

Gist of RSTV Big Picture - Ram Temple: History & Significance

Anchor: Frank Rausan Pereira

Guests:

1. J. Sai Deepak, Advocate, Supreme Court
2. Ashok Tandon, Senior Journalist
3. Rajiv Malhotra, Author & Researcher

What's in the news?

- Prime Minister laid the first brick of the grand Ram Temple in Ayodhya, as per the 'muhurat' for 'bhumi puja'
- He performed the 'pooja' at 'Shree Ram Janmabhoomi' along with the UP Governor Anandiben Patel and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat.
- PM said, "Like August 15, today's day holds a similar significance for crores of people who devoted their lives for the cause of the Ram temple. The 'mandir' will mark a decisive change in the economy of Ayodhya."
- August 5th has been termed as a 'golden day' because the Ram Janmabhoomi stands 'liberated'.
- The UP chief minister said that the temple construction is a moment to "showcase new India to the world, which does not discriminate based on caste and creed".

What's the background or the history of this issue?

- The Ramayana is one of the largest and oldest epics in world literature. It is one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India, other than the Mahābhārata.
- Ramayana has a profound impact on the art, culture, literature, and temple architecture in many Southeast Asian countries like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand.
- Ayodhya, the birthplace of deity Rama, has been at the center-stage of political, historical, and socio-religious conflict in India.
- While the Hindus believed that the Babri Masjid, named after Mughal emperor Babur, was built in Ayodhya after destroying a Ram Temple that marked the birthplace of the deity, several groups, prominently from the Muslim community denied this claim.
- In 1992, the Babri mosque was demolished by Hindu political groups, which was followed by an investigation into the case by the Liberhan Commission.
- In 2010, The Allahabad High Court decided in favour of trifurcating the disputed land between- the Sunni Wakf Board, Nirmohi Akhara, and the Hindus supporting Ram idol installation.
- In 2019, the Supreme Court ordered -
 - the land to be handed over to a trust to build the Hindu temple.
 - to give an alternate 5 acres of land to the Sunni Waqf Board to build a mosque.
 - Dismissed all petitions seeking review of its final verdict.

What is the road ahead?

- The biggest challenge in creating a strategy for deciding the future of similar sites like Ram Janambhoomi is the continued existence of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991.
- Section 4 of the Places of Worship Act, 1991 has been challenged by Hindu trusts as it comes in the way of reclaiming disputed religious sites other than the Ram Janmabhoomi (Ayodhya), for instance,

the mosques in disputed temple properties in Varanasi and Mathura.

What is the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991?

- It bans the conversion of a place of worship or even a section of it into a place of worship of a different religious denomination or a different segment of the same religious denomination.
- Imposes a positive obligation on the State to maintain the religious character of every place of worship as it existed at the time of Independence.

What does this mean for the politics of the country?

- With the legal closing of the Ayodhya issue, the politics over the ownership of the disputed territory is also over.
- Positive reactions have emerged from political parties across India . It has been established that “Rama” is above any particular religion and is a symbol of universal good values. He is also a symbol of Indian culture and history.
- There have been no agitations or incidents of communal violence in the wake of the beginning of temple construction event.
- Even in the southeast Asian nations, people ardently followed the temple inauguration event in India and expressed positive sentiment towards the occasion.

What does it mean for the culture, heritage, and history of India?

- For the first time in the recent past, the entire nation has been united over a political issue. However, the challenge of divisive/separatist groups within and outside India using this issue as an opportunity to galvanize communal sentiments in Indian minorities persists.
- It has shaped a distinct civilizational and cultural identity of India in the world. It is an opportunity to reinvent modernity, science, governance, and social thought in the context of the ethics of the ‘Ramayana’.
- Going back to the values of Ramayana signals intellectual decolonization taking place in India. This includes the decolonization of Indian history as well.

Is this majoritarianism an end of the Indian republic?

- This issue is about reclaiming the religious and civilizational identity of the indigenous populace of India.
- It is a manifestation of the concept of decolonization- India has suffered British as well as settler colonialism for elongated periods. The temple construction after a wait of nearly 150 years is an example of tolerance and law abidance of the Indian people.
- Every political decision is bound to have positive as well as negative responses in people. The peaceful and constitutional manner in which the temple construction is being carried out makes it an amicable decision.

The best way forward-

- The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) should create a Ramayana archaeology, where all the sites referred to in the Ramayana should be systematically studied.
- If the Government wants to make an informed decision on the claims of different communities to the disputed religious sites, it must order an excavation in those sites by the ASI. The findings will help in deciding whether the claims of any particular community are justified or not.

- India must celebrate its unity in diversity and the culture of inclusiveness, which the consensus on this issue has highlighted.

