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### The Ram Temple Dispute and Indian Nationhood

The Ram Temple is a Hindu temple currently under construction in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, India. The ground-breaking ceremony of the temple — performed by the Indian Prime Minister and BJP leader, Narendra Modi, on August 5th, 2020 — was the culmination of long-running communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India.<sup>1</sup> The Ram temple site is considered by many Hindus to be the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram.<sup>2</sup> It is also the site of Babri Mosque, built in the 16th century under the Mughal Empire, which stood for 400 years until it was assaulted and demolished by right-wing Hindu nationalists in 1992.<sup>3</sup> The groundbreaking of the temple, and the dispute over the mosque site in Ayodhya, has been covered extensively in news reports in India and around the world.

How should we understand the history behind these events? I aim to contextualize these events in light of three overlapping topics: the religious history of India, and especially the legacies of the Mughal Empire; the sharpening of sectarian tensions during the period of British colonialism; and the struggles over secularism and citizenship that followed from partition and independence. In exploring these issues, I rely on lectures from Dr. Christina Welsch, the

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman and Hari Kumar, “Modi Founds Temple on Mosque's Ruins, in Triumphant Moment for Hindu Base.” *The New York Times*, August 5, 2020, online at *Nytimes.com*.

<sup>2</sup> Sunetra Choudhury and Pawan Dixit. “Ayodhya's Tryst with Destiny,” *Hindustan Times*, August 5, 2020, online at *Hindustantimes.com*

<sup>3</sup> Gettleman and Kumar, “Modi Founds Temple.”

textbook surveys of William Duiker's *Contemporary World*, a public lecture on the Citizenship Amendment Act by Dr. Abhinav Chandrachud, and Angana Chatterjee et al's study of Hindu nationalism. Together, these works show that the Ram Temple dispute grows out of tensions that are deeply rooted in the history of British India and the central tensions of independent India.

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