



# World Heritage / Patrimoine Mondial

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Postcolonial North India: A Study of Muslim Political Discourse  
on Babri Masjid and Jama Masjid

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complete)

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**Please provide a 500 words abstract outlining your thesis; you may wish to attach a table of contents or any other relevant material:**

In general the terms 'historic architecture' and 'monument' are used interchangeably to describe old buildings or historic sites. There is, however, an important conceptual difference between these two terms. Historic architecture is a broad category and it could be used to describe various old buildings, ruins and protected monuments. In contrast, the basic function of a monument is to commemorate ideas, events or person(s). In this sense, a 'monument' could have two interrelated aspects: (a) the object/structure that is erected to symbolise a person or an event and (b) the associated idea /story that has to be commemorated. Thus, any historic buildings could be identified as a historic monument of a nation, community or people at any point of time. However, this transition from 'historic architecture' to 'monument' depends upon the ways by which a particular building is differentiated from other buildings; how 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 a part of a grand 'heritage'. In a broader sense, this may be called the *process of monumentalisation*.

The process of *monumentalisation* in India started in the colonial period. The British archaeological and legal initiatives not only identified Indian historic buildings as an important 'source' of objective history but also classified Indian historic sites on religious basis and protected them as secular *monuments*. In this process, the fixed images of Indian religious communities were produced and the dominant colonial notion of Indian history, which conceptualized India's past as a battle ground of religious conflicts, was substantiated. The monuments became a point of reference to uphold the view that Muslims — the foreign invaders — conquered and destroyed the indigenous Hindu civilisation in medieval India. In order to demoralise Hindus, Muslim invaders are alleged to have targeted the Hindu temples. We are told that they demolished these places of worship and/or converted them into mosques. The desecration of Hindu temples, therefore, became a focal point for historical discourse in colonial India. The colonial discovery of the 'Muslim invasion' eventually produced the 'contested' idea of an 'Indian Muslim architectural heritage'.

This study, thus, deals with the process of *monumentalisation* in colonial and postcolonial at three levels. First, it examines the clash between the concept of

modern secular monument, which recognizes historic sites as dead entities, and various Islamic traditions, which commemorate these buildings as living sites. Second, it looks at the controversial placing of the Indo-Islamic buildings in the official discourse on Indian 'national heritage'. It investigates a few dominant as well as paradoxical images of 'Muslim heritage' such as 'symbols of Islamic conquests', and 'emblem of Indian's shared heritage' to find out why an 'additional explanation' is always attached to describe these sites. Finally, the study examines the political appropriation of Indo-Islamic buildings in postcolonial India by analysing the ways by which these contested images of Muslim heritage are re-invented by the Muslim political groups.