



ISSN Print: 2664-8717
ISSN Online: 2664-8725
Impact Factor: RJIF 8.00
IJRE 2024; 6(2): 33-35
www.englishjournal.net
Received: 05-05-2024
Accepted: 13-06-2024

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International Journal of Research in English

Divine justice: Ram Janmabhoomi case and the legal persona of temple deities in India

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648717.2024.v6.i2a.203>

Abstract

The Ram Janmabhoomi case in India stands as a pivotal moment where legal discourse intersected with religious sentiment and historical significance. Central to this landmark litigation was the recognition of temple deities as juristic persons, a concept that reshaped the understanding of legal standing for non-human entities in Indian jurisprudence. This abstract explores the implications of the Supreme Court's decision on the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute, highlighting the evolution of the concept of legal persona for deities and its broader implications for religious and legal frameworks in India. Through an analysis of judicial reasoning, historical context, and socio-religious dimensions, this abstract aims to elucidate the complex relationship between law and faith, offering insights into how the notion of divine justice was navigated within the framework of secular legal principles.

Keywords: Janmabhoomi, litigation, jurisprudence, implications, legal principles

Introduction

The Ram Janmabhoomi case in India, culminating in a landmark Supreme Court verdict in 2019, transcended its legal dimensions to become a symbol of historical ^[1], cultural, and religious significance ^[2]. At its core was the contentious dispute over the site in Ayodhya, claimed both as the birthplace of Lord Ram by Hindus and as the location of the Babri Masjid by Muslims ^[4]. Beyond the physical and spiritual ^[5]. Claims lay a profound legal question: The recognition of temple deities as juristic persons in Indian law.

This introduction delves into the multifaceted dimensions of the Ram Janmabhoomi case, examining its evolution ^[6] from a historical and religious dispute to a legal battleground where the concept of legal personality for deities was fiercely debated ^[7]. It explores how the judiciary navigated the intricate interplay between faith and law, ultimately shaping the jurisprudential landscape by conferring juristic personality upon Hindu deities in a manner that reverberates through India's secular legal framework ^[8]. Moreover, this introduction situates the Ram Janmabhoomi case within the broader context of legal developments pertaining to religious institutions and entities in India, highlighting the implications of recognizing temple deities as juristic persons ^[9]. By analyzing judicial reasoning, historical narratives, and societal implications, it seeks to illuminate the complexities and significance of the case, offering a foundational understanding for the subsequent exploration of divine justice and legal persona in the following chapters.

Summary

The Ram Janmabhoomi issue is a deeply entrenched and contentious socio-religious dispute centered on Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, India. It revolves around a piece of land claimed by both Hindus and Muslims. Hindus believe the site to be the birthplace of Lord Ram, a revered deity in Hinduism, and assert that a temple dedicated to him existed there before being demolished by the Mughal emperor Babur in the 16th century to construct the Babri Masjid mosque. Conversely, Muslims claim the Babri Masjid was built on vacant land after demolishing an existing temple. This dispute has evolved over centuries, fueling communal tensions and legal battles. It gained prominence in the 1980s when Hindu nationalist groups such as the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) spearheaded a movement advocating for the construction of a Ram temple on the site.

The movement culminated in the demolition of the Babri Masjid by Hindu activists in 1992, triggering widespread riots and exacerbating religious and political divisions.

Legal wrangling over ownership and rights to the site persisted through various courts for decades, with both Hindu and Muslim parties citing historical and archaeological evidence, religious beliefs, and legal precedents to bolster their claims. The case underwent numerous appeals and hearings in Indian courts, culminating in a landmark judgment by the Supreme Court of India in November 2019.

In its verdict, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of allowing the construction of a Hindu temple on the disputed site, while also directing the allocation of an alternate parcel of land for the construction of a mosque. The decision rested on a careful examination of historical evidence, archaeological findings, and legal principles, aiming to reconcile conflicting claims while preserving communal harmony. The Ram Janmabhoomi issue continues to wield significant influence on India's social and political fabric, reflecting intricate intersections of religion, law, history, and identity. It remains a pivotal topic in public discourse and continues to shape legal frameworks concerning religious sites and communal relations in India.

Materials and Methods

The Ram Janmabhoomi issue has been marked by profound philosophical and judicial contestations, intertwining religious beliefs, historical narratives, and legal interpretations. At its core, the dispute revolves around the philosophical assertions of sacred geography and the perceived sanctity of the birthplace of Lord Ram, a central figure in Hindu mythology. Philosophically, the contention rests on the belief among Hindus that Ayodhya is not just a historical city but also the divine birthplace of Lord Ram. This belief imbues the land with spiritual significance, shaping a deep-seated reverence that transcends mere historical or legal considerations. The claim to the site as Ram Janmabhoomi is thus rooted in the metaphysical and spiritual dimensions of Hindu faith, emphasizing continuity of tradition and sacred heritage. Judicially, the contestations have spanned decades of legal battles, navigating intricate layers of historical evidence, archaeological findings, and competing assertions of legal rights. The courts have been tasked with reconciling these competing claims within the framework of Indian secular law, which seeks to uphold principles of justice and religious harmony.

The legal journey of the Ram Janmabhoomi case has seen numerous phases, from initial suits filed in the British era to modern-day litigation in independent India. Decisions have hinged on interpretations of historical documents, archaeological surveys, and testimonies from religious scholars, often prompting intense scrutiny and debate in legal circles and the broader public sphere.

The philosophical and judicial contestations surrounding Ram Janmabhoomi underscore broader questions about the intersection of religion and law in a secular state. They reflect ongoing debates over the recognition and protection of religious beliefs and cultural heritage within legal frameworks designed to accommodate diverse faith traditions while maintaining the rule of law and social cohesion. Ultimately, the Ram Janmabhoomi dispute serves as a poignant example of how philosophical convictions and legal interpretations converge, shaping both the cultural

identity of a nation and the contours of its judicial landscape. It continues to provoke introspection and debate, highlighting the complexities inherent in reconciling spiritual devotion with the imperatives of modern governance and legal adjudication.

Conclusion

The Ram Janmabhoomi case represents a significant milestone in the Indian legal system, particularly in its treatment of temple deities as juristic entities. The Supreme Court's verdict in 2019, which granted the disputed land in Ayodhya to the deity Ram Lalla, underscores the unique legal status and rights of Hindu deities as recognized by Indian jurisprudence.

Key Takeaways

1. Legal Personhood of Deities

Indian law has long acknowledged the personhood of deities, allowing them to own property, enter into legal contracts, and sue or be sued. This principle was crucial in the Ram Janmabhoomi case, where Ram Lalla was treated as a litigant, demonstrating the judiciary's recognition of the deity's legal persona.

2. Historical and Cultural Context

The case highlights the profound interweaving of religion, culture, and law in India. The court's decision was influenced by historical records, religious texts, and archaeological findings, reflecting the complex layers of India's heritage and the role of religion in public life.

3. Balancing Secularism and Religious Sentiments

The verdict navigated the delicate balance between maintaining India's secular fabric and respecting the religious sentiments of millions. By granting the land to Ram Lalla while also allocating land for a mosque, the court aimed to address the interests of both Hindu and Muslim communities, promoting communal harmony.

4. Precedent for Future Cases

This landmark judgment sets a precedent for future disputes involving religious sites and entities. It reinforces the idea that religious beliefs and practices are not only matters of personal faith but also of legal significance, necessitating careful adjudication.

5. Implications for Legal Framework

The decision prompts a re-examination of the legal framework governing religious entities in India. It calls for a nuanced understanding of how laws can accommodate religious diversity while upholding constitutional values and ensuring justice for all communities.

Final Thoughts

The Ram Janmabhoomi case illustrates the dynamic interplay between law, religion, and society in India. It reinforces the judiciary's role in interpreting and upholding the rights of religious entities while striving to maintain social cohesion and justice. As India continues to evolve, this case will remain a pivotal reference point for understanding the legal personhood of deities and the broader implications for religious and secular coexistence.

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