# Court Order on Kashi Vishwanath Temple-Gyanvapi Mosque Site

## Why in news?

The Varanasi court has ordered the continuation of the video survey of the Kashi Vishwanath temple-Gyanvapi mosque complex and has asked to submit the report.

## What is the issue?

- The controversy erupted in 1991 when a group of local priests sought permission to worship in the Gyanvapi complex, claiming the mosque was built on a demolished portion of Kashi Vishwanath Temple.
- The matter was reignited after petitioners demanded an archaeological survey of the Gyanvapi complex but the Allahabad High Court stayed the archaeological study of the complex.
- A videography survey of the mosque was ordered on the plea of some women petitioners who seek to perform worship of idols that are said to be located on the walls of the mosque.
- The Muslim side alleged bias from the side of the court-appointed commissioner of the survey and called videography inside the mosque, a violation of the Places of Worship Act, 1991.
- The court has said that court commissioner, accused of biased conduct will not be changed and two more commissioners will join the archaeological survey of the Gyanvapi mosque.
- It has also ordered the continuation of the video survey of the Kashi Vishwanath temple-Gyanvapi mosque complex and has asked to submit the report.

## What is the history of the Gyanvapi Mosque?

- The Gyanvapi Mosque is believed to have been built in 1669 during the reign of Aurangzeb, who ordered the demolition of the existing Vishweshwar temple and its replacement by a mosque.
- This is also mentioned in the 1937 book History of Benares: From the Earliest Times Down to 1937 by AS Altekar.
- The name of the mosque is said to have derived from an adjoining well, the Gyanvapi, or Well of Knowledge.
- The plinth of the temple was left untouched, and served as the courtyard of the mosque.
- One of the walls of the temple became the qibla wall, the most ornate and important wall in a mosque that faces Mecca.
- Material from the destroyed temple was used to build the mosque.
- An old sculpture of the Nandi bull inside the compound of the present Kashi Vishwanath Temple faces the wall of the mosque instead of the sanctum sanctorum of the temple.
- It is believed that Nandi is in fact, facing the sanctum sanctorum of the original Vishweshwar temple.

*The mosque is **not** an ASI-protected site, and the ASI has no role in its maintenance or upkeep.*

## What about the Kashi Vishwanath Temple?

- Details about the Shiva temple is described in the Kashi Khanda of Skanda Purana.
- Kashi Vishwanath temple was constructed by the Hari Chandra in the 11$^{th}$ century.
- The present Kashi Vishwanath Temple was built in the 18th century by Rani Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore, immediately to the south of the mosque.
- The temple stands on the western bank of the holy river Ganga, and is one of the twelve Jyotirlingas, the holiest of Shivatemples.
- The main deity is known by the name Vishvanatha or Vishveshvara meaning *Ruler of The Universe*.
- The two domes of the temple were covered by the gold offered by the Punjab Kesari Maharaja Ranjeet Singh in 1839.
- Many Hindus have long believed that the original lingam of the erstwhile Vishweshwar temple was hidden by the priests inside the Gyanvapi well during Aurangzeb's raid.

## What were the claims?

- From time to time, petitioners have laid claim to the mosque, saying it remains the original sacred place of Hindu worship.
- The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 mandates that the nature of all places of worship, except the one in Ayodhya, shall be maintained as it was on August 15, 1947, and no encroachment of any such place prior to the date can be challenged in courts.
- This provision applies to the disputed complex in Varanasi.

**References**


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