

India: Inquiry finds BJP and RSS responsible for 1992 pogrom

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A government-appointed commission of inquiry has found the top leadership of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) allies and mentors bear responsibility for the 1992 razing of the Babri Masjid—an outrage that precipitated an anti-Muslim pogrom in which more than two thousand people lost their lives.

On Dec. 6, 1992 Hindu supremacist activists mobilized by the BJP, the Shiv Sena (a Maharashtra-based communal party), the RSS and aligned Hindutva-ite organizations stormed the 450-year-old Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh mosque and demolished it using pick axes and other hand implements. In the preceding two years, the then BJP head and the party's current parliamentary leader L.K. Advani had spearheaded a communal and obscurantist all-India agitation targeting the Babri Masjid. In the name of securing the "nation's honour," the "Ram Janmabhoomi" (Birthplace of Ram) movement demanded the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the erection in its place of a temple to the mythical Hindu god Ram.

In the commission's final 1,000-plus page report, which was tabled in India's parliament yesterday, Justice M.S. Liberhan categorically rejects the claim of BJP and RSS leaders that the razing of the Babri Masjid was a "spontaneous" act.

"[I]t stands established beyond doubt," declares Liberhan in his report's conclusion, "that the events of the day were neither spontaneous, nor unplanned nor [an] unforeseen overflowing of the people's emotions."

Rather the razing of the Babri Masjid was a conspiracy. A conspiracy "carried out with great painstaking preparation and pre-planning," organized by the RSS, and aided and abetted by the BJP state government of Uttar Pradesh.

Liberhan observes that Babri Masjid was not set upon by a mob run amuck. While security forces—on the order of Kalyan Singh, the BJP Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, stood by—a small number of veiled karsevaks (Hindutvite "volunteers" or activists) stormed the mosque and quickly produced instruments to both demolish it and erect a makeshift temple.

Liberhan finds that the Kalyan Singh's state government acted in concert with the RSS to subvert the rule of law in India's most

populous state. "[T]he Chief Minister of the state of Uttar Pradesh, its ministers and its mandarins supported the destruction [of the Babri Masjid] with tacit, open and material support at every step." Under the BJP's rule, the machinery of state in Uttar Pradesh became "a willing ally and co-conspirator in the joint common enterprise to announce the revival of a rabid breed of Hindutva [the Hindu supremacist notion that India is first and foremost a "Hindu nation"], by demolishing the structure they had denounced as a symbol of Islam."

Singh's government systematically replaced any official or police officer in the twin cities of Ayodhya and Faizabad who was not sympathetic to the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation. It used the "coercive forces of law" only against those who were opposing the agitation; repeatedly lied to the Supreme Court about its intentions; instructed security forces to do nothing to prevent the storming of the Babri Masjid and let it be known in advance that force would not be deployed; ensured that no videotape of the razing (including from the closed-circuit cameras the Supreme Court had ordered placed at the site) survive; and failed to order security forces to intervene when mobs began attacking and killing Muslims.

Chief Minister Singh did not direct the police "to use force or resort to firing to chase away the miscreants or to save the lives of those wretched innocents ..." And he allowed "the wanton violence against human life and property" to continue "unabated," refusing, even as the death toll rapidly mounted, to call out the central government para-military forces that had been deployed to the state and that Singh had previously ordered to stand down so as to allow the mosque to be destroyed.

As for the national BJP leadership—Advani and Atal Behari Vajpayee (India's prime minister from March 1998 through May 2004)—Liberhan calls them "pseudo-moderates." Both before and after the razing they claimed to deplore violence and said they wanted a "negotiated" settlement to have the Babri Masjid taken down and replaced with a Hindu temple. But in reality they served as accomplices, providing a moderate and benign face for those bent on subverting India's secular state.

Liberhan says that while they were not in charge, the "pseudo-moderates" knew what was being planned and failed to stop it because they are beholden to the RSS and, in any event, hoped to

benefit politically from the assertion of Hindutva power.

“It cannot be assumed even for a moment,” concludes Liberhan, “that L.K. Advani, A.B. Vajpayee or M.M. Joshi did not know the designs” of the RSS. “These people, who may be called pseudo-moderates could not have defied the mandate of the Sangh Parivar [the RSS-founded network of organizations], and more specifically the diktat of the RSS, without having bowed out of public life as leaders of the BJP.”

The BJP, whose formation in 1982 was co-sponsored by the RSS, has always vehemently denied that it is an arm of the RSS, although many of its leading cadres including Advani and Vajpayee are lifelong RSS members and BJP leaders invariably consult with the RSS leadership about key decisions, including when Vajpayee was prime minister, cabinet appointments. Liberhan, however, asserts in his findings that the “BJP was and remains an appendage of the RSS” whose purpose is to provide “an acceptable veneer” to its “less popular” positions and “a façade for the brash members of the Sangh Parivar.”

Liberhan names 68 persons—leaders of the BJP, Shiv Sena, RSS, and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), ministers in Uttar Pradesh’s BJP government, and state and local officials—who he says by acts of commission and omission contributed to the razing of the Ayodhya mosque and, in an understatement given the pogrom that followed, led “the country to the brink of communal discord.”

Liberhan was appointed to inquire into the events surrounding the razing of the Babri Masjid ten days after it happened. Seventeen years later his report can hardly be said to be shocking. The RSS’s role in organizing the razing of the Babri Masjid and the complicity of the BJP leadership were obvious to any politically literate person at the time. As Liberhan notes, Kalyan Singh and others initially boasted of their role.

However, the blunt findings of BJP culpability and Liberhan’s contention that India’s alternate party of government is an appendage of an organization “whose Ayodhya campaign was clearly against the letter and spirit of Indian law and ethos” implicitly raises burning questions about the vitality and viability of India’s bourgeois democratic institutions—questions the ruling elite has long sought to suppress.

Liberhan’s report itself pulls many punches. Seventeen years on it gives legal sanction to what has long been known about the role of Uttar Pradesh’s BJP government, but this is far from the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The report whitewashes the role of the Congress Party central government of the time. Liberhan argues that the constitution tied the hands of Congress Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, but the Congress has repeatedly used the constitutional provision that allows the central government to place states under “president’s rule” in the event they fail to uphold the rule of law or there is breakdown in law and order.

Yet it stood aside in the face of the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation, an agitation it had encouraged by its own increasing identification of India with Hinduism, as in the 1984 election campaign. Indeed, in 1986 the Congress government of Rajiv Gandhi gave a boost to the Ram Janmabhoomi cause when it signaled to the courts that it favored removing the locks on the Babri Masjid mosque and allowing Hindus to offer darshan and puja in the disputed structure.

The reality is that the Congress has a long history of conniving with the Hindu right as exemplified by the 1947 communal partition of the subcontinent.

This month marks the 25th anniversary of the anti-Sikh Delhi pogrom, an atrocity organized by local Congress Party bosses following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. None of those responsible has ever been convicted of any crime. In fact many enjoyed long and successful political careers.

The state sanction for the anti-Sikh pogrom—Rajiv Gandhi who succeeded his mother as prime minister dismissed it by saying that when a mighty tree falls the earth shakes—could not but give courage to the Hindu right.

While Liberhan absolves the Congress government and party of any responsibility, he chastises various Muslim communal organizations for failing to defend their community or well-serve it in negotiations over the Babri Masjid and dismisses any suggestion that Muslims in India constitute a socially-disadvantaged minority and a frequent target of discrimination.

This is truly preposterous. In 1992, the Congress Party had formed the national government in all but two-and-half years of the 45 years of independent India. If the Hindu right has grown from a relatively marginal force into a threat to India’s secular state, as Liberhan contends, surely the Congress must bear much of the responsibility.

In the coming weeks, the *World Socialist Web Site* will have more to say about the Liberhan report and the political debate that arises from it.



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