion is to accept them in BJP's terms and argue the case accordingly. But the real point is : religious sentiments are all right as long as these are the personal affairs of the believers and do not replace or distort history. Once you refer to a birthplace and a temple on the site, you leave the domain of beliefs and enter the terrain of history, of hard facts. Hence in this brief article, let us explore the store of such hard facts as regards the "Ramjanmabhoomi temple" at the Babari Mosque's site.

Contrary Statements :

Puranic Rama being at least 900000 (ninchundred thousand) years old, the BJP-VHP-RSS axis had to bring in a "Vikramaditya" (that again, they cannot specify) of the Gupta period to have constructed the Ramjanmabhoomi temple and other temples at Ayodhya in the cognisable historical period. But how could this "Vikramaditya" discover the proper sites ? Again myths and oral traditions are not always sympathetic to history but go and grow on their own track. And the further trouble for the BJP clique has been to recruit two groups of "intellectuals" and allow each to circulate its own views and findings on the temple fiction. Hence while Justice Deoki Nandan pleaded for the existence of a Ramjanmabhoomi temple since Vikramaditya's time, that is, since the Gupta period (which continued up to fifth century A.D.), archaeologists, like B.B. Lal, S.P. Gupta etc. spoke of a Ramjanmabhoomi temple built in the 11th or 12th century A.D. Both views are printed in RSS-BJP publications with equiapproval, as if to let the people accept whichever they like. However, there are quite a large number of people in the country who find it difficult to accept both the calendars simultaneously, and therefore, question the sincerity of those who subscribe to such views

and organisations. Moreover, if the leadership of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement goes on referring to - millenium apart - two time points for the construction of the same temple, that itself nullifies their claim.

Literary Evidences :

Even then, one may be tempted to examine their claim from a broader frame of reference. But one would be surprised to know that the VHP in its "evidences" laced memorandum to the Union Government during Chandrashekhar's proxy-rule, failed to cite a single Sanskrit source, authenticating the claim of a Ramjanmabhoomi temple at Ayodhya. The only one they referred to is the *Skanda Purana*, which is dated by the scholars to belong to the 16th to 18th century.

But the contrary evidences are galore. Fa-Hsien (405-415A.D) and Huan Tsang (629-45 A.D.), the two Chinese pilgrims to Buddhist sanctuaries in India, mentioned no Ramjanmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya. Vorahamihira of Ujjain (6th century A.D.) spoke of idols of Rama in his *Brihatsamhita* but not of any Ramjanmabhoomi temple anywhere, not to speak of Ayodhya. So far no epigraphic (inscription) or numismatic (coins) evidences have been found which adduced to a Ramjanmabhoomi temple. Lakshmidhara in 1125 and Vachaspati Mishra in 1420 catalogued all the main *tirthas* (pilgrimage sites) for the Hindus. But they did not speak of any Ramjanmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya to be visited. *Ayodhya Mahatmya*, a section in the *Skanda Purana*, composed and elaborated up to the 16th century, and with interpolations continuing till the 18th century, describes the various points of pilgrimage in Ayodhya associated with Rama in the form of Shiva-Parvati dialogue and highlights the *Swargadwar* (death place) rather than the birthplace of Rama. It also refers to two different things as *Janmabhumi* and *Janmasthan* and situates both these places much further westward from the site of the Babari Mosque. Moreover, this only Sanskrit source of the VHP also does not even mention a Ramjanmabhoomi temple at those *Janmabhumi* and *Janmasthan* points. Todar Mal of Akbar's court commissioned a number of Brahmin Pandits of Benares to prepare a magnum opus of the Hindu religious practices and their *tirthasthanas*, popularly known as *Todarnandam*, which was completed in 1585. It also does not include any Ramjanmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya, nor does it mention any Ramjanmabhoomi temple being demolished and replaced by a mosque.

However, amidst all these literary sources, stands aloft one single volume, the *Ramcharitmanas* composed by Tulsidas in the vernacular (Early Avadhi speech, similar to Hindi) which became the most wellknown and popular version of the *Ramayana*. Tulsidas wrote it in 1572, staying at Ayodhya. Not only does he not refer even for once to any Ramjanmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya, but even relegates Ayodhya much lower in the list of *tirthas*. He recommends Prayaga, that is Allahabad as the '*Tirtharaj*' or the best or principal place of Hindu pilgrimage. If, to

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believe the BJP, Babar or any of his commanders had destroyed a Ramjanmabhoomi temple and substituted a mosque there, could a Rama-devotee like Tulsidas who was quite vocal against the so-called *Mlechhas* (heathens) and *Yavanas*, ignore the entire episode in his works?

Then, there is no contemporary writing, in Turkish or Persian, testifying to such an event, from that period. Babar, Baqi, Akbar, Abul Fazal and similar Moghal nobilities could not obviously foresee the doom of their empire. So they would rather want to keep such a deed in record, had there been such an incident.

It is this lack of any palpable literary evidence supporting VHP-BJP's contention of the "temple-destroyed-mosque built" episode, that drove them madly to misquote references. Take just one example, where they quote William Finch who travelled through Northern India in 1608-11, to have confirmed their Ramjanmabhoomi-Babari Mosque thesis. Actually, however, Finch referred only to "the ruins of Ramachandra's castle and houses, which the Indians acknowledge for the great God, . . ." as well as to the place where Rama was believed mythologically to have his last dip in the river Sarayu before leaving this world. (*Early Travels in India*, 1583-1619 ; ed. W. Foster, New Delhi 1968, p. 176) These are merely references to some myths and beliefs of the local Hindus, and there is nothing about a Ramjanmabhoomi temple destroyed by Babar.

Archaeological Scandal

The BJP-VHP-RSS lobby had to similarly tamper with the archaeological evidences. Thus Prof. B.B. Lal, when he was the director general of the Archaeological Survey of India, was entrusted with the task of excavating certain sites at Ayodhya, as part of the Ramayana Project of the Government of India, to attest the historicity of the *Ramayana*-story or otherwise, at the behest of the then Union Education Minister, Prof. Nurul Hassan. After a comprehensive excavation at various sites including the Southwestern backside of the Babari Mosque in 1975-76 Prof. Lal was disappointed to find no significant clue to the Rama story. In his preliminary official reports published in *Indian Archaeology - A Review* (1976-77, 1979-80) he pointed out that habitation in Ayodhya started not earlier than 700 BC and continued up to 400 AD, after which upto 1000 AD the place was rather deserted. He also found no trace of any Gupta kingdom's association with this Ayodhya. Thus, the Vikramaditya-link with the Ramjanmabhoomi temple was also rejected by him. The *Ramayana* Project was therefore dropped in 1976, and it was not revived even during the Janata party regime when Mr. L.K. Advani himself was the Cabinet Minister in charge of Information and Broadcasting.

Suddenly, in 1990, Prof. Lal, by now retired and enrolled in the BJP-VHP think-tank, discovered that he had discovered many "evidences" of a Ramjanmabhoomi temple behind the Babari Masjid. He started writing this new "discovery" in the columns of RSS magazines like *Manthan* (October, 1990) and the daily *Indian Express* (December 2, 1990), and not in any standard archaeological journal. Mr. S.P. Gupta, former director of Allahabad Museum, never a participant in the *Ramayana* Project also claimed his participation with Prof. Lal and wrote of having found Ramjanmabhoomi temple evidence with faked photographs.

Some historians and archaeologists, taking part in the debate repeatedly demanded of the Chandra Shekhar Government, as well as the concerned Governmental departments to produce the relevant excavation notebooks, register of antiquities, as well as drawings, plans etc. of these BJP archaeologists. Neither any such papers or material, nor even a note was sent by the departments. Sometimes experts also fail to produce false papers.

Moreover, a team of renowned historians and archaeologists, carrying on independent investigations, found on a thorough study of all available material, including B.B. Lal's own publication and material from different excavations by Prof. A.K. Narain kept at Benares Hindu University that the VHP temple destruction theory was completely baseless from an archaeological point of view. Instead of any object associated with a Hindu temple excavations of both B.B. Lal and A.K. Narain had yielded Islamic glazed ware pottery. These, they pointed out, are never used in a Hindu temple. Yet according to the experts, these are found to occur in trenches immediately below the general floor level of the mosque, indicating that the site was inhabited by Muslims from the 13th century onwards. (R.S. Sharma, M. Athar Ali, D.N. Jha, Suraj Bhan : *Ramjanmabhumi Baburi Masjid, A Historians' Report to the Nation*)

Actually the "archaeology" of Lal-Gupta combination exposed the real face of the BJP-VHP-RSS claims over the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babari Mosque in three eye-opening propositions. The first relating to Ayodhya's lacking any *Ramayana*-like evidences ; the second one asserting a Rama temple at the site of the Babari Mosque despite archaeological evidence to the contrary ; the third one shifting the time of construction of the temple by 1000 years. This reminds one of an adage : falsifiers require sharp memories to reconcile statements uttered at different places and times !

Historical or Documentary Claim

The only solid palpable "proof" that a Ramjanmabhoomi temple was destroyed by Babar, or one of his governors to construct the Babari Mosque comes from the BJP-VHP-RSS from Smt. A.S. Beveridge's translation of *Babar-nama* (1921) where she makes an assertion to the effect in Appendix U, in connection with the inscriptions on the erstwhile Babari Mosque, a part of which she translated. The full text of the original inscriptions, consisting of fourteen couplets has been retrieved and published in an authoritative publication of the Archaeological Survey of

India, (*Epigraphia Indica, Arabic and Persian Supplement*, 1965, pp. 58-62). But nowhere is there any mention or even a hint that the builder of the mosque (Mir Baqi) destroyed a temple, not to speak of a Ramjanmabhoomi temple or that the mosque was erected on the site of a temple. Nor does Babar make any mention as stated before, in his memoirs, the *Babar-nama* of having ordered the building of a mosque in Ayodhya, not to speak of the destruction of a temple. Even though he refers to Mir Baqi, his governor of Awadh or Ayodhya, he talks of imperial affairs only. So how could Mrs. Beveridge infer about the destruction of a Ramjanmabhoomi temple to erect a mosque there by Mir Baqi at the order of Babar ? By referring to H.R. Neville Faizabad Gazetteer (1905) who had recorded the local story circulating about the destruction episode of a temple and adding on her own : marking the birthplace of Roma. Neville in turn had referred to Fuhrer. Actually, the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babari Mosque controversy was hatched and the temple destruction myth circulated by the British imperialists with some ulterior motive in the mid-nineteenth century. The writings of the British officials like P. Carnegie (1866), an officiating Commissioner of the settlement office, Faizabad, and historians like Lady A. Beveridge and Fuhrer had given some communal distortions. Unfounded in all previous historical documents these motivated chroniclers suddenly discovered that Babar destroyed the temple and founded the mosque in its place. But that these were sheer presumptions and not fact is in a way admitted in their own writings even. One of them wrote that Ayodhya "must at least have possessed a fine temple in Janmasthan . . ." and "it seems that in 1528 Babar visited Ayodhya and under his orders this ancient temple was destroyed..." (P. Carnegie, emphasis added). Even Lady A. Beveridge wrote : "Presumably the order for building the mosque was given during Babar's stay in Oudh." (emphasis added). It is clear from their language as quoted, that the conclusion drawn by them was on the basis of presumption and unfounded and subjective thinking. The motive behind such distortion was however later unravelled by Indian historians who showed that the British authorities like Colonel Sleeman (1856) then Resident of Lucknow, in their bid to justify the annexation of Avadh, employed this controversy spherically to drive a wedge in the Hindu-Muslim unity. Moreover, the East India Company officials were smelling powder in the air, in the growing popular discontent, which later burst into the Great Revolt of 1857. So they were in search of allies among the Indian population. That is why they turned on their propaganda machine to spread the gossip prominently to set the Hindus of Ayodhya against the Muslims. They also directly approached Bairagis of Ayodhya for the purpose. The latter, quite gladly, offered the temple of Hanumangarhi as a shelter and rear of the British army during the Revolt. The Bairagis, sold the national cause to the British aggressors to win their favour in the petty feuds over the site of the Babari Mosque. The Company officials and, later the British rulers, paid back the debt by falsifying history as pointed out above. Lady Beveridge sodded her academic pursuit with this colonialist filth, in

1921 when Indian people were again rising in massive civil disobedience movement against the Raj, with a view to perpetrating the rift between the Hindus and Muslims over such temple-mosque disputes.

Hedgewar and Golwalkar, the first two chieftains of the RSS, reciprocated fairly well, in continuation with the Ayodhya's Bairagis keeping their volunteers off the entire course of freedom struggle and condemned the freedom fighters as anti-national for fighting against the British colonisers.

Lesson for Us All :

These give a glimpse of the magnitude of falsehood, forgery and betrayal to the national cause by the Ramjanmabhoomi temple mongers of the BJP-VHP-RSS axis. Had they been really sure of the existence of a Ramjanmabhoomi temple at the site of the erstwhile Babari Mosque, they would have no reason to object to impartial historical-archaeological enquires to be made by renowned experts in the relevant subjects. The very fact that they opposed such an enquiry and were seeking out an opportunity to anyhow demolish the Babari Masjid, that the moment they got a chance, they bulldozed the entire structure to dust, sending the broken materials and debris to distant corners of the country in order to wipe out all identifiable traces of the monument – these facts themselves prove how well aware they were about the baselessness of their claims. It not only causes deep anguish in the minds of those who seek truths on all questions, who are scared of falsehood disparaging the real, and what is more important, seek unity of the common people. It also pains those religiously devout Hindus to see the heinous attempt to raise a temple in the name of a god through falsification, deception, duplicity and then through riots, violence, bloodshed, rape of women, loot and arson.

It is high time the people were alert against similar sinister games to be played by these forces in Mathura, Kashi, Agra etc. Let us cry in unison : "Falsifiers and swindlers ! Hands off religious disputes !! We shall appeal to the court of History, to the reason and commonsense of the people to settle such disputes !"

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