

Unveiling India's Duality: Islamophobia Amidst Ram Mandir Inaugurations

India was brought to a halt on 22nd January 2023, during the inauguration of the much-awaited Ram Mandir. The event was broadcasted nationwide and viewed on LED screens in rural areas, drawing large crowds. While the event was celebrated as a triumph by the majority, for some, it symbolised the perpetuation of Islamophobia in a nation renowned for its status as the world's most secular state.

However, amidst the celebration of the temple's consecration, a dark undercurrent of violence swept through India, targeting Muslim communities. Shortly after the consecration, a Muslim burial ground was set on fire in the northern state of Bihar in India, a Muslim man was publicly paraded in a state of nudity in southern India, and a saffron flag, symbolising aggressive Hinduism, was raised above a church in central India, as reported by [Aljazeera](#).

The temple to Hindu God Ram known as The Ram Mandir, was built on the site of a 16th century mosque called Babri Masjid, which was demolished by Hindu protesters in 1992. According to [Aljazeera](#), the events in 1992 led to the killing of 2000 people, mostly Muslims in India. "We've reclaimed what was rightfully ours after years," said Vinod Gupta, a priest hailing from Haridwar, India. "The Mughal empire built their own place of worship on our sacred grounds but today, we've demonstrated the enduring strength of our faith over theirs".

For supporters of Ram Mandir, it represented reclaiming of cultural heritage and a reaffirmation of Hindu identity. For many Muslims, it sparked fears of further marginalisation in a country where Islamophobia runs rampant.

Zahra Khan, a student at Aligarh Muslim University in India, shared a concerning incident involving her house help. "I am happy with the inauguration of the Ram Mandir, and personally, I've never encountered any problems as a Muslim living in India," she stated. "However, I cannot say the same for my house help. Recently, she faced appalling remarks

from the wife of a prominent High Court judge in my city." Zahra recounted the judge's wife explicitly saying, "Whatever is happening to Muslims in India because of Prime Minister Modi's regime is absolutely correct. If I were in his place, I would make all the Muslims in India stand in one line and chop their heads off."

In India, individuals in positions of influence and power openly express support for atrocities against Muslims. The phenomenon of influential figures endorsing violence and discrimination against Muslims reflects not only a moral failure but also a systemic issue within Indian society. According to The Wire, less than a month ago following the Ram Mandir consecration, a Bihar BJP MLA named Haribhushan Thakur Bachaul made a remark implying that Muslims should be burned alive, similar to the tradition of Hindus burning effigies of Ravana during the Dussehra festival.

Mariele Campusano, a Global Studies Master's student at HBKU, expressed concern about the situation, stating, "There's an alarming amount of anti-Muslim propaganda by those in authority in India." She linked it to the situation in Palestine, where efforts are made to eradicate a religious group. Campusano finds the derogatory remarks and inhumane treatment against Muslims deeply troubling and in violation of global laws and principles of justice. Despite these challenges, she remains hopeful that efforts to improve India's social-political landscape will prevail.

"In the diverse nation of India, Islam is held in high regard as a respected religion. As an Indian citizen, I've had the privilege of experiencing the richness of various cultures and faiths. However, she points out that the ruling BJP's political agenda, centred on promoting Hinduism, often utilizes events like temple inaugurations as part of their strategy for the 2024 election campaign.

Despite this, several Indian citizens uphold the values of religious tolerance and unity. They wish to see India without any prejudices and a nation with unity and equality.

“India stands as the largest democracy but diversity in India in terms of religion and culture should not just merely be tolerated, it should be celebrated” said Angad Bajwa, a youth leader. “It is important that we educate our friends and family to embrace diversity and combat the harmful narratives of Islamophobia and oppression, ensuring a brighter future for India without such prejudices”.

###