

Understanding the Ram Mandir Journey through Snyder's Hope Theory

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Babri Masjid/ Ram Mandir Dispute

The year 2024 began with the accomplishment of a decades long struggle of turning a dream into reality. The Ram Mandir, a reflection of Hindu glory, was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on 22 January 2024 (Mogul et al., 2024). The Babri Masjid-Ram Mandir conflict stands as one of the most contentious and enduring issues in India's socio-political landscape. Spanning over centuries, the conflict is a complex intersection of historical, religious, and political dimensions, leading to significant social disruption and legal battles. At its centre, the conflict revolves around the disputed site in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, where both the Babri Masjid, built in the 16th century, and the Ram Mandir, symbolising the birthplace of Lord Ram, hold profound religious significance for both the Hindus as well as the Muslims. Spanning over seven decades (post-independence), its eventual fruition in 2024 reflects the power of cultivated hope in a complex socio-political movement. This issue brief interprets the movement through C.R Snyder's hope theory framework across its key events and phases.

Timeline

The timeline of the Ram Mandir dispute starts from the 16th Century until now, as given below (Outlook Web Desk, 2022):

1528 Mir Baqi built the Babri Mosque under the orders from the Mughal Emperor Babur. As per some claims, the mosque was built after destroying the remains of a Hindu temple.

1853 First recorded instance of religious violence at the site. During early British rule, Nihang Sikh troops allegedly razed the mosque and built a chabutra (platform) nearby for Hindu worship.

1859 As Hindu-Muslim clashes over the site continued, the British erected fences to separate areas of worship. Hindus were granted permission to worship outside the Mosque and to build a temple on the chabutra to suppress clashes.

1934 Religious riots broke out after the slaughter of cows near the mosque, resulting in multiple casualties.

1949 Idol of the infant Lord Ram appeared inside the mosque under controversial circumstances. Multiple legal cases were filed by Hindu and Muslim groups claiming ownership.

1986 A district judge in Uttar Pradesh ordered that the gates of the disputed structure be opened to allow Hindu worshippers to offer prayers. This led to nationwide communal tension and violence.

1989 The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) conducted a shilanyas ceremony by laying foundations for a Ram temple on the land adjacent to the mosque. Apparently, this led to further inflaming tensions around the country (Mathew, 2020).

1990 The mosque was partially damaged in 1990 by volunteers returning from a procession organised by politically affiliated parties.

1992 The Babri mosque was completely demolished by thousands led by karyakartas. This led to nationwide communal riots, continuing for months. The official death toll was over 1000 across India but Mumbai suffered the most severe burns.

2002 The burning of a train in Godhra carrying Hindu Karsevaks returning from Ayodhya and subsequent anti-Muslim riots in Gujarat left over 2000 dead. As per official figures more than 2,00,000 people were left displaced including many losing their businesses (Powers, 2008, p.105). **2003** The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) submitted its report on the Ayodhya excavations to the Allahabad High Court. The report found that there was evidence of a structure

older than the Babri Masjid beneath the mosque. However, the association of the structure to a Hindu temple was not clearly stated.

2010 The Allahabad High Court ordered the disputed land to be divided into 3 parts, two going to Hindu groups and one to the Muslim group that was the original plaintiff (PTI, 2023).

2014-2019 The BJP government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi prioritised speedy resolution of the case through the legal process. In 2019, the Supreme Court awarded the entire disputed land to a government-run Hindu trust for construction of a Ram temple.

The Babri Masjid-Ram Mandir conflict extends beyond legal matters. It epitomises larger issues of identity, nationalism, and relationships between communities in present-day Uttar Pradesh as well as India. The prolonged nature of this dispute highlights the complexities of managing religious diversity under a democratic system. It also underlines how historical grievances and conflicting accounts from the past continue to have lasting impact on individuals, societies as well as on the state's behaviour.

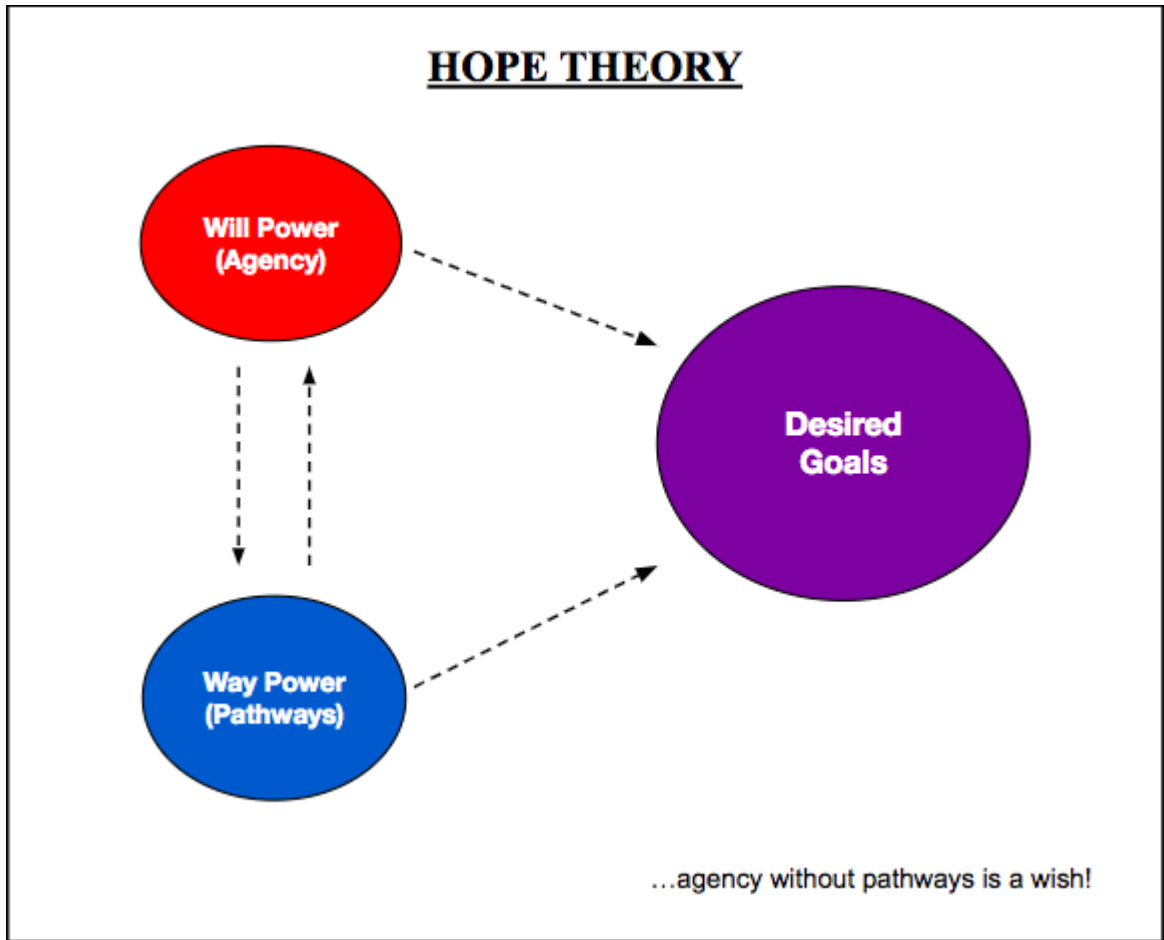
As India deals with long-term effects of colonialism, existence of multiple religions, languages, cultures, this issue serves as a relevant example of the difficulties in running a democratic government. Applying psychological concepts and frameworks can potentially shed light on the cognitive, emotional, and social dynamics that guided the decisions and conduct of key stakeholders in various scenarios, in this case the Ram Mandir controversy. This could aid in better comprehending the rationale, or lack thereof, behind specific choices made by state and non- state actors, while also identifying any consistent behavioural tendencies that emerged during the course of this conflict.

Snyder's Hope Theory

C. R. Snyder defined hope as the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals (the pathways component) and motivate oneself through agency thinking to use those pathways (the agency component) to attain certain goals (Snyder, 2002). He defined Goals as the anchor for his hope theory. They could be short or long-term, ambiguous, or well-specified. As per him, goals must be significantly important to warrant sustained thinking and pursuit. There are two types - positive/approach goals and negative/avoidance goals. He defined pathways thinking as a perceiving factor that one can come up with strategies to reach goals, including alternate routes in case obstacles arise. He stated that the pathways get refined as one pursues the goals. His research found that high hope people have clearer, well-articulated pathways whereas low hope people have tenuous routes in mind. He later defined agency thinking as the motivation and perceived capacity of an individual to actually use the pathways to reach goals. He stated that this motivation factor comes into play especially in times of crisis or blockades. As per him, High hope involves self-referential thoughts about one's capabilities whereas low hope involves self-doubts.

Figure 1

Snyder's Hope Theory



(in-Training, 2019)

The pathways and agency thoughts function in a reciprocal manner throughout a goal pursuit. Among the people with high-hope, this process is often fluid and fast unlike the people with low-hope, for whom it is slow and halting. He argued that high-hope consistently leads to superior outcomes across domains like academics, athletics, physical health and professional career (Snyder, 2002). He also correlated the aspect of emotions. Through his research he found

that emotions result from perceptions of goal pursuit whether successful or failure. He found that High-hope people have enduring positive emotional sets as opposed to low-hope people who have negative emotional sets.

Snyder also argued against ‘false hopes’, on the basis that the slight positive biases of high hope people are backed by negative feedback about probabilities. Additionally, people with high- hope tend to pursue suitable goals using effective strategies. Hence, the criticisms regarding ‘false hope’ stand void (Snyder, 2002).

Hope theory is based upon the framework for understanding goal-directed cognition and its outcomes through fostering pathways and agency thinking (MTCT, n.d.).

Ram Mandir through the lens of the Hope Theory

The Ram Janmabhoomi movement spearheaded by the VHP and BJP, leading to the construction of a Ram Temple in Ayodhya stands as one of India’s most ambitious and celebrated religious-political campaigns.

Background

The belief that a Ram temple existed at the site of the 16th century Babri Masjid had been fuelling the imagination of the Hindu community since the 1850s. However, the politicisation of this religious symbol gathered momentum in the 1980s, making temple construction a part of their Hindutva agenda. This sparked a volatile nationwide campaign which transformed the political context in India, alternate strategies of political parties and protracted legal issues until now that the goal has been achieved (TOI, 2024).

Goal Setting and Vision Expansion

Snyder identified defining specific goals as the first prerequisite for hope. For local Hindu sadhus and priests, restoring the Ram Janmabhoomi site was rooted in reclaiming religious glory (Mogul et al., 2024). However, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) expanded this goal into the political realm as a vision of cultural and national reawakening across caste and class boundaries. LK Advani framed it within the emotive evocation of bringing back “Ram Rajya”, aligning mass sentiment behind the broader Hindutva vision with his ‘Rath Yatra’ (Prakash, 2024). As Snyder also noted, higher hope persons often inject uncertainty into seemingly straightforward goals to stretch skills; likewise, the historical ambiguity of Ram Lalla’s birthplace too fuelled efforts of the ones who were challenged to prove the very same existence of their Lord (PTI, 2019). The goal’s motivational significance was consciously stretched in line with Snyder’s conception of hope requiring wider self-defining ambitions versus isolated outcomes.

Pathways

The analysis looks at BJP’s role in the creation of the Ram Mandir, strategies and engagement of other entities will not be included. As stated by Snyder, people with high-hope, are prone to coming up with multiple pathways and improvised strategies to ensure that their goal is achieved. Given the many roadblocks that the BJP had to cross such as the legal battle, public opinion, opposition’s counter strategies and communal violence, it used multiple ways of achieving momentum (SCO, 2024).

When the initial petitions failed in favour of the Hindus, the strategy pivoted to mass mobilisation and the stalled legal case prompted the unlocking of the mosque gates by court order

in 1986 (Udayakumar, 1997, p. 14). This temporary pathway opening fuelled the goal's pursuit. However, as barriers remained, the BJP-VHP channel shifted from primarily political to more provocative religious mass actions. The Shilanyas Ceremony was performed in 1989, a foundational stone laying ceremony for a Ram Mandir on acquired land near the Babri Masjid site. The ritual was given significant media coverage to mobilise mass attention and emotions beyond those who were physically present in Ayodhya. Bricks carved with Ram's name were sent across India for symbolic participation (Husain, 2020). Involving individuals nationwide created perceptions of collective agency in backing the temple construction pathway (Udayakumar, 1997, p. 14). Temporary structures built on acquired land signalled progress, acting as an agency backing the pathway of all those who witnessed this in person or through media/conversations.

BJP leader-President LK Advani's historic Rath Yatra in 1990 was a strategic move to ignite passion among the Hindu community (Prakash, 2024). The Rath Yatra expanded the initial religious aim of rebuilding the temple into a shared political vision of Hindu cultural reawakening through establishment of a Ram Rajya. Symbolising Lord Ram's mythical glory, the Rath(chariot) and the waving saffron flags framed Advani as the torch bearer for Hindu dignity, and further strengthened people's perception of walking behind Lord Ram's footsteps (historicalgyan, 2024). Portraying Advani as a leading 'Kar Sevak' inspired individuals (young-old, female-male, rich- poor, upper caste-lower caste) to emulate his kind of passion for the Yatra (Prakash, 2024). This is the agency-level thinking or motivation that is necessary to turn actions into outcomes as per Snyder. The massive outcry post his arrest in Bihar signalled collective agency and efficacy in pursuing the obstructed pathway, which led to the continuation of the Yatra, further boosting the agency behind this movement. By the end radical Hindu mobs took matters into their own hands,

demolishing the Mosque in 1992 leading to exploding communal tensions across India (John, 2023). Despite widespread condemnation, it became a touchpoint for the future.

The leaders of this movement, as people with high-hope, did not step back; rather they continued the legal as well as socio-political engagements, to keep memory fresh and hope alive, among the masses. They ensured that in every BJP-Manifesto from 1996 onwards, the agenda of building the Ram Mandir was clearly stated, leaving no scope for people to lose hope or let go of the idea (*ELECTION MANIFESTO-1996*, 1996). Again, a follow-up Pathway was put into place to keep up the momentum of the campaign. The history of 1992 repeated itself in the form of ‘2002 Godhra Riots’, a result of the attack on karsevaks returning from Ayodhya (FRONTLINE, 2022). This incident was further used to mobilise the Hindu community by instilling ‘hope’ through the idea of building the Mandir in the memory of those Karsevaks who lost their lives.

BJP’s continuous engagement and new strategies, especially after coming in power in Uttar Pradesh as well as in Centre (2014), kept the movement alive via actions such as advocating for allotting land for Ram Mandir in 2015 (PTI, 2014), government led by PM Modi filing plea for the urgent Ayodhya verdict and pan India donation drive for Mandir (PTI, 2019a). Engaging with all citizens, it ensured that people did not deflect from the goal. The government also formally initiated putting in place measures that would open the scope for building the Mandir, such as ending dependencies delaying foundation work by establishing a temple trust and beginning architectural planning for construction (Our Bureau, 2019).

Agency

Another key emphasis in Snyder’s theory is bolstering perceptions of collective agency and capacities to advance towards set goals. BJP slogans like “*Saugandh Ram Ki Khate Hain, Hum*

Mandir Wahin Banayenge” - We swear on Lord Ram that we will construct the temple there, and campaigns continually reinforced notions that the people had the motivation and capacity to achieve the goal (OpIndiaStaff, 2024). They framed it as a shared community goal. Any action in service of the cause - from shilanyas bricks to vote mobilisation or charity collection - gave individuals in the movement a sense of ownership and hence the agency, though they couldn't directly build the temple. Apart from these, rhetoric through speeches emphasised on reclaiming past glory with visions of Ram Rajya, promising dignity to all Hindus along with the PM Modi vowing to build a grand mandir in speeches, campaigns & manifestos signalling completion capability.

Conclusion

This analysis provides an understanding of the dynamics, motivations, and outcomes in laying the Ram Mandir foundation. The goal was not only of building a temple, but its religious and cultural power moulded collective agency and pathway thinking across the centuries-long campaign which not only made an impact within the domestic territory but was contentious among the Indian diasporas. This movement has changed the very foundations of the political structure of India. Hope theory, thus, offers a framework to the prevailing political and historical lenses in explaining this defining dispute in India's trajectory as a nation. The paper draws connections between the key events and inflection points of the dispute and Snyder's conceptualization of goal- setting, agency, and pathways within the hope theory. It centres his model of hope being driven by perceptions of important shared goals and both the motivational energy and perceived capacities to generate routes towards those desired objectives. Such an analysis points out the enduring relevance of hope as a transformative force in shaping individual and collective pursuits,

particularly in the context of contentious socio-political issues imbued with historical, cultural, and religious significance. The movement thus empirically validates Snyder's emphasis on cultivated hope engendering goal-based human action against odds.

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