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Mosque as Monument: The Afterlives of Jama Masjid and the Political Memories of a Royal Muslim Past

Hilal Ahmed*

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This article examines various political images of Jama Masjid of Delhi to find out the ways in which historic buildings are transformed into monuments of various kinds. More specifically, it studies a particular event of 1987 when Jama Masjid, a functional Muslim religious place of worship, was closed by its own Imam. The paper makes a broad argument that the afterlives of historical objects produce various kinds of monumentalisation. In the case of postcolonial Muslim politics, especially in north India, the commemorative capacities of historic mosques are politically evoked, not merely by stressing their religious significance as religious places of worship but also by highlighting them as a Muslim contribution to the making and remaking of the official postcolonial idea of 'Indian heritage'.

Keywords: mosque; Muslim; monument; monumentalisation; heritage; commemoration; afterlives

The afterlives of historical objects as a conceptual category draw attention to multiple modes by which these objects are seen, interpreted, represented, discovered, classified, categorized, and even destroyed. This concept questions the neutrality of historical objects and points towards diverse socio-political processes, which transform them into various conflicting categories: monuments, museums, memorials on the one hand, and mosques, temples, graveyards, and maqbaras (tombs) on the other. This paper is about the production and reproduction of these diverse categories. It focuses on Jama Masjid of Delhi, one of the most famous mosques of South Asia, to investigate the question: how do the conflicting afterlives of historical objects produce various kinds of 'political memories'?

Two conflicting afterlives are examined here. Firstly, this essay considers the transformation of Jama Masjid into a historical monument of a specific kind. Technically speaking, Jama Masjid is not a protected monument in the strict legal sense. Yet, its representation as a symbol of medieval Muslim heritage in postcolonial India converted it into an officially recognized 'historical object'. Precisely for this reason, the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) was directed by the government to provide special funds and technical support for the proper upkeep and maintenance of the building of this historic mosque. This specific form of monumentalisation offers an official identity to Jama Masjid. The mosque continues to function as a religious place of worship despite the state's direct involvement in the conservation of its built structure. So, Jama Masjid's eternal life as a functional religious place of Islamic worship goes alongside an equally infinite afterlife of state protection.

The virtual conversion of Jama Masjid into a 'centre' of Muslim politics in postcolonial India symbolizes another kind of afterlife for this mosque. The eleventh Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid, Syed Abdullah Bukhari, who is still remembered for his election fatwas of the 1970s and 1980s, re-discovered the political potential of this historic mosque. Bukhari made some crucial changes to the public presence of this mosque: he installed a notice board in Urdu narrating the painful story of India's minorities, especially Muslims, and introduced some interesting political rituals such as issuing farman (decrees) to mobilize the public for his speeches and sermons. He started wearing a particular kind of clothing to establish a direct link between his political activities and the memories of a Muslim rule in India. Thus, Jama Masjid, which had already been monumentalized, found a new afterlife as a Muslim political centre.

In order to examine these two conflicting afterlives, I focus on an important political event – the closure of Jama Masjid for regular prayers in 1987. I choose this event for two reasons. Firstly, this event signifies an interesting political act – the closure of a mosque. Usually, mosques in India are used for mobilizing Muslims for socio-religious and even political activities. The demand that historical mosques under the protection of the ASI should be opened for regular prayers had been an important political agenda for Muslim groups in the 1980s. The Imam of Jama Masjid, on the other hand, decided to close the mosque to the public, and so
highlighted the secular status of Jama Masjid as an historical monument. This secularization of Islamic politics in postcolonial India makes this event very significant.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this event is also linked to a memory of a royal Muslim past. The Imam closed the gates of Jama Masjid precisely to demand that the gates of Babri Masjid should be opened for Muslims. Jama Masjid was thus linked to another Mughal mosque, Babri Masjid, which had been forcibly occupied by a section of local Hindus in Ayodhya in 1949 and opened for restricted worship for Hindus in 1986. Thus, both mosques – Jama Masjid and Babri Masjid – were politically represented as monuments by the Imam in order to redefine the memories of a royal Muslim past in an interesting way. This article makes the broad argument that the commemorative capacities of historic mosques are politically evoked by Muslim political groups in postcolonial India, not merely by stressing their religious significance as places of worship but also by highlighting them as Muslim contributions to the larger post-colonial Indian heritage.

I would like to make two important clarifications here. I use the term ‘political memory’ to understand the ways in which the ‘past-consciousness’ of a social group is transformed into what Jan Assamann calls ‘actual memory’ – the memories that are generated when historical objects are given new meanings in public discourses. In this sense, I make an attempt to explore various contending modalities – history, memory, myth – to trace the political meanings of Jama Masjid as an historical object to make sense of the discourse of a ‘royal Muslim past’. The second clarification is about the term ‘monumentalisation’. I make a conceptual difference between ‘historic architecture’ and a ‘monument’ to understand the process by which a particular building or a group of buildings is converted into (a) protected historical monument(s) in India. This process deals with a number of issues: a particular building is differentiated from other buildings; its physical characteristics are identified as symbols; its architectural properties are measured; certain historical and artistic values of the building are determined; its history is traced; and finally it is preserved as the heritage of a nation, community, or people. In a broad sense, this may be called the process of monumentalisation.

Babri Masjid and Jama Masjid in 1986

To understand the closure of Jama Masjid in 1987, one needs to look closely at the manner in which Jama Masjid was linked to the issue of the Ram temple/Babri Masjid. For this purpose, I suggest, it is important to contextualize this link in relation to the strengths and weaknesses of three dominating Muslim political groups of that time: the Muslim legal-constitutionalists, particularly the leaders of the All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat (AIMMM); the Muslim radicals led by Imam Bukhari; and the ulema of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB).

The case of Babri Masjid was full of potential for all of them. Firstly, the Babri Masjid dispute was primarily a legal case in which the question of the right to worship was involved. The physical existence of a mosque under the control of the state could have been shown as a form of legal injustice and infringement of minority rights by the legal-constitutionalists. Secondly, the dispute over Babri Masjid was related to medieval Muslim rule. The Hindutva claim – that Babri Masjid was actually built on the very site of a temple built by Mughal Emperor Babar and therefore that the site should be given back to Hindus – could have been the most attractive aspect of the case for the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid. It was possible for him to establish a link between Jama Masjid and Babri Masjid. He could have portrayed Babri Masjid as a symbol of Muslim subjugation in contemporary India. And, finally, Babri Masjid was a mosque, which had a specific wakf status under Islamic Sharia. The issue could certainly be approached by the ulema from a Sharia point of view. They could have ‘exposed’ the crisis of Islam and the virtual dominance of Hindus in secular India.

These issues were closely related to each other and it was not possible, at least at that date, for these political forces to focus on any single aspect of the case. The legal constitutionalists were incapable of mobilizing common Muslims simply by projecting the Babri Masjid case as a ‘constitutional matter’. They had to rely on people like Shahi Imam for popular politics and ulema for acquiring a ‘religious’ sanction for their political moves. The Imam, on the other hand, was not in a position to ignore the complex legal issues involved in the case. He needed the legal-constitutionalists to establish a link between the Jama Masjid and the crisis of Babri Masjid. Similarly, politically active ulema were desperately looking for radicals and legal-constitutionalists for establishing a Sharia-based political argument around Babri Masjid.

Thus, the intricacies of the Babri Masjid case obliged various ideological forces to come together and form a grand coalition. This was the safest option for all the groups and leaders. It could give them a secure political start because the responsibility of possible failure was to be shared by all the constituents. At the same time, the coalition could provide them with a considerable amount of time to refashion their independent agendas. Table 1 illustrates this point more clearly (Table 1).

Let me now focus on the Imam’s strategy. A photograph depicting the idols of Lord Ram inside the Babri Masjid compound was published by a local Urdu newspaper, the Faisal Jideed, on 3 February 1986. The copies
Immediate concerns
Making a coalition
Acquiring a leading space after Shah Bano case
How to sideline others

of this newspaper were widely distributed by the supporters of the Imam in the Jama Masjid area and it was announced that the Imam would speak on this issue later. This was followed by his Friday sermon on 7 February 1986. In a highly provocative speech, he warned the government that if Babri Masjid was not given back to Muslims, he would start a mass movement.

In the meantime, a few Muslim organizations observed 14 February 1986 as a Black Day to register Muslim protest about Babri Masjid. It was a Friday and the Imam was well aware of the significance of this call. He encouraged local people to observe this day as a Black Day and appealed to Muslims to offer Juma prayer at Jama Masjid. The Imam had been using his sermons for making political speeches since 1974–75. However, this time the Imam had to carve out a space for himself in the larger Muslim coalition on Babri Masjid. The Imam, manipulating the feelings of resentment and outrage among the local Muslims, delivered a very lucid and eloquent sermon. This was his first crucial public ‘performance’ in the Babri Masjid case. The carefully selected contents of this speech were delivered in a very aggressive tone. This speech was so articulate and organised that it was very difficult to directly blame the Imam for spreading any kind of ‘communal’ feelings. Yet it was a very decisive speech, which outlined his political strategy and determined the course of future political events in the country.

His speech ignited the feelings of the worshippers. After the Friday congregational prayer, he called upon all the devotees to say Nara-e-Takbir Allah ho Akbar (‘Allah is supreme’). The crowd dispersed, chanting slogans related to the Babri Masjid case, and it soon became a major communal clash in old Delhi, still remembered as the first Babri Masjid riot. This riot was followed by a series of communal incidents which took place in the coming months and further elevated the political status of Abdullah Bukhari as a radical Muslim leader.

The formation of the Adam Sena was his next step. On 15 June 1986 Ahmed Bukhari, the elder son of Abdullah Bukhari and the then Naib Imam (deputy Imam) of the mosque, announced that a new Muslim organization, the Adam Sena, would be established to fight against the ‘communal forces’. Two donation boxes were installed at every entrance of Jama Masjid and Muslims were asked to give moral, religious, and above all financial support to this endeavour. The aims, objectives, and formal organizational structure of this outfit remain unknown. Yet the Imam and his son Ahmed Bukhari in almost all their speeches and sermons praised the Adam Sena as an organised Muslim group for self-defence.

The establishment of the Adam Sena on the lines of the Shiv Sena or the Bajrang Dal was an interesting move. The Adam Sena had a media value. Unlike the political strategy of the Muslim leaders associated with the AIMMM, the Adam Sena was highlighted as a clear and visible ‘Muslim’ response to Hindu militant organizations. Perhaps for that reason, the Adam Sena was always compared with Bajrang Dal. Furthermore, the Adam Sena was clearly compatible with the radical image of Abdullah Bukhari and his Shahi kind of politics. It was represented as a Muslim ‘army’ led by the Shahi Imam to protect Muslim heritage in India, including Babri Masjid. In this sense, the Adam Sena experiment established an intrinsic link between the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid and Babri Masjid.

In the meantime, an All India Conference on Babri Masjid was organised in Delhi in December 1986. The purpose of this conference was to coordinate Muslim efforts in this case. This conference led to the formation of the very first Muslim political coalition on the issue of Babri Masjid, the All India Babri Masjid Movement Coordination Committee (AIBMMCC). This new umbrella organization introduced two radical proposals: the non-observance of the Republic Day call, and a massive Muslim rally for the restoration of Babri Masjid.

The Imam, who had been known for his radical politics, did not campaign for the non-observance of Republic Day, and decided to keep a low profile. This was an important move. The non-observance of the Republic Day call was an outcome of a collective decision in which several other political players were involved. The success of this call could have benefited the AIBMMCC and above all its convenor and the Imam’s main political rival, Syed Shahabuddin. This strategy worked perfectly well for the Imam. The non-observance call was withdrawn on 25 January 1987 and the faction led by Shahabuddin was ultimately held

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Legal-constitutionalists</th>
<th>Ulema</th>
<th>Radicals (the Imam of Jama Masjid)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strengths</td>
<td>Minority Rights discourse</td>
<td>Shariat</td>
<td>Emotional mass politics of heritage</td>
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<td>Weaknesses</td>
<td>No experience of agitational/direct mass politics</td>
<td>Unable to lead a mass movement</td>
<td>Unaware of the complexity of the case at least initially</td>
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<td>Immediate concerns</td>
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responsible for the failure of this move. The Imam, on the other hand, managed to save his energies for another decisive ‘public’ event: the massive Muslim rally, to be held on 30 March 1987.

The massive rally at the Boat Club in Delhi on 30 March 1987 is supposed to have been the largest ever Muslim gathering for any political cause in post-colonial India. The Muslim participants, who had come from different parts of the country, mobilized by numerous Muslim leaders and organizations, assembled at the northern gate of Jama Masjid and marched towards the Boat Club. This enormous rally, attended by more than 100,000 people, was completely peaceful. Despite the fact that the Imam was not giving his full co-operation to the AIBMMCC and had not been participating in its regular meetings, Jama Masjid was selected as the starting point for the procession.

This public event was significant for the Imam in sidelining other Muslim leaders. On this occasion he spoke as the ultimate authority and ignored the agenda of the AIBMMCC. His speech was full of emotion, excitement, and frustrations. The Imam called upon the Muslims to reject the ‘judicial system of the government which had been unable to protect the religious place of Muslims’. He criticised the Muslim ministers, Members of Parliament, and Members of the Legislative Assembly for their unreceptive approach and asked the community ‘to burn their houses and break their legs if they were unable to respond to the hurt feelings of the Muslims’. He criticised the Muslim ministers, Members of Parliament, and Members of the Legislative Assembly for their unreceptive approach and asked the community ‘to burn their houses and break their legs if they were unable to respond to the hurt feelings of the Muslims’. He criticised the Muslim ministers, Members of Parliament, and Members of the Legislative Assembly for their unreceptive approach and asked the community ‘to burn their houses and break their legs if they were unable to respond to the hurt feelings of the Muslims’. He criticised the Muslim ministers, Members of Parliament, and Members of the Legislative Assembly for their unreceptive approach and asked the community ‘to burn their houses and break their legs if they were unable to respond to the hurt feelings of the Muslims’. He criticised the Muslim ministers, Members of Parliament, and Members of the Legislative Assembly for their unreceptive approach and asked the community ‘to burn their houses and break their legs if they were unable to respond to the hurt feelings of the Muslims’. He criticised the Muslim ministers, Members of Parliament, and Members of the Legislative Assembly for their unreceptive approach and asked the community ‘to burn their houses and break their legs if they were unable to respond to the hurt feelings of the Muslims’. He criticised the Muslim ministers, Members of Parliament, and Members of the Legislative Assembly for their unreceptive approach and asked the community ‘to burn their houses and break their legs if they were unable to respond to the hurt feelings of the Muslims'.

During his speech, Syed Shahabuddin, who was sitting just next to him on the podium, tried to pacify him by pulling his kurta. Abdullah Bukhari, like a perfect anchor, used this minor incident innovatively. Showing an extreme gesture of anger and irritation, the Imam publicly pushed Shahabuddin over on the dais. This symbolic act marked the beginning of a public rift between the two dominant factions within the Babri Masjid campaign: one led by Shahabuddin and the other by the Imam.

The event

The post-30 March rally scenario was marked by a series of communal riots across the country. The most severe communal clash took place on 23 May 1987 in Maliana, a small Muslim locality in the outskirts of Meerut, where the PAC killed at least 35 Muslims. The Meerut riots were followed by a fresh wave of communal violence in old Delhi, particularly in the last week of Ramadan (the Islamic month of fasting) in May 1987.

This was a very disturbing period for local Muslims, particularly for those families who had lost their relatives in communal violence. In this context, the festival of Eid, which was to be celebrated on 28 May 1987, had to be a very low-key affair in the locality of Jama Masjid. The Imam understood this and in a statement issued on 26 May 1987 he called upon all the Muslims not to offer Eid congregational prayers in big mosques, including Jama Masjid. As was expected, no Eid prayer was held in larger mosques. Instead, people performed Eid Namaz on streets and roads.

After Eid prayers on 28 May 1987 Abdullah Bukhari, quite unexpectedly, decided to close Jama Masjid from 4 June 1987. Except for the staff and the members of the management Committee, no one was allowed to enter the mosque for regular prayers. A huge black fabric cover was wrapped around the minarets and domes of the mosque in order to show the resentment of Muslims against the government. At the main entrance of the mosque a large banner, written in Urdu, Hindi, and English, proclaimed (Figure 1):

Protest against extreme atrocities & barbarism Jama Masjid, Delhi shall remain closed till guilty police officials are severely punished, all innocents arrested are immediately released. Not verbal but practical assurance for the security of life and property for future is made. May 28, 1987.

1. Black Banner at the main entrance of Jama Masjid. Baba Photos, HA Picture Collection.
Black plaques were also installed at the southern, northern, and eastern gates of Jama Masjid, demanding that Vir Bahadur Singh, the then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, should be dismissed immediately, and an independent enquiry commission should be set up to investigate the Meerut riots of 1987 (Figure 2).

The closure of a functional Muslim mosque as an expression of political resentment was a highly controversial decision. A number of fatwas were issued against this move. The famous Muslim madrasa Darul Uloom, Deoband, which had been known for its pro-Congress stance, also issued a fatwa and declared that the closure of the mosque was an un-Islamic act. The Imam openly refuted this charge. He criticised these fatwas as Sarkari Fatwas and alleged that the government was involved in an anti-Muslim conspiracy. The supporters of the Imam also started a poster war against such fatwas. Some pro-Imam fatwas were also obtained and were posted around the walls of Jama Masjid.20

The government did not respond immediately. It took nearly two weeks to accept the demands of the Imam. On 13 June 1987 the government assured Bukhari that a departmental enquiry would be initiated against the guilty police officers and those who were arrested would be released soon on bail.21 On the same evening Jama Masjid was opened to the common people (Figure 3). Before its reopening, the Imam delivered a short speech, stating:

*A meri qaum tu sun le! Agar chothi choti baton me dhoka hua to me kal subha se phir Jama Masjid band karva dunga*

(Listen O members of my community, if there is any betrayal on small assurances given, then I shall close down the Jama Masjid tomorrow once again).22

Reflecting on these developments later, the Imam said that he had been ‘only 75% satisfied [. . .] therefore the mosque would be opened but the black flags and banners put up in Jama Masjid and the black cloth covering some of the domes and minarets would not be pulled down’. He further pointed out that the closure of Jama Masjid was an ‘international issue’, claiming that the world media, particularly the western print and electronic media, had been approaching him in this regard.23

The closure of Jama Masjid helped the Imam to consolidate his position on Babri Masjid. It also gave him an opportunity to establish political links with emerging Third Front leaders, including V. P. Singh. Eventually these developments led to the collapse in late 1988 of the Muslim coalition on Babri Masjid and the Imam successfully established a separate Muslim organization, the All India Babri Masjid Action Committee.

Evoking a ‘Muslim past’ as memory: Jama Masjid and its publics

The entire event had three interlinked elements: the doors of the mosque were closed; the visible parts of the mosque were wrapped with black cloth; a few demands were
communicated first through banners and then by permanent plaques. The first element indicates that although the gates were closed to the public, the staff of Jama Masjid, including the Imam and his family, continued to offer prayers inside. So who was the public in this case? It is important to note that Jama Masjid is surrounded by a large number of mosques which provide ample space for offering Namaz for the local Muslim community. Except on Fridays or on the occasion of Eid or other festivals, Jama Masjid remains almost empty. Thus, Jama Masjid is primarily used for congregational prayers by the local community. Nevertheless, Jama Masjid also attracts a very different kind of public. The mosque is included in most of the Delhi-based tourist packages. As a result, a large number of tourists, mainly foreigners, visit the mosque. These tourists are one of the main sources of income for the mosque. In addition, Muslims from different parts of the country and the subcontinent pay customary visit to the mosque. In this scenario, the closure of mosque was not going to affect the religious or social needs of local Muslims, but it would have an obvious impact on those who were coming from outside. The Imam, it seems, was well aware of these practical aspects. The closure of a historic mosque could have been shown as a symbol of Muslim resentment and the overseas tourists could be used as messengers to spread this information.

The closure of Jama Masjid also had a media value. The Imam, who had already established his reputation as a radical Muslim leader, used this opportunity to capture media attention. In the 1980s, national television (Door Darshan) and radio (Akashwani) were completely under the direct control of the state. People like the Imam were almost non-entities for electronic media. However, print media, especially the English newspapers, were interested in some kind of ‘exploratory journalism’. The rise of rightist Hindutva politics was already occupying a central stage in these newspapers. The media was desperately looking for a Muslim leader who could be juxtaposed with radical Hindutva politics, simply to underline the direct control of the state. People like the Imam were largely non-Urdu speaking. Thus, they had to be communicated with in a different language and in such a way that the internal nuances of the message could not get affected. English was an obvious choice, but interestingly the messages written in English had a very clear overtone of local Urdu. The heading of the plaque, which was installed at the main entrance of the mosque (Figure 4), is a good example in this regard: ‘Tears of Blood: Quench the fire under our breast.’

The second important aspect of this act was associated with the public presence of Jama Masjid. The ‘public presence’ of a mosque is constituted by two interlinked domains: the inner domain of religiosity and the outer domain of urbanity. The inner domain of the mosque is where religion and culture interact; the outer domain is where mosques as built form respond to the legal-constitutional discourse of secularism and the urban landscape. The closure of Jama Masjid affected both of these domains in telling ways. The Imam’s decision during this period to discontinue the use of the public address system to make Azan should be seen in relation to the inner public presence of Jama Masjid. Azan is not merely a medium to make a call to worshippers; it has a religious value of its own. In South Asian Islamic cultures Azan is considered to be the voice of the house of Allah: it marks the life of a mosque. The Imam’s move, on the other hand, disconnected the Azan from the everyday sensibilities of the local community. This reconfiguration of the inner domain of the public presence of Jama Masjid – as a living mosque without an Azan – helped the Imam to create a melancholic atmosphere.

The covering of domes and minarets with black fabric was linked to the outer public presence of the Jama Masjid. This act was more significant because it was transforming a mosque into a ‘dead entity’ of some kind. Jama Masjid, known for its eternal architectural features, was given a very different image – an image of a mourning site (Figure 5).

The resources for this act were not drawn from any Islamic religious customs. There is a long tradition of mourning in Islam, particularly in Shia Islam. The colour black is somehow linked to it. However, the use of black cloth to wrap the visible parts of the mosque was not related to any of the known Islamic traditions of mourning. Jama Masjid is a Sunni mosque, and it has not been associated with any Shia rituals. This act of wrapping the mosque, as the Imam’s various statements of that time suggest, constituted a secular political act. It was based on a strong assumption that Jama Masjid, being the most visible icon of the Muslim presence in post-colonial India, could symbolise Muslim anger in a strictly modern sense.

Finally, this move was linked to the demands of the Imam. A close look at the banners and plaques installed at Jama Masjid reveals a few slogan-like statements and some short-term demands. For example, the banner put
up outside the northern gate signalled a ‘protest against extreme atrocities and barbarism’, while the plaque situated at the main entrance demanded that the chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh be dismissed at once. These were immediate concerns and had clear populist overtones. Interestingly, there was no reference to Babri Masjid in these banners, although this was the issue around which this entire event revolved. Precisely for that reason it was not difficult for the government to respond to these demands. This aspect shows an interesting relationship between immediate demands and larger political claims.

This discussion returns to the main argument of this article. The Imam successfully portrayed Jama Masjid as the most important political symbol of India’s Muslims. He intentionally highlighted its official status as an historical monument by almost ignoring its basic religious position as a mosque. In this sense, it was a radical interpretation of the idea of an Indo-Islamic heritage as a ‘Muslim contribution’. The two afterlives of Jama Masjid – the afterlife of an historical monument and the afterlife of a political object – were evoked by the Imam to establish a direct link between ‘Muslim grievances’ and a ‘Muslim contribution’. In a much wider sense, this act helped him in reconstituting the larger claim that Muslims, who once ruled India and also contributed to its making and remaking into a modern nation, had been relegated to the margins. The
expression of Muslim grievances, in this kind of argument, does not merely mark the social marginalization of a religious minority; rather, it underlines the victimhood of a ruling class that actually struggles for its dignity. The afterlives of Jama Masjid, I argue, have been nurturing these political memories of a royal Muslim past.27

NOTES

AIBMMCC – All India Babri Masjid Movement Coordination Committee
AIMMM – All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat
AIMPLB – All India Muslim Personal Law Board
ASI – Archeological Survey of India

1. Jama Masjid, built in the seventeenth century by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, has an interesting historic link with its Imam. The emperor invited a leading Muslim scholar of that time, Imam Abdul Ghafur Shah Bukhari, to lead the prayers in this mosque. He was given the title of Imam-ul-Sultan (the Imam of the Emperor) or the Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid. Since then this family has been responsible for leading the prayers. See Aziz-ur Rahman, History of Jama Masjid and Interpretation of Muslim Devotions, 2nd edn (New Delhi: Publication India, 1987).

2. For an elaborated discussion of Bukhari’s politics, see H. Ahmed, ‘Reception of Nehruvian Secularism and the Political Architecture of Jama Masjid’, Third Frame: Literature, Culture and Society, 2.3 (July-September 2009), 95–127.


7. After the Delhi riots of February 1986, a violent Hindu-Muslim clash took place in Meerut in March 1986. The Imam visited the riot-affected areas of Meerut. However, in the outskirts of Meerut his car was attacked by a Hindu mob. In this confrontation he received some minor injuries. He came back to Jama Masjid and publicly took off his kurta to show his wounds. This incident created a wave of sympathy for him in northern India. H. Ahmed, ‘Field Notes and Observations on Jama Masjid’.

8. The term sena is very significant here. The Imam did not prefer any Urdu/Persian term for ‘army’. Instead, he relied on the popular Hindi word so as to make it ‘media friendly’.

9. ‘Chronology of the Month’, Muslim India, 43 (July 1986), 331.

10. ‘Biggest-Ever Muslim Rally’, The Times of India, Delhi, 31 March 1987, p. 3. I am also thankful to Mr Nadim for providing a detailed account of the events of June-July 1986. H. Ahmed, ‘Field Notes and Observations on Jama Masjid’.

11. In our discussions with the local residents and particularly with the shop-keepers of Meena Bazaar, this aspect came up very sharply. No one, except two bodyguards of Abdullah Bukhari, has ever seen any Adam Sena volunteers wearing green uniforms. The idea of the Adam Sena was severely criticised by the local people. Group Discussion with local shopkeepers, Jama Masjid areas, 22 February 2004; Tape Recorded.

12. In an interview with the Imam, Abdullah Bukhari pointed out ‘Adam Sena is for the service of the Muslims […] it is different from the other Hindu senas. It does not believe in violence.’ When asked about the possibility of the arming of the Adam Sena, he gave a categorical answer: ‘Well, it is for self-defence. There is no harm in that.’ ‘India is in Danger: Shahi Imam’, Muslim India, 47 (November 1986), 520.

13. This rift between the Imam and Shahabuddin became very apparent within a few days. For instance, in an interview, Ahmed Bukhari expressed apprehensions about the effectiveness of the non-observance call and Abdullah Bukhari did not attend the crucial meetings of the AIBMMCC held on 10 January 1987. ‘Chronology of the Month’, Muslim India, 50 (February 1987), 94.

14. ‘Biggest-Ever Muslim Rally’.

15. Mr Nadim, who attended this rally as a Khaksar volunteer, quoted the Imam as saying ‘Meri qaum ke naujawan chahye tumhari tange tor de aur tumhari kothio me aag laga de’. H. Ahmed, ‘Field Notes and Observations on Jama Masjid’.

16. ‘Biggest-Ever Muslim Rally’.

17. In his Juma-tul-Vida sermon on 22 May 1987 the Imam asked the congregation to pray for Babri Masjid. Despite his emotional speech a fresh wave of violence erupted in old Delhi and at least four more people were killed. Delhi Meerut Riots: Analysis, Compilation and Documentation, ed. by A. A. Engineer (Delhi: Ajanta, 1988), pp. 80–85.
18. ‘Chronology of the Month’, *Muslim India*, 55 (July 1987), 333.
20. I have not found any copies of the pro-Imam *fatwas*. However, Mr Nadim told us that the pro-Imam *fatwas* were based on the argument that the mosque had been closed only for the general public, particularly for foreign tourists, while the regular prayers were still going on inside it. Thus, this act could not be considered ‘a closure of the mosque’. H. Ahmed, ‘Field Notes and Observations on Jama Masjid’.
22. Ibid., pp. 109–110.
23. Ibid., pp. 109–110.
24. That secularism has been an important ‘explanatory template’ in popular public discourse in postcolonial India explains why the print media debates on the Babri Masjid question were keen to get a ‘communal Muslim perspective’ to produce a ‘balanced’ report. However, this search for a communal Muslim stance paid no attention to the qualitative differences between Hindu and Muslim politics.
26. I have developed this argument on the inner and outer domains of a mosque in ‘Uttar Opniveshik Bharat me Akadhik Muslim Adhunitaon ka Vimarsh: Hindi Aur Muslim Pehachano ka Nirman’ (‘Multiple Muslim Modernities in Postcolonial India: Hindi and the making and remaking of Muslim identities’), *Tadbhav*, January 2010.