

Modi inaugurates a Hindu supremacist temple on the site of the razed *Babri Masjid*: One historic crime atop another

Wasantha Rupasinghe, Keith Jones
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On Monday, January 22, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will preside at a “sacred” religious ceremony to inaugurate the massive Hindu temple that his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has had erected in Ayodhya on the site of the razed *Babri Masjid* (mosque)—fulfilling a longstanding goal of the Hindu supremacist right.

The Masjid, an historic Muslim shrine dating from the 16th century, was demolished on Dec. 6, 1992, by Hindu fundamentalist activists mobilized by the BJP and its allies in the fascistic RSS and the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP, World Council of Hindus). In defiance of the orders of India’s Supreme Court and under the watchful eyes of top BJP leaders and thousands of security personnel who supposedly had been deployed to protect the Masjid, specially trained Hindu activists razed it to the ground in a matter of hours using axes, hammers and grappling hooks.

The razing of the Masjid provoked India’s worst communal violence since the 1947 partition of the subcontinent into an expressly Muslim Pakistan and a predominantly Hindu India. In riots and other communal outrages that unfolded across much of north and west India well into 1993, thousands of people, most of them poor Muslims, were killed.

The BJP government and their Hindu right allies intend for Monday’s inauguration of the Ram Mandir to be a national spectacle and celebration. Central government workers have been given the day off until 2pm, and in most BJP-ruled states, including Uttar Pradesh—India’s largest state and where Ayodhya is situated—schools have been ordered closed and the sale of meat and alcohol forbidden.

With the corporate media shamelessly promoting the event, it is anticipated that hundreds of millions will watch on television as Modi blesses an idol, in reality a 51-inch (1.3 metre) doll, of Rama Lalla—the infant form of the Hindu deity Lord Ram—that is to be unveiled in the temple’s sanctum sanctorum.

Seeking to exploit religious sensibilities and backwardness, the Hindu right placed at the centre of its agitation over the Babri Masjid—an agitation aimed at whipping up animosity against India’s Muslims and asserting Hindu dominance—the absurd claim that the mosque was built atop the birthplace of the mythical Lord Ram.

Monday’s inauguration spectacle is far more than just a

celebration of religious mumbo-jumbo, mysticism and communal reaction.

It is the celebration of an historic crime. One that, as the building of the temple to Lord Ram on the former site of the Babri Masjid and its blessing by India’s prime minister underscores, is ongoing and giving rise to further outrages.

These crimes are in furtherance of a still more monstrous one—the transformation of India into a *Hindu rashtra* or state, in which those who hail from minority faiths, including Muslims, Christians, and any Dalits (former Untouchables) who do not accept that India is first and foremost a “Hindu nation,” live at the sufferance of the Hindu majority.

Monday’s inauguration has intertwined objectives.

First, it will provide an unofficial platform for Modi and the BJP to launch their campaign for a third consecutive five-year term when India goes to the polls this spring.

Modi and his RSS mentors also conceive of it as capping their campaign to make the Ram Mandir a Hindu nationalist-supremacist shrine. It is to be a symbol of the “new India” they are forging and whose very existence is testament to “Hindu” (in reality Hindu far-right) assertion and political pre-eminence in contemporary India.

With the assistance of a pliant corporate media, the BJP and its allies have promoted a series of reactionary, interlaced narratives.

The building of the temple to the infant Lord Ram (Ram Lalla), they claim, incarnates the “rebirth” of India as a “Hindu nation” after more than a millennia when, according to the perverted historiography of the Hindu right, it was subject to “alien” Muslim rule, only to be followed by the British colonialists.

The rebirth of India as a Hindu nation under Modi and the BJP is held up as inseparable from its capitalist “rise” and the increasingly assertive role it is playing in world affairs as a prized ally of the US, Japan and the European imperialist powers.

India’s billionaires are being given a place of honour at the inauguration of the Ram Mandir. Scores of them have been invited, beginning with India’s two richest billionaires, both of them staunch Modi supporters—Mukesh Ambani (net worth \$US105.4 billion according to the Forbes’ Real-Time billionaires ranking on January 18) and Gautam Adani (\$74.9 B).

Modi’s inauguration of the Ram Mandir in a “national” celebration is intended and in the most demonstrable fashion to

repudiate any conception of India as a “secular” state. Whatever the constitution may formally declare, the Modi government, aided and abetted by the judiciary and with the support of the Ambani’s, Adani’s and other titans of Indian industry, is changing India into a de facto, if not yet a fully de jure, Hindu state.

As around the world, big business in India, fearful of growing social opposition and locked in a frenetic struggle for market share and profits, is embracing the far-right as the most ruthless defender of its interests and ferocious opponent of the working class and social equality.

Through the Ram Mandir ceremony, the BJP leadership hopes to electrify the Hindu right forces who comprise its cadre, project the party as triumphantly imposing its image on India, and whip up Hindu communalism with a view to polarizing the electorate along religious lines.

It also is seeking to build up Modi as an authoritarian figure, a Hindu “strongman” touched with the divine. Thus in announcing he was conducting Hindu “purification” rituals prior to Monday’s *pran pratishtha* (literally “giving life to the idol”) ceremony, Modi modestly declared that he was serving as God’s vehicle. “God created me,” he tweeted on Jan. 12, “to represent all the citizens of India during pran pratishtha. Keeping this in mind, I am beginning an 11-day special *anushthan* (purification) from today.”

The BJP was for decades a marginal force in Indian politics, and until the 1980s the dispute over the Babri Masjid was a local curiosity in Ayodhya and its environs, kept alive by a handful of Hindu fundamentalists and Hindu Mahasabha fascists.

The emergence of the Hindu right, like fascist forces elsewhere, is bound up with the bourgeoisie’s ever-accelerating turn to the right and the role that ostensible liberal and “left” parties have played for decades in attacking the social and democratic rights of working people, funneling resources into the military and war, and presiding over ever deeper social inequality.

The rise of the BJP was also facilitated by the connivance of the purportedly “secular” opposition parties and institutions of the Indian state with the Hindu right. The Congress Party’s record of adapting to and working with the Hindu right, including in 1947 communal partition massacres, is far too long to catalogue here. But it should not be forgotten that Congress governments colluded in the razing of the Babri Masjid. This included championing a 1986 judgment by a district court ordering the locks on the mosque be removed so as to open it to Hindu devotees of Lord Ram, and the refusal of the Naramsimha Rao government to order the thousands of security forces deployed in Ayodhya to block the mosque’s Dec. 6, 1992 demolition.

As in other infamous cases of mass communal violence, including the anti-Sikh riots fomented by Congress leaders after Indira Gandhi’s 1984 assassination and the 2002 anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat, the police and courts failed to successfully prosecute those responsible for organizing the Babri Masjid’s demolition, although leaders of the BJP and Shiv Sena boasted of their involvement, or for inciting the mass violence that followed.

In 2019, India’s highest court rewarded the perpetrators of the Babri Masjid’s razing, “ordering” the BJP government to realize one of its most cherished goals and build a temple to Lord Ram on

the vacant lot where it once stood. In a transparent attempt to obscure its endorsement of criminality in the name of Hindu pride and assertion, the court said India’s Muslims should be compensated by the building of a mosque on another site as well as a hospital and various other community projects. Not surprisingly, five years on none of these have materialized.

After much to-ing and fro-ing, India’s main opposition parties announced one after the other that they would not participate in the Ram Mandir inauguration. But they did so in the most apologetic manner. Many, including Sitaram Yechury, the head of the Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, said they would have liked to attend, but couldn’t under conditions where Modi and his BJP had decided to “politicize” the event.

As if the Ram Janmabhoomi (‘Birthplace of Ram’) movement had not been political from its inception! Conspicuously absent from virtually all the statements of opposition leaders was any reference to the Babri Masjid’s demolition and the mass communal violence that followed.

Underscoring their cowardice and adaptation to the Hindu right, some opposition parties and opposition-led governments have decided to organize their own events Monday to mark the Ram Mandir or pay homage to other Hindu gods. The AAP government in Delhi is doing the former, while West Bengal Trinamool Congress Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will pay tribute to the Hindu God Kali.

Monday’s celebration of communal reaction and lawlessness and the prostration of the opposition parties must serve as an injunction to the working class to blaze a new political path, based on the program of socialist internationalism.

The Stalinist-supported, Congress Party-led, opposition INDIA electoral alliance is nothing more than a safety-valve for the bourgeoisie that offers it an alternative right-wing government, committed like Modi’s to further pro-investor reform and the anti-China Indo-US “global strategic partnership,” should the BJP government falter.

To defend its democratic rights and defeat communal reaction, the working class must be mobilized as an independent political force, rallying the rural toilers behind it in opposition to the bourgeoisie and all its political representatives and in the fight for workers’ power and the socialist reorganization of socio-economic life.



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