

Why BJP deserves credit for Ram Mandir in Ayodhya

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Success belongs to those who make sacrifices. It does not belong to naysayers, and definitely not to those who tried to scuttle the effort in every way

“*Goli nahin chalegi* (police will not open fire),” the late Kalyan Singh remembered his words in a Hindi-language interview in 2009. He was speaking of the time when lakhs of *karsevaks* had gathered in Ayodhya in December 1992, and he was the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh.

The interviewer was not happy. ‘So you let it happen just to save a hundred lives,’ he demanded. Again, Kalyan Singh tried to explain. The crowd was in lakhs. If the police had opened fire, there would have been a stampede. Thousands would have died. But the ‘liberal’ interviewer would not give up on his bloodthirsty line of questioning. ‘So what if a thousand people had died?’ he asked. ‘You let India’s secular foundation be hurt just to save a thousand lives?’

In case you are wondering, the interviewer was not a representative of the British Empire. Nor was he a lawyer for General Reginald Dyer, who had insisted that the firing at Jallianwala Bagh had been necessary to save the foundations of the Empire. He was just from *NDTV*. But this is only an example of the attacks that the BJP has faced from the ‘secular’ establishment over the years. And the sacrifices that the party has made. The disputed structure in Ayodhya fell on December 6, 1992. That evening, Kalyan Singh resigned. Within hours, the central government, led by the Congress, dismissed the state government.

But nobody shed any tears for the elected state government in 1992. The Congress party had ruled India more or less continuously since 1947. In that period, India had become an economic basket case. Compared to the world, the average Indian was now three times poorer than in 1950! The country had been to the IMF seven times to ask for money. The latest was 1991. But for politicians, activists and the media, there was only one villain in 1992. That was the BJP, which stood accused of harming ‘secularism’.

Well, times change. The date for *pran pratistha* at Shri Ram Mandir in Ayodhya has been set for January 22. The ceremony will be performed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, head of the BJP government at the center, elected with full majority in 2014 and 2019. He will be accompanied by Yogi Adityanath, the BJP chief minister of Uttar Pradesh.

As the date approaches, there is joy and excitement across the nation. Hotels in Ayodhya are fully booked. It is just not enough. They are making new ones on a massive scale. The new airport has just been completed. The existing railway station has been expanded to cope with the wave of arrivals.

BJP workers and those of the Sangh parivar are going door to door, with *akshat* (whole rice) in preparation for the grand event. Newspaper reports say that *Gita Press* in Gorakhpur has run out of copies of *Ramcharitmanas*. There is no way they can print 4 lakh additional copies in such a short time. Such is the Ram sentiment sweeping the nation. *Ram aayenge...*

Ordinary Hindus understand that this is a historic moment. They instinctively understand the parallels with the return of Ram from 14 years of *vanvaas*. This time, it has been 500 years.

The old secular establishment cannot understand this idiom. They are too cut off from Hindu society. But they are feeling cornered now. Why should the BJP get credit for the Ram temple, they ask. Maybe because success belongs to those who actually struggle. It belongs to those who made sacrifices. It does not belong to naysayers. And definitely not to those who tried to scuttle the effort in every way. It seems that 'secular' parties and their fellow travellers are having a hard time understanding this.

What kinds of sacrifices?

First, there are those who sacrificed their lives. Few would know the names of the Kothari brothers from Kolkata. They were among the lakhs of *karsevaks* who had gathered for the VHP in Ayodhya in 1990. The police opened fire on them and hundreds were killed. The Kothari brothers were among the dead. Even in those days, India had activists, lawyers and journalists. But nobody cared about the human rights of the *karsevaks*. In fact, civil society has always acted as if they deserved to die.

Over a decade later, they had the same attitude towards the 59 *karsevaks* who were burned to death in S6 coach of Sabarmati express near Godhra on February 27, 2002. The dead were smeared. They were accused of not paying for tea, thus provoking Muslim vendors at the railway station. As if 59 lives could be worth just two rupees. They were accused of harassing a girl. Anything to make it look like the *karsevaks* deserved to die.

The accused in the Godhra carnage, all belonging to the minority community, have been convicted. Their sentences have been confirmed by the Supreme Court. But civil society continues to spread conspiracy theories about this incident. They feed these lies to the international media, which still won't accept who set fire to the train. They will never believe us. The Ram temple is a triumph for people whose sacrifices (and human rights) the world chose to ignore.

Let us look at this another way. Would the Ram temple have been possible without the efforts of the BJP? In 1990, Lal Krishna Advani led the mass mobilisation of Hindus, with his *rath-yatra* from Somnath to Ayodhya. As fate would have it, one of the organisers of the *rath-yatra* was Narendra Modi. How can someone deny credit to these leaders and to the BJP today?

The 'secular' parties of the time did everything to stop the *yatra*. Advani himself was arrested at Samastipur in Bihar. With this one act, Lalu Yadav sealed Muslim votes in favour of his party, something that continues even today. So did the Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh after police opened fire on *karsevaks*. This became a template across the country. To consolidate Muslim votes through mindless bashing of the BJP. It was just enough to get an advantage in our first past the post system.

The resulting governments were often shaky, marked by corruption, and accompanied by total breakdown of law and order. But they always enjoyed the full intellectual backing of scholars, academics and civil society.

On the other hand, the BJP paid a price everywhere. On the morning of December 6, 1992, the BJP had four state governments. Two weeks later, they had zero. Not just in Uttar Pradesh, every single BJP chief minister was dismissed by the Congress government at the centre. The duly elected governments of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh were dismissed. The excuse was a law and order problem in Uttar Pradesh! Where does this leave the constitutional structure of India?

In the 1996 elections, the BJP emerged as the single largest party. But no party would ally with them. It is because they were worried about losing minority votes. As a result, Vajpayee's government fell after just 13 days. When the BJP managed to form a coalition government in 1998, they were forced to put their three biggest ideological demands on hold. This included the Ram temple in Ayodhya, abolition of Article 370, and a Uniform Civil Code. Even so, the Vajpayee government managed to start the excavation under the disputed structure in Ayodhya. This paved the way for the Supreme Court judgement that has led to the construction of the Ram temple today.

It is because of these three ideological issues, the BJP finds it hard to attract allies even today. Who knows what would have happened if the people of India had not given an outright majority to Narendra Modi in 2014? Would there have been a UPA 3 government? Quite possible. The same goes for 2019. In 2024, the strategy of the opposition is to somehow keep the BJP short of 272 seats. The BJP takes huge risks and pays a heavy political price because it stands by its three big ideological issues. Two of these have been achieved today. This is a hard won ideological victory for the BJP. This is their moment.

The Congress government of Rajiv Gandhi removed the lock on the gates of the so-called Babri Masjid in 1986. But the Congress had almost had 40 years of power by then, and had failed to resolve the issue. And it seemed more of a cynical political calculation to balance out charges of Muslim appeasement after the Shah Bano case. Since then, the party has always appeared grumpy over the issue of the Ram temple.

For instance, they passed the Places of Worship act in 1991. This was written to deny Hindu claims in similar disputes at Kashi and Mathura. Then came the Waqf Act of 1995. This gave sweeping powers to the Waqf boards to take over almost any piece of land anywhere in India for Muslim religious purposes. That too without any due legal process outside of the so-called Waqf tribunals. It was not even clear if our High Courts and the Supreme Court would have the power to overturn decisions of these so-called Waqf tribunals. It is only recently that our judiciary has begun a pushback against this.

And who can forget the haste with which the UPA government in 2007 wanted to demolish the Ram Setu between India and Sri Lanka? The BJP led an agitation against it. Curiously enough, the supposed civil society groups were nowhere to be found. Even if you set aside for a moment the matter of religious belief, why did they not come out against the ecological damage of destroying the coral ridge? Perhaps because it was more important for them to show Hindus their place in the 'secular' nation.

The *pran pratishtha* at the Ram temple is also a deserved defeat for India's liberal elites. For decades, they used fake narratives to deny the oppression that Hindus faced at the hands of Muslim rulers. From Ayodhya and Varanasi to Vijaynagar. Fake narratives such as Muslim rulers demolished temples for

political reasons and not religious reasons. Well, every ruler in history had political power. And every ruler had political aims. Does this mean that no ruler was ever motivated by racism, xenophobia or bigotry? But their fake narratives took hold. Simply because the leftists had the echo chamber to themselves.

But you cannot destroy civilisational memory so easily. There are local Hindu communities in Ayodhya who still remember that their ancestors had fought to save the temple that stood at the spot. Their ancestors took an oath not to wear their *pagdi* until the temple was rebuilt. Their honour has been restored today, after 500 years.

When the Supreme Court verdict came out in favour of the Ram temple in 2019, everyone welcomed it. Both Hindus and Muslims. There was not one incident of communal violence. In other words, the secular fabric of the nation is just as safe as it always was. The fear mongering by some political parties and their intellectual backers has come to nothing. Long years ago, a crime had been committed. And now it has been set right. Was it good that the disputed structure had to be removed the way it was in 1992? Perhaps not. But that is how history works. A great historic outpouring, such as the fall of the Bastille during the French revolution of 1789, contains many ironies.

For Indians everywhere, the Ram temple comes at a time of great national renewal. We are building expressways, railways and airports at amazing speed and scale. We are reaching out to the last person in line with toilets, tap water, gas connections, electricity connections, bank accounts, as well as digital infrastructure. India just became the fifth largest economy. In two or three years, India will be the third. The world awaits the return of India as a great power. The return of Shri Ram to Ayodhya is symbolic in so many ways.

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