

REPORTABLE

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF INDIA

CIVIL APPELLATE JURISDICTION

CIVIL APPEAL NOS.10866-10867 OF 2010

M. SIDDIQ (D) THR. LRS. ... APPELLANT(S)

VERSUS

MAHANT SURESH DAS AND OTHERS ETC. ... RESPONDENT(S)

WITH

C.A. No. 4768-4771/2011, C.A. No. 2636/2011,
 C.A. No. 821/2011, C.A. No. 4739/2011, C.A. No. 4905-
 4908/2011, C.A. No. 2215/2011, C.A. No. 4740/2011, C.A.
 No. 2894/2011, C.A. No. 6965/2011, C.A. No. 4192/2011,
 C.A. No. 5498/2011, C.A. No. 7226/2011, C.A. No.
 8096/2011, C.A.No. _____ of 2018 (@ Diary No.
 22744/2017).

J U D G M E N T**ASHOK BHUSHAN, J.(For Self & Dipak Misra, CJI.)**

These appeals were fixed for commencement of final arguments on 05.12.2017, when Dr. Rajeev Dhavan, learned senior counsel appearing for the appellants (C.A. No. 10866-10867 of 2010 and C.A. No. 2215 of 2011) submitted

that the Constitution Bench Judgment of this Court in

Dr. M. Ismail Faruqui and Ors. Vs. Union of India and Ors., (1994) 6 SCC 360 (hereinafter referred to as "**Ismail Faruqui's case**") needs reconsideration, hence the reference be made to a larger Bench. The above submission of Dr. Dhavan was opposed by learned counsel appearing for the respondents. After completion of the pleadings, when matter was again taken on 14.03.2018, we thought it appropriate that we should hear Dr. Dhavan as to whether the judgment in **Ismail Faruqui's case** requires reconsideration.

2. We have heard Dr. Rajeev Dhavan, learned senior counsel for the appellants, Shri K. Parasaran and Shri C.S. Vaidyanathan, learned senior counsel for the respondents in Civil Appeal Nos. 4768-4771 of 2011, Shri Tushar Mehta, learned Additional Solicitor General has appeared for the State of U.P. We have also heard Shri P.N. Mishra, Shri S.K. Jain and several other learned counsels. Shri Raju Ramachandran, learned senior counsel has also addressed submissions supporting the reference to larger Bench. Learned counsel for the parties have given their notes of submissions.

3. Before we notice the respective submissions of

learned counsel for the parties, we need to notice few facts, leading to the Constitution Bench decision in **Ismail Faruqui's** case. The sequence of events which lead filing of these appeals be also noticed. The Constitution Bench in **Ismail Faruqui's** case has extracted few facts from White Paper, which was published by Central Government. In Para 5 and 6 of the judgment, the Constitution Bench noticed:-

"5. The 'Overview' at the commencement of the White Paper in Chapter I states thus:

"1.1 Ayodhya situated in the north of India is a township in District Faizabad of Uttar Pradesh. It has long been a place of holy pilgrimage because of its mention in the epic Ramayana as the place of birth of Sri Ram. The structure commonly known as Ram Janma Bhoomi-Babri Masjid was erected as a mosque by one Mir Baqi in Ayodhya in 1528 AD. It is claimed by some sections that it was built at the site believed to be the birthspot of Sri Ram where a temple had stood earlier. This resulted in a long-standing dispute.

1.2 The controversy entered a new phase with the placing of idols in the disputed structure in December 1949. The premises were attached under Section 145 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Civil suits were filed shortly thereafter. Interim orders in these civil suits

restrained the parties from removing the idols or interfering with their worship. In effect, therefore, from December 1949 till 6-12-1992 the structure had not been used as a mosque."

6. The movement to construct a Ram Temple at the site of the disputed structure gathered momentum in recent years which became a matter of great controversy and a source of tension. This led to several parleys the details of which are not very material for the present purpose. These parleys involving the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the All India Babri Masjid Action Committee (AIBMAC), however, failed to resolve the dispute. A new dimension was added to the campaign for construction of the temple with the formation of the Government in Uttar Pradesh in June 1991 by the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) which declared its commitment to the construction of the temple and took certain steps like the acquisition of land adjoining the disputed structure while leaving out the disputed structure itself from the acquisition. The focus of the temple construction movement from October 1991 was to start construction of the temple by way of *kar sewa* on the land acquired by the Government of Uttar Pradesh while leaving the disputed structure intact. This attempt did not succeed and there was litigation in the Allahabad High Court as well as in this Court. There was a call for resumption of *kar sewa* from 6-12-1992 and the announcement made by the organisers was for a symbolic *kar sewa* without violation of the court orders including those made in the proceedings pending in this Court. In spite of initial reports from Ayodhya on 6-12-1992 indicating an air of normalcy, around midday a crowd addressed by leaders of BJP, VHP, etc., climbed the Ram Janma Bhumi-Babri Masjid (RJM-BM) structure and started

damaging the domes. Within a short time, the entire structure was demolished and razed to the ground. Indeed, it was an act of "national shame". What was demolished was not merely an ancient structure; but the faith of the minorities in the sense of justice and fairplay of majority. It shook their faith in the rule of law and constitutional processes. A five-hundred-year-old structure which was defenceless and whose safety was a sacred trust in the hands of the State Government was demolished."

4. The Constitution Bench has noticed details of suits, which were filed in the year 1950 and thereafter, which suits were ultimately transferred to the Allahabad High Court to be heard together in the year 1989. In Para 9 of the judgment, following has been noticed:-

"9. A brief reference to certain suits in this connection may now be made. In 1950, two suits were filed by some Hindus; in one of these suits in January 1950, the trial court passed interim orders whereby the idols remained at the place where they were installed in December 1949 and their puja by the Hindus continued. The interim order was confirmed by the High Court in April 1955. On 1-2-1986, the District Judge ordered the opening of the lock placed on a grill leading to the sanctum sanctorum of the shrine in the disputed structure and permitted puja by the Hindu devotees. In 1959, a suit was filed by the Nirmohi Akhara claiming title to the disputed structure. In 1981, another suit was filed claiming title to the disputed structure by the Sunni Central Wakf Board. In 1989, Deoki Nandan Agarwal, as the next friend of the Deity filed a title suit in respect of the disputed structure. In 1989,

the aforementioned suits were transferred to the Allahabad High Court and were ordered to be heard together. On 14-8-1989, the High Court ordered the maintenance of status quo in respect of the disputed structure (Appendix-I to the White Paper). As earlier mentioned, it is stated in para 1.2 of the White Paper that:

“... interim orders in these civil suits restrained the parties from removing the idols or interfering with their worship. In effect, therefore, from December 1949 till 6-12-1992 the structure had not been used as a mosque.”

5. As a result of the happenings at Ayodhya on 06.12.1992, the President of India issued a proclamation under Article 356 of the Constitution of India assuming to himself all the functions of the Government of Uttar Pradesh, dissolving the U.P. Vidhan Sabha. As a consequence of the events at Ayodhya on 06.12.1992, the Central Government decided to acquire all areas in dispute in the suits pending in the Allahabad High Court. It was also decided to acquire suitable adjacent area, which would be made available to two Trusts for construction of a Ram Temple and a Mosque respectively. The Government of India has also decided to request the President to seek the opinion of the Supreme Court on the question whether there was a Hindu temple existing

on the site where the disputed structure stood. An ordinance was issued on 07.01.1993 namely "Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Ordinance" for acquisition of 67.703 acres of land in the Ram Janam Bhumi-Babri Masjid complex. A reference to the Supreme Court under Article 143 of the Constitution was also made on the same day, i.e. 07.01.1993. The Ordinance No. 8 of 1993 had been replaced by the Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Act, 1993 (No. 33 of 1993) (hereinafter referred to as "Act, 1993"). A Writ Petition Under Article 32 was filed in this Court challenging the validity of the Act No. 33 of 1993. Several writ petitions at Allahabad High Court were also filed challenging various aspects of the Act, 1993. This Court exercising its jurisdiction under Article 139A had transferred the writ petitions, which were pending in the High Court. The Writ Petitions under Article 32, transferred cases from High Court of Allahabad as well as Reference No.1 of 1993 made by President under Article 143 were all heard together and decided by common judgment dated 24.10.1994, where the Constitution Bench had upheld the validity of the Act except that of Section 4(3) of the

Act, 1993 which was struck down.

6. After the judgment of this Court in the above Constitution Bench, all the suits, which had been transferred by the High Court to be heard by a Full Bench of the High Court stood revived. One Mohd. Aslam, who was also one of the petitioners in Constitution Bench Judgment in **Ismail Faruqui's** case filed a writ petition seeking certain reliefs with regard to 67.703 acres of land acquired under the Act, 1993. This Court on 13.03.2002 passed an interim order. Paras 4 and 5 of the interim order are as follows:-

"4. In the meantime, we direct that on 67.703 acres of acquired land located in various plots detailed in the Schedule to the Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Act, 1993, which is vested in the Central Government, no religious activity of any kind by anyone either symbolic or actual including bhumi puja or shila puja, shall be permitted or allowed to take place.

5. Furthermore, no part of the aforesaid land shall be handed over by the Government to anyone and the same shall be retained by the Government till the disposal of this writ petition nor shall any part of this land be permitted to be occupied or used for any religious purpose or in connection therewith."

7. The above writ petition was ultimately decided on 31.03.2003 by a Constitution Bench, which judgment is

reported in (2003) 4 SCC 1, **Mohd. Aslam alias Bhure Vs. Union of India and Others**. Before the Constitution Bench, both the parties had placed reliance on **Ismail Faruqui's** case. This Court disposed of the writ petition directing that order of this Court dated 13.03.2002 as modified on 14.03.2002 should be operative until disposal of the suits in the High Court of Allahabad. The Allahabad High Court after hearing all the suits on merits decided all the suits vide its judgment dated 30.08.2010. The parties aggrieved - both plaintiffs and defendants in the original suits have filed these appeals in this Court.

8. Dr. Rajeev Dhavan submits that judgment in **Ismail Faruqui's** case had made observations that a mosque is not an essential part of the practice of the religion of Islam and namaz (prayer) by Muslims can be offered anywhere, even in open. The observations made by the Constitution Bench has influenced the decisions under the appeal, the law laid down in **Ismail Faruqui** in relation to praying in a mosque not being an essential practice is contrary to both, i.e. the law relating to essential practice and the process by which essential

practice is to be considered. Whether essential practice can be decided on a mere *ipse dixit* of the Court or whether the Court is obliged to examine belief, tenets and practices, is a pure question of law. The **Ismail Faruqui's** judgment being devoid of any examination on the above issues, the matter need to go to a larger Bench.

9. Dr. Dhavan specifically referred to paras 78 and 82 of the judgment in **Ismail Faruqui's** case. He specifically attacked following observations in Paragraph 78 :-

"78. While offer of prayer or worship is a religious practice, its offering at every location where such prayers can be offered would not be an essential or integral part of such religious practice unless the place has a particular significance for that religion so as to form an essential or integral part thereof. Places of worship of any religion having particular significance for that religion, to make it an essential or integral part of the religion, stand on a different footing and have to be treated differently and more reverentially."

10. In Para 82, following observation is specifically attacked:-

"A mosque is not an essential part of the practice of the religion of Islam and namaz(prayer) by Muslims can be offered

anywhere, even in open.”

11. He submits that essential practice of a religion requires a detailed examination. He has referred to various judgments of this Court to support his submission that wherever this Court had to determine the essential practice of a religion, detailed examination was undertaken. He submits that **Ismail Faruqui's** case does not refer to any material nor enters into any detailed examination before making the observations in Paragraphs 78 and 82 as noticed above. Dr. Dhavan further submits that a broad test of essentiality as laid down by Seven Judges Bench in **The Commissioner, Hindu Religious Endowments, Madras Vs. Sri Lakshmindra Thirtha Swamiar of Sri Shirur Mutt, 1954 SCR 1005** cannot be cut down by a later judgment of lesser strength, which judgments have introduced the test of integrality. He submits that the test of integrality is interchangeable with essentiality test. Dr. Dhavan, during his submissions, has taken us to submissions made by various parties before the High Court, where reliance was placed on **Ismail Faruqui's** case. He has also referred to various grounds taken in these appeals,

which grounds rely on the judgment of **Ismail Faruqui's** case. He submits that the above furnishes ample grounds for appellants to pray for reconsideration of **Ismail Faruqui's** case. Dr. Dhavan in his notes 'For reference to a larger Bench' has clarified that questionable aspects as noted above are not the ratio of **Ismail Faruqui's** case. Dr. Dhavan submits that ratio in **Ismail Faruqui's** case can be summed up to the following effect:-

- (i) The suits revive in their entirety.
- (ii) The acquisition was legally competent, traceable to List III and Entry 42 of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.
- (iii) The word 'vest' has multiple meanings and implied that the status of the Central Government was that of a statutory receiver which would dispense with the land (including the other areas acquired) in accordance with the judgment in the suits rather than the Reference which was declined.
- (iv) Status quo as in Section 7(2) of the Act would be maintained, justified on the basis of comparative user since 1949.
- (v) Secularism is a facet of equality and represents equal treatment of all religions in their own terms and with equal respect and

concern for all.

12. Shri K. Parasaran, learned senior counsel refuting the submissions of Dr. Dhavan submitted that the prayer for reconsideration of the judgment in **Ismail Faruqui's** case is not maintainable at the instance of the appellants. He submitted that those who were eo nomine parties to the proceedings in the case in **Ismail Faruqui**, litigated bona fide in respect of a public right viz. the right of the Muslim public, all persons interested in such right shall, for the purposes of Section 11 Civil Procedure Code, be deemed to claim under the persons so litigating and are barred by Res Judicata in view of Explanation VI to Section 11 C.P.C. He submits that the interests of Muslim community were adequately represented before this Court in **Ismail Faruqui's** case. He further submits that the judgment in **Ismail Faruqui's** case is binding on those who are eo-nomine parties thereto. Even apart from the question of res judicata, the doctrine of representation binds those whose interests are the same in the subject matter of Ram Janam Bhumi-Babri Masjid as those of eo-nomine parties. He submitted that the appellants are not

entitled to request for reconsideration of the said judgment on the principle of doctrine of representation. Mr. Parasaran submitted that to reconsider the judgment in **Ismail Faruqui's** case will be an exercise in futility as the judgment therein is binding on the present appellants. Assuming without admitting that by a further reference to a larger bench **Ismail Faruqui's** case is overruled, nevertheless, in so far as "Ayodhya Janmasthan Babri Masjid" is concerned, the judgment in **Ismail Faruqui's** case will still be binding on the appellants on the principle of finality. He submits that in the present case, the submissions made were a reargument of the submissions made in **Ismail Faruqui's** case as if it were an appeal against the said judgment by canvassing the correctness of the said judgment. He further submits that in addition to being binding on the parties, the judgment operates as a declaration of law under Article 141 of the Constitution.

13. Shri Parasaran further submits that observations in **Ismail Faruqui's** case that a mosque is not an essential part of the practice of Islam have to be read in the context of validity of the acquisition of the

suit property under the Act, 1993. He submits that this Court has not ruled that offering namaz by Muslims is not an essential religious practice. It only ruled that the right to offer namaz at every mosque that exists is not essential religious practice. But if a place of worship of any religion has a particular significance for that religion, enough to make it an essential or integral part of the religion, then it would stand on a different footing and would have to be treated differently and more reverentially. Mr.Parasaran respectfully submitted that the thrust of the reasoning of this Court has to be understood as to the freedom of religion under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution in the context of the inherent sovereign power of the State to compulsorily acquire property in the exercise of its jurisdiction of eminent domain in a secular democracy.

14. Shri Parasaran further submits that the fundamental right of the Muslim community under Article 25, to offer namaz, is not affected because the Babri Masjid was not a mosque with particular significance for that religion. The faith/practice to offer namaz is an essential part

of Muslim religion and, therefore, it may be performed in any mosque at Ayodhya. Ayodhya is of particular significance to the Hindus as a place of pilgrimage because of the ancient belief that Lord Ram was born there. He further submits that the impact of acquisition is equally on the right and interest of both the communities. Shri Parasaran, during his submissions, has also tried to distinguish the cases relied by the appellants to support their submissions in favour of reference.

15. Shri C.S. Vaidyanathan has submitted that present is not a case where judgment of **Ismail Faruqui's** case need any reference to a larger Bench. He has adopted the submissions made by Shri Parasaran.

16. Shri Tushar Mehta, learned Additional Solicitor General, submits that Constitution Bench judgment of this Court in **Ismail Faruqui's** case is a correct law, which does not deserves to be disturbed by referring it to a larger Bench. Shri Mehta further submits that the prayer made by the appellants for referring to larger Bench deserves to be rejected on the ground of inordinate delay. He submits that judgment was rendered

in 1994. The judgment came for consideration in **Mohd. Aslam's case, (2003) 4 SCC 1** where both the parties have relied on the judgments. Had there been any genuine grounds, request for reference ought to have been made at that time. He further submits that a request is not a bona fide request and has been made with the intent to delay the proceedings. Shri Tushar Mehta, learned Additional Solicitor General has reiterated his submissions that State of U.P. is neutral in so far as merits of the case of either of the parties is concerned.

17. Shri Parmeshwar Nath Mishra, learned counsel appearing for one of the respondents submits that all Mosques of the World are not essential for practice of Islam. During the submissions, he referred to various texts, sculptures of the religion of Islam. He further submits that the Al-Masjid, Al-Haram i.e. Ka'ba in Mecca is a mosque of particular significance for the reasons that there is Quranic command to offer prayers facing towards Ka'ba and to perform Haj as well as Umra in Ka'ba without which right to practise the religion of Islam is not conceivable. Two other Mosques namely, Al-

Masjid Al-Aqsa i.e. Baitul Muqaddas in Jerusalem and Al-Masjid of Nabi at Madina also have particular significances for the reason that besides Ka'ba, pilgrimage to these two mosques have also been commanded by the sacred Hadiths. Shri Mishra in his submission has referred to and relied on various texts and sculptures. He has referred to verses of Holy Quran and Hadiths, which are principal source of religion of Islam, its beliefs, doctrine, tenets and practices.

18. Shri S.K. Jain, learned senior counsel appearing for Nirmohi Akhada has also refuted the submission of Dr. Dhavan that **Ismail Faruqui's** case needs to be referred to a larger Bench.

19. Dr. Rajeev Dhavan in his submissions in rejoinder refutes the submission of Shri Parasaran that principle of res judicata is attracted in the present case. He submits that **Ismail Faruqui's** case was about a challenge to the Act, 1993 and the Presidential Reference and the question as to whether in the light of the Act, 1993 the suits abated due to Section 4(3) of the Act, 1993. The cases under these appeals are from suits, where the issues were entirely different. He submits that for

constituting a matter res judicata the following conditions must be satisfied, namely:-

1. The matter directly and substantially in issue in the subsequent suit or issue must be the same matter which was directly and substantially in issue in the former suit;
2. The former suit must have been a suit between the same parties or between parties under whom they or any of them claim;
3. The parties must have litigated under the same title in the former suit;
4. The court which decided the former suit must be a court competent to try the subsequent suit or the suit in which such issue is subsequently raised; and
5. The matter directly and substantially in issue in the subsequent suit must have been heard and finally decided by the Court in the first suit. Further Explanation I shows that it is not the date on which the suit is filed that matters but the date on which the suit is decided, so that even if a suit was filed later, it will be a former suit if it has been decided earlier. In order therefore that the decision in the earlier two appeals dismissed by the High Court operates as res judicata it will have to be seen whether all the five conditions mentioned above have been satisfied.

20. He submits that matter, which was directly and substantially in issue in the suits is entirely different from the issues, which came for consideration in the case of **Ismail Faruqui**. His submission is that **Ismail Faruqui's** case was concerned with the Act, 1993 and the Presidential Reference. He further submits that issue of essentiality of a Mosque generally was not before the Court and emerged only in the judgment. He further submits that pure questions of law are not res judicata. The ipse dixit of the Court that something is, or not the essential practice is contrary to law. He further submits that in the Constitution Bench, the suits were not transferred rather it was the writ petitions, which were filed in the High Court challenging the Act, 1993, were transferred. No transfer of the suit having been made in the Supreme Court to be heard alongwith **Ismail Faruqui's** case, the judgment in **Ismail Faruqui's** case cannot be said to be judgment in the suits. What constitute an essential practice and how it is to be established is a pure question of law and not amenable to res judicata. It is open to this court to examine the law relating to

determination and application of the essential practices test. The observations on prayer in a Mosque not being essential or concept of particular significance and comparative significance are without foundation. Replying to the submission of Shri Tushar Mehta, Dr. Dhavan submits that State has not taken a non-neutral stance in the present proceedings. He submits that there is no delay on the part of the appellants in praying for reconsideration of **Ismail Faruqui's** judgment. He submits that impugned judgment of the High Court is affected by the observations made in the **Ismail Faruqui's** case. He submits that submission of Shri Tushar Mehta that prayer is not bonafide and has been made only to delay the proceedings are incorrect and deserves to be rejected. Dr. Dhavan has also referred to various observations made by judgment in High Court to support its submissions that judgment of **Ismail Faruqui's** case has influenced the judgment of the High Court. He has further referred to various submissions made by the learned counsel for the parties relying on judgment of **Ismail Faruqui's** case before the High Court. He further submits that in these appeals also, several

grounds have been taken by the different learned counsel relying on **Ismail Faruqui's** case.

21. Learned counsel for the parties have referred to and relied on various judgments of this Court, which shall be referred to while considering the submissions in detail.

22. Before we enter into the submissions advanced by the learned counsel for the parties it is relevant to notice certain established principle on reading of a judgment of the Court. The focal point in the present case being Constitution Bench judgment in **Dr. M. Ismail Faruqui & Ors. vs. Union of India & Ors. reported in (1994) 6 SCC 360**. We have to find out the context of observations made in the judgment which according to the appellant are questionable and to decide whether the said observations furnish any ground for reconsideration of the Constitution Bench judgment. The most celebrated principle on reading of a judgment of a Court of law which has been approved time and again by this Court is the statement by LORD HALSBURY in **Quinn v. Leathem, 1901 AC 495**, where following was laid down:

"Before discussing the case of Allen v. Flood (1898) AC 1 and what was decided

therein, there are two observations of a general character which I wish to make, and one is to repeat what I have very often said before, that every judgment must be read as applicable to the particular facts proved, or assumed to be proved, since the generality of the expressions which may be found there are not intended to be expositions of the whole law, but are governed and qualified by the particular facts of the case in which such expressions are to be found. The other is that a case is only an authority for what it actually decides. I entirely deny that it can be quoted for a proposition that may seem to follow logically from it. Such a mode of reasoning assumes that the law is necessarily a logical code, whereas every lawyer must acknowledge that the law is not always logical at all. "

23. The following words of LORD DENNING in the matter of applying precedents have become locus classicus:

"Each case depends on its own facts and a close similarity between one case and another is not enough because even a single significant detail may alter the entire aspect, in deciding such cases, one should avoid the temptation to decide cases (as said by Cardozo, J.) by matching the colour of one case against the colour of another. To decide therefore, on which side of the line a case falls, the broad resemblance to another case is not at all decisive.

* * *

Precedent should be followed only so far as it marks the path of justice, but you must cut the dead wood and trim off the side branches else you will find yourself lost in thickets and branches. My plea is to keep the

path of justice clear of obstructions which could impede it."

The above passage has been quoted with approval by this Court in ***Sarva Shramik Sanghatana (KV), Mumbai vs. State of Maharashtra and others, (2008) 1 SCC 494.***

24. In the Constitution Bench judgment in ***Islamic Academy of Education and another v. State of Karnataka and others, (2003) 6 SCC 697,*** Chief Justice V.N. Khare speaking for majority held:

"The ratio decidendi of a Judgment has to be found out only on reading the entire Judgment. In fact the ratio of the judgment is what is set out in the judgment itself. The answer to the question would necessarily have to be read in the context of what is set out in the judgment and not in isolation. In case of any doubt as regards any observations, reasons and principles, the other part of the judgment has to be looked into. By reading a line here and there from, the judgment, one cannot find out the entire ratio decidendi of the judgment. We, therefore, while giving our clarifications, are deposed to look into other parts of the Judgment other than those portions which may be relied upon."

25. Justice S.B. Sinha, J. in his concurring opinion has reiterated the principles of interpretation of a judgment in paragraphs 139 to 146. Following has been

held in paragraphs 139-146:

"INTERPRETATION OF A JUDGMENT

139. A judgment, it is trite, is not to be read as a statute. The ratio decidendi of a judgment is its reasoning which can be deciphered only upon reading the same in its entirety. The ratio decidendi of a case or the principles and reasons on which it is based is distinct from the relief finally granted or the manner adopted for its disposal.

[See *Executive Engineer, Dhenkanal Minor Irrigation Division v. N.C. Budharaj* [2001]2 SCC 721].

140. In *Padma Sundara Rao v. State of T.N.*, (2002) 3 SCC 533, it is stated: (SCC p. 540 paragraph 9)

"There is always peril in treating the words of a speech or judgment as though they are words in a legislative enactment, and it is to be remembered that judicial utterances are made in the setting of the facts of a particular case, said Lord Morris in *Herrington v. British Railways Board* (1972) 2 WLR 537 [Sub nom *British Railways Board v. Herrington*, (1972) 1 All ER 749. Circumstantial flexibility, one additional or different fact may make a world of difference between conclusions in two cases."

[See also *Haryana Financial Corporation v. Jagadamba Oil Mills* (2002 3 SCC 496)]

141. In *General Electric Co. v. Renusagar Power Co.*, (1987) 4 SCC 137, it was held: (SCC p.157, paragraph 20)

"As often enough pointed out by us, words and expressions used in a judgment are not to be construed in the same manner as statutes or as words and expressions defined in

statutes. We do not have any doubt that when the words "adjudication of the merits of the controversy in the suit" were used by this Court in *State of U.P. v. Janki Saran Kailash Chandra* [1974]1SCR31, the words were not used to take in every adjudication which brought to an end the proceeding before the court in whatever manner but were meant to cover only such adjudication as touched upon the real dispute between the parties which gave rise to the action. Objections to adjudication of the disputes between the parties, on whatever ground are in truth not aids to the progress of the suit but hurdles to such progress. Adjudication of such objections cannot be termed as adjudication of the merits of the controversy in the suit. As we said earlier, a broad view has to be taken of the principles involved and narrow and technical interpretation which tends to defeat the object of the legislation must be avoided."

142. In *Rajeshwar Prasad Mishra v. The State of West, Bengal*, AIR 1965 SC 1887, it was held:

"Article 141 empowers the Supreme Court to declare the law and enact it. Hence the observation of the Supreme Court should not be read as statutory enactments. It is also well known that ratio of a decision is the reasons assigned therein."

(See also *Amar Nath Om Prakash and Ors. v. State of Punjab*[1985] 1 SCC 345 and *Hameed Joharan v. Abdul Salam*, 2001 (7) SCC 573).

143. It will not, therefore, be correct to contend, as has been contended by Mr. Nariman, that answers to the questions would be the ratio to a judgment. The answers to the questions are merely conclusions. They have to be interpreted, in a case of doubt or dispute with the reasons assigned in support

thereof in the body of the judgment, where for, it would be essential to read the other paragraphs of the judgment also. It is also permissible for this purpose (albeit only in certain cases and if there exist strong and cogent reasons) to look to the pleadings of the parties.

144. In *Keshav Chandra Joshi v. Union of India, 1992 Supp (1) SCC 272*, this Court when faced with difficulties where specific guidelines had been laid down for determination of seniority in *Direct Recruits Class II Engineering Officers' Association v. State of Maharashtra, (1990) 2 SCC 715*, held that the conclusions have to be read along with the discussions and the reasons given in the body of the judgment.

145. It is further trite that a decision is an authority for what it decides and not what can be logically deduced therefrom. [See *Union of India v. Chajju Ram, (2003) 5 SCC 568*.

146. The judgment of this Court in *T.M.A. Pai Foundations, (2002) 8 SCC 481*, will, therefore, have to be construed or to be interpreted on the aforementioned principles, The Court cannot read some sentences from here and there to find out the intent and purport of the decision by not only considering what has been said therein but the text and context in which it was said. For the said purpose the Court may also consider the constitutional or relevant, statutory provisions vis-a-vis its earlier decisions on which reliance has been placed."

26. Justice Arijit Pasayat, J. speaking for the Court in ***Commissioner of Central Excise, Delhi vs. Allied Air-conditioning Corporation (Regd.), (2006) 7 SCC 735***, held

that the judgment should be understood in the light of facts of the case and no more should be read into it than what it actually says. In paragraph 8 following has been laid down:

“8.....A judgment should be understood in the light of facts of the case and no more should be read into it than what it actually says. It is neither desirable nor permissible to pick out a word or a sentence from the judgment divorced from the context of the question under consideration and treat it to be complete law decided by this Court. The judgment must be read as a whole and the observations from the judgment have to be considered in the light of the questions which were before this Court. (See *Mehboob Dawood Shaikh v. State of Maharashtra* , (2004) 2 SCC 362.....”

27. In the light of the above principles, we now revert back to the Constitution Bench judgment in ***Ismail Faruqui***. We need to notice the issues which had come up for consideration before the Constitution Bench, the ratio of the judgment and the context of observations. We have noticed above that the Constitution Bench in ***Ismail Faruqui case*** decided five transferred cases, two writ petitions filed under Article 32 and Special Reference No.1 of 1993. The Special Reference No.1 of 1993 made by the President of India under Article 143

was respectfully declined to be answered by the Constitution Bench. The challenge in the writ petitions under Article 32 and transferred cases was to the Act, 1993. The Act, 1993 was enacted to provide for the acquisition of certain area at Ayodhya and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. Section 2(a) defines the area as:

"2(a) "area" means the area (including all the buildings, structures or other properties comprised therein) specified in the Schedule;

28. The Schedule of the Act contained the description of the area acquired. Apart from the other plots Revenue Plot Nos.159 and 160 situated in village Kot Ramchandra wherein structure commonly known as Ram Janam Bhumi-Babri Masjid was situated was also included. Several other plots including all the building structure on other properties comprised therein were acquired.

29. The validity of Act, 1993 was challenged on several grounds. The ground for challenge has been noticed in paragraph 17 of the judgment which is to the following effect:

"17. Broadly stated, the focus of challenge to the statute as a whole is on the

grounds of secularism, right to equality and right to freedom of religion. Challenge to the acquisition of the area in excess of the disputed area is in addition on the ground that the acquisition was unnecessary being unrelated to the dispute pertaining to the small disputed area within it. A larger argument advanced on behalf of some of the parties who have assailed the Act with considerable vehemence is that a mosque being a place of religious worship by the Muslims, independently of whether the acquisition did affect the right to practice religion, is wholly immune from the State's power of acquisition and the statute is, therefore, unconstitutional as violative of Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution of India for this reason alone. The others, however, limited this argument of immunity from acquisition only to places of special significance, forming an essential and integral part of the right to practice the religion, the acquisition of which would result in the extinction of the right to freedom of religion itself. It was also contended that the purpose of acquisition in the present case does not bring the statute within the ambit of Entry 42, List III but is referable to Entry 1, List II and, therefore, the Parliament did not have the competence to enact the same. It was then urged by learned Counsel canvassing the Muslim interest that the legislation is tilted heavily in favour of the Hindu interests and, therefore, suffers from the vice of non-secularism, and discrimination in addition to violation of the right to freedom of religion of the Muslim community....."

30. The challenge to the acquisition of the area in excess of area which is disputed area was on the ground

that same was unnecessary, hence, ought to be declared invalid. The challenge to excess area was laid by members of the Hindu community to whom the said plots belonged. One of the grounds of attack was based on secularism. It was contended that Act read as a whole is anti-secular and against the Muslim community. A mosque has immunity from State's power of acquisition. It was contended on behalf of the Muslim community that the defences open to the minority community in the suits filed by other side including that of adverse possession for over 400 years since 1528 AD when the Mosque was constructed have been extinguished by the acquisition. The suits have been abated without the substitution of an alternate dispute resolution mechanism to which they are entitled in the Constitutional scheme.

31. The Constitution Bench held that acquisition of the properties under the Act affects the rights of both the communities and not merely those of the Muslim community. In paragraph 49 following has been noticed:

"49. The narration of facts indicates that the acquisition of properties under the Act affects the rights of both the communities and not merely those of the Muslim community. The interest claimed by the Muslims is only over the disputed site where

the mosque stood before its demolition. The objection of the Hindus to this claim has to be adjudicated. The remaining entire property acquired under the Act is such over which no title is claimed by the Muslims. A large part thereof comprises of properties of Hindus of which the title is not even in dispute.... "

32. This Court also noticed that Ayodhya is said to be of particular significance to the Hindus as a place of pilgrimage because of the ancient belief that Lord Rama was born there. The Court also noticed that equally mosque was of significance for the Muslim community as an ancient mosque built by Mir Baqi in 1528 AD. In paragraph 51 of the judgment following has been noticed:

"51. It may also be mentioned that even as Ayodhya is said to be of particular significance to the Hindus as a place of pilgrimage because of the ancient belief that Lord Rama was born there, the mosque was of significance for the Muslim community as an ancient mosque built by Mir Baqi in 1528 A.D. As a mosque, it was a religious place of worship by the Muslims. This indicates the comparative significance of the disputed site to the two communities and also that the impact of acquisition is equally on the right and interest of the Hindu community. Mention of this aspect is made only in the context of the argument that the statute as a whole, not merely Section 7 thereof, is anti-secular being slanted in favour of the Hindus and against the Muslims."

33. As noted above, one of the principal submission

which was raised by the petitioners before the Constitution Bench was that mosque cannot be acquired because of a special status in the Mohammedan Law. The Constitution Bench in *Ismail Faruqui case* by a separate heading "MOSQUE - IMMUNITY FROM ACQUISITION" from paragraphs 65 to 82 considered the above ground.

34. The discussion from paragraphs 65 to 82 as per above heading indicates that the discussion and all observations were in the context of immunity from acquisition of a mosque. In paragraph 65 of the judgment a larger question was raised at the hearing that there is no power in the State to acquire any mosque, irrespective of its significance to practice of the religion of Islam. The Court after noticing the above observation has observed that the proposition advanced does appear to be too broad for acceptance. We reproduce paragraph 65 which is to the following effect:

"65. A larger question raised at the hearing was that there is no power in the State to acquire any mosque, irrespective of its significance to practice of the religion of Islam. The argument is that a mosque, even if it is of no particular significance to the practice of religion of Islam, cannot be acquired because of the special status of a mosque in Mahomedan Law. This argument was not confined to a mosque of particular

significance without which right to practice the religion is not conceivable because it may form an essential and integral part of the practice of Islam. In the view that we have taken of limited vesting in the Central Government as a statutory receiver of the disputed area in which the mosque stood, for the purpose of handing it over to the party found entitled to it, and requiring it to maintain status quo therein till then, this question may not be of any practical significance since there is no absolute divesting of the true owner of that property. We may observe that the proposition advanced does appear to us to be too broad for acceptance inasmuch as it would restrict the sovereign power of acquisition even where such acquisition is essential for an undoubted national purpose, if the mosque happens to be located in the property acquired as an ordinary place of worship without any particular significance attached to it for the practice of Islam as a religion. It would also lead to the strange result that in secular India there would be discrimination against the religions, other than Islam. In view of the vehemence with which this argument was advanced by Dr. Rajeev Dhavan and Shri Abdul Mannan to contend that the acquisition is invalid for this reason alone, it is necessary for us to decide this question. "

35. Although in paragraph 65 the Court observed that the proposition is too broad for acceptance but in view of the vehemence with which argument of the learned counsel appearing for the petitioners was put the Court proceeded to decide the issue.

36. The contention before the Constitution Bench was also that acquisition of a mosque violates the right given under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution of India. After noticing the law in the British India, prior to 1950, and the law after enforcement of the Constitution, the Constitution Bench came to the conclusion that places of religious worship like mosques, churches, temples etc. can be acquired under the State's sovereign power of acquisition. Such acquisition per se does not violate either Article 25 or Article 26 of the Constitution. After noticing the various decisions following was laid down in paragraph 74:

"74. It appears from various decisions rendered by this Court, referred later, that subject to the protection under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution, places of religious worship like mosques, churches, temples etc. can be acquired under the State's sovereign power of acquisition. Such acquisition per se does not violate either Article 25 or Article 26 of the Constitution. The decisions relating to taking over of the management have no bearing on the sovereign power of the State to acquire property. "

37. The Constitution Bench further held that the right to practice, profess and propagate religion guaranteed

under Article 25 of the Constitution does not necessarily include the right to acquire or own or possess property. Similarly, this right does not extend to the right of worship at any and every place of worship. Further, it was held that protection under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution is to religious practice which forms an essential and integral part of the religion. In paragraphs 77 and 78 following has been held:

“77. It may be noticed that Article 25 does not contain any reference to property unlike Article 26 of the Constitution. The right to practice, profess and propagate religion guaranteed under Article 25 of the Constitution does not necessarily include the right to acquire or own or possess property. Similarly this right does not extend to the right of worship at any and every place of worship so that any hindrance to worship at a particular place per se may infringe the religious freedom guaranteed under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution. The protection under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution is to religious practice which forms an essential and integral part of the religion. A practice may be a religious practice but not an essential and integral part of practice of that religion.

78. While offer of prayer or worship is a religious practice, its offering at every location where such prayers can be offered would not be an essential or integral part of such religious practice unless the place has a particular significance for that religion

so as to form an essential or integral part thereof. Places of worship of any religion having particular significance for that religion, to make it an essential or integral part of the religion, stand on a different footing and have to be treated differently and more reverentially. "

38. With the above observation the Constitution Bench held that offer of prayer or worship is a religious practice, its offering at every location would not be an essential or integral part of such religious practice unless the place has a particular significance for that religion so as to form an essential or integral part thereof. Places of worship of any religion having particular significance for that religion, to make it an essential or integral part of the religion, stand on a different footing and have to be treated differently and more reverentially.

39. From what we have noticed above following are deducible:

- (i) Places of religious worship like mosques, churches, temples, etc. can be acquired under the State's sovereign power of acquisition, which does not violate Articles 25 or 26 of the Constitution.

- (ii) The right to practice, profess and propagate religion guaranteed under Article 25 does not extend to the right of worship at any and every place of worship so that any hindrance to worship at a particular place per se may infringe the religious freedom guaranteed under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution.
- (iii) The protection under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution is to religious practice which forms an essential or integral part of the religion.
- (iv) A practice may be a religious practice but not an essential and integral part of practice of that religion.
- (v) While offer of prayer or worship is a religious practice, its offering at every location where such prayers can be offered would not be an essential or integral part of such religious practice unless the place has a particular significance for that religion so as to form an essential or integral part thereof.

The Court itself has drawn a distinction with regard

to the place of a particular significance for that religion where offer of prayer or worship may be an essential or integral part of the religion.

40. The Court held that the mosques were subject to the provisions of statute of limitation thereby extinguishing the right of Muslims to offer prayers in a particular mosque. In paragraph 80 following was held:

"80. It has been contended that a mosque enjoys a particular position in Muslim Law and once a mosque is established and prayers are offered in such a mosque, the same remains for all time to come a property of Allah and the same never reverts back to the donor or founder of the mosque and any person professing Islamic faith can offer prayer in such a mosque and even if the structure is demolished, the place remains the same where the Namaz can be offered. As indicated hereinbefore, in British India, no such protection was given to a mosque and the mosque was subjected to the provisions of statute of limitation there by extinguishing the right of Muslims to offer prayers in a particular mosque lost by adverse possession over that property."

41. The Constitution Bench unequivocally laid down that every immovable property be a temple, church or mosque etc. is liable to be acquired and a mosque does not enjoy any additional protection which is not available to religious places of worship of other religions.

42. Now, we come to paragraph 82 of the judgment which is the sheet anchor of the submission raised by Dr. Rajiv Dhavan. Serious objections have been raised by Dr. Rajiv Dhavan to some observations made in paragraph 82. Entire paragraph 82 is quoted below:

"82. The correct position may be summarised thus. Under the Mahomedan Law applicable in India, title to a mosque can be lost by adverse possession (See Mulla's Principles of Mahomedan Law, 19th Edn. by M. Hidaytullah - Section 217; and AIR 1940 PC 116). If that is the position in law, there can be no reason to hold that a mosque has a unique or special status, higher than that of the places of worship of other religions in secular India to make it immune from acquisition by exercise of the sovereign or prerogative power of the State. A mosque is not an essential part of the practice of the religion of Islam and Namaz (prayer) by Muslims can be offered anywhere, even in open. Accordingly, its acquisition is not prohibited by the provisions in the Constitution of India. Irrespective of the status of a mosque in an Islamic country for the purpose of immunity from acquisition by the State in exercise of the sovereign power, its status and immunity from acquisition in the secular ethos of India under the Constitution is the same and equal to that of the places of worship of the other religions, namely, church, temple etc. It is neither more nor less than that of the places of worship of the other religions. Obviously, the acquisition of any religious place is to be made only in unusual and extraordinary situations for a larger national purpose keeping in view that such acquisition should not result in extinction of the right to

practice the religion, if the significance of that place be such. Subject to this condition, the power of acquisition is available for a mosque like any other place of worship of any religion. The right to worship is not at any and every place, so long as it can be practised effectively, unless the right to worship at a particular place is itself an integral part of that right. "

"A mosque is not an essential part of the practice of the religion of Islam and namaz(prayer) by Muslims can be offered anywhere, even in open."

43. Dr. Dhavan submits that above observation in Para 82 of the Constitution Bench judgment in *Ismail Faruqui's* case is the reason for reconsideration of the judgment. He submits that the above statements in paragraph 82 are wrong because it is wrong to say that

(vi) A mosque is not essential to Islam.

(vii) The essential practices doctrine does not protect places of worship other than those having particular significance.

44. Elaborating his submission, Dr. Dhavan relies on several judgments of this Court where what are the essential practice of a religion had been elaborated and how the Court should determine the essential practice of a religion has been noticed. The submission is that

above observations were made by the Constitution Bench on its *ipse dixit* without consideration of any material due to which reason the statement is unsustainable.

45. Before we proceed to examine the nature and content of above statement, it is relevant to have an overview of the law laid down by this Court with regard to essential practices of a religion. The *locus classicus* of the subject is Constitution Bench judgment of this Court in ***Commissioner, Hindu Religious Endowments, Madras Vs. Sri Lakshmindra Thirtha Swamiar of Sri Shirur Mutt, AIR 1954 SC 282.*** The Mathadipati of Shirur Mutt filed a writ petition in Madras High Court challenging various provisions of Madras Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act, 1951. Challenge to the Act was on various grounds including the ground that provisions of the Act violate the fundamental right guaranteed under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution of India. The High Court had struck down various provisions of the Act against which appeal was filed by the Commissioner, Hindu Religious Endowments, Madras. Justice B.K. Mukherjea speaking for the Constitution Bench held that it would not be correct to say that a

religion is nothing but a doctrine or belief. It was held that a religion may also lay down a code of ethical rules for its followers and it might prescribe rituals and observances, ceremonies and modes of worship which are regarded as integral parts of religion. In Para 17, following was held:-

"17.....Religion is certainly a matter of faith with individuals or communities and it is not necessarily theistic. There are well known religions in India like Buddhism and Jainism which do not believe in God or in any Intelligent First Cause. A religion undoubtedly has its basis in a system of beliefs or doctrines which are regarded by those who profess that religion as conducive to their spiritual well being, but it would not be correct to say that religion is nothing else but a doctrine or belief. A religion may not only lay down a code of ethical rules for its followers to accept, it might prescribe rituals and observances, ceremonies and modes of worship which are regarded as integral parts of religion, and these forms and observances might extend even to matters of food and dress."

46. Further, in Para 18, following was laid down:-

18. The guarantee under our Constitution not only protects the freedom of religious opinion but it protects also acts done in pursuance of a religion and this is made clear by the use of the expression "practice of religion" in Article 25....."

47. The Court further held; what constitutes the

essential part of a religion is primarily to be ascertained with reference to the doctrines of that religion itself. In Para 19, following has been laid down:-

"19. The contention formulated in such broad terms cannot, we think, be supported. In the first place, what constitutes the essential part of a religion is primarily to be ascertained with reference to the doctrines of that religion itself. If the tenets of any religious sect of the Hindus prescribe that offerings of food should be given to the idol at particular hours of the day, that periodical ceremonies should be performed in a certain way at certain periods of the year or that there should be daily recital of sacred texts or oblations to the sacred fire, all these would be regarded as parts of religion and the mere fact that they involve expenditure of money or employment of priests and servants or the use of marketable commodities would not make them secular activities partaking of a commercial or economic character; all of them are religious practices and should be regarded as matters of religion within the meaning of Article 26(b).

What Article 25(2)(a) contemplates is not regulation by the State of religious practices as such, the freedom of which is guaranteed by the Constitution except when they run counter to public order, health and morality but regulation of activities which are economic, commercial or political in their character though they are associated with religious practices....."

48. Two other judgments were delivered in the same year,

which had relied and referred to Madras judgment. In ***Ratilal Panachand Gandhi and Others Vs. State of Bombay and Others, AIR 1954 SC 388***, in paragraph Nos. 10 and 13 following was held:-

"10. Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees to every person and not merely to the citizens of India, the freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion. This is subject, in every case, to public order, health and morality. Further exceptions are engrafted upon this right by clause (2) of the article. Sub-clause (a) of clause (2) saves the power of the State to make laws regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice; and sub-clause (b) reserves the State's power to make laws providing for social reform and social welfare even though they might interfere with religious practices.

Thus, subject to the restrictions which this article imposes, every person has a fundamental right under our Constitution not merely to entertain such religious belief as may be approved of by his judgment or conscience but to exhibit his belief and ideas in such overt acts as are enjoined or sanctioned by his religion and further to propagate his religious views for the edification of others.....

13. Religious practices or performances of acts in pursuance of religious belief are as much a part of religion as faith or belief in particular doctrines. Thus if the tenets of the Jain or the Parsi religion lay down that

certain rites and ceremonies are to be performed at certain times and in a particular manner, it cannot be said that these are secular activities partaking of commercial or economic character simply because they involve expenditure of money or employment of priests or the use of marketable commodities. No outside authority has any right to say that these are not essential parts of religion and it is not open to the secular authority of the State to restrict or prohibit them in any manner they like under the guise of administering the trust estate....."

49. Another judgment, which followed the **Shirur Mutt** case was **Sri Jagannath Ramanuj Das and Another Vs. State of Orissa and Another, AIR 1954 SC 400**. The Constitution Bench in **Sri Venkataramana Devaru and Others Vs. State of Mysore and Others, AIR 1958 SC 255** had occasion to consider Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution of India in context of Madras Temple Entry Authorisation Act, 1947 as amended in 1949. Referring to **Shirur Mutt** case, following was stated in para 16(3):-

"16(3)....Now, the precise connotation of the expression "matters of religion" came up for consideration by this Court in The Commissioner, Hindu Religious Endowments, Madras v. Sri Lakshmindra Thirtha Swamiar of Sri Shirur Mutt (AIR 1954 SC 282), and it was held therein that it embraced not merely matters of doctrine and belief pertaining to the religion but also the practice of it, or to put it in terms of Hindu theology, not

merely its Gnana but also its Bakti and Karma Kandas...."

50. Another judgment, which needs to be noticed is **Mohd. Hanif Quareshi and Others Vs. State of Bihar, AIR 1958 SC 731**. A writ petition under Article 32 was filed questioning the validity of three legislative enactments banning the slaughter of certain animals passed by the States of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh respectively. One of the submissions raised by the petitioner was that banning of slaughter of cows infringes fundamental right of petitioner to sacrifice the cow on Bakra-Id. The Court proceeded to dwell with essential practice of the religion of Islam in above context. The Court examined the material placed before it for determining the essential practice of the religion and made following observations in paragraph 13:-

"What then, we inquire, are the materials placed before us to substantiate the claim that the sacrifice of a cow is enjoined or sanctioned by Islam? The materials before us are extremely meagre and it is surprising that on a matter of this description the allegations in the petition should be so vague. In the Bihar Petition No. 58 of 1956 are set out the following bald allegations:

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We have, however, no material on the record before us which will enable us to say, in the face of the foregoing facts, that the sacrifice of a cow on that day is an obligatory overt act for a Mussalman to exhibit his religious belief and idea. In the premises, it is not possible for us to uphold this claim of the petitioners."

51. Next case to be considered is **Sardar Syedna Taher Saifuddin Saheb Vs. State of Bombay, AIR 1962 SC 853.**

The issue raised before this Court in the above case was regarding validity of law interfering with right of religious denomination to excommunicate its members. Articles 25 and 26 came to be considered in the above context. In paragraph 34 of the judgment, referring to earlier decisions of this Court, main principles underlying have been noticed, which is to the following effect:-

"34. The content of Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution came up for consideration before this Court in 1954 SCR 1005 : (AIR 1954 S.C. 282); Ramanuj Das v. State of Orissa, 1954 SCR 1046 : (AIR 1954 SC 400); 1958 SCR 895 : (AIR 1958 S.C. 255); (Civil Appeal No. 272 of 1969 D/-17-3-1961 : (AIR 1961 S.C. 1402) and several other cases and the main principles underlying these provisions have by these decisions been placed beyond controversy. The first is that the protection of these articles is not limited to matters of

doctrine or belief, they extend also to acts done in pursuance of religion and therefore contain a guarantee for rituals and observances, ceremonies and modes of worship which are integral parts of religion. The second is that what constitutes an essential part of a religion or religious practice has to be decided by the courts with reference to the doctrine of a particular religion and include practices which are regarded by the community as a part of its religion."

52. Next judgment to be noticed is Constitution Bench judgment of **Tikayat Shri Govindlalji Maharaj etc. Vs. State of Rajasthan and Others, AIR 1963 SC 1638.** The validity of Nathdwara Temple Act, 1959 was challenged in the Rajasthan High Court. It was contended by Tilkayat that the idol of Shri Shrinathji in the Nathdwara Temple and all the properties pertaining to it were his private properties and hence, the State Legislature was not competent to pass the Act. It was also contended that if the temple was held to be a public temple, then the Act would be invalid because it contravened the fundamental rights guaranteed to the denomination under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution. Gajendragadkar, J. speaking for the Court in Paragraphs 58 and 59 laid down following:-

"58. In deciding the question as to whether a given religious practice is an integral part of the religion or not, the test always would be whether it is regarded as such by the community following the religion or not. This formula may in some cases present difficulties in its operation. Take the case of a practice in relation to food or dress. If in a given proceeding, one section of the community claims that while performing certain rites white dress is an integral part of the religion itself, whereas another section contends that yellow dress and not the white dress is the essential part of the religion, how is the Court going to decide the question? Similar disputes may arise in regard to food. In cases where conflicting evidence is produced in respect of rival contentions as to competing religious practices the Court may not be able to resolve the dispute by a blind application of the formula that the community decides which practice is an integral part of its religion, because the community may speak with more than one voice and the formula would, therefore, break down. This question will always have to be decided by the Court and in doing so, the Court may have to enquire whether the practice in question is religious in character and if it is, whether it can be regarded as an integral or essential part of the religion, and the finding of the Court on such an issue will always depend upon the evidence adduced before it as to the conscience of the community and the tenets of its religion. It is in the light of this possible complication which may arise in some cases that this Court struck a note of caution in the case of *Dungah Committee Ajmer v. Syed Hussain Ali & Ors.*¹⁸ and observed that in order that the practices in question should be treated as a part of religion they must be regarded by the said religion as its essential and integral

part; otherwise even purely secular practices which are not an essential or an integral part of religion are apt to be clothed with a religious form and may make a claim for being treated as religious practices within the meaning of Article 26.

59. In this connection, it cannot be ignored that what is protected under Articles 25(1) and 26(b) respectively are the religious practices and the right to manage affairs in matters of religion. If the practice in question is purely secular or the affair which is controlled by the statute is essentially and absolutely secular in character, it cannot be urged that Article 25(1) or Article 26(b) has been contravened. The protection is given to the practice of religion and to the denomination's right to manage its own affairs in matters of religion. Therefore, whenever a claim is made on behalf of an individual citizen that the impugned statute contravenes his fundamental right to practise religion or a claim is made on behalf of the denomination that the fundamental right guaranteed to it to manage its own affairs in matters of religion is contravened, it is necessary to consider whether the practice in question is religious or the affairs in respect of which the right of management is alleged to have been contravened are affairs in matters of religion. If the practice is a religious practice or the affairs are the affairs in matter of religion, then, of course, the right guaranteed by Article 25(1) and Article 26 (b) cannot be contravened."

53. The above decisions of this Court clearly lay down that the question as to whether particular religious

practice is essential or integral part of the religion is a question, which has to be considered by considering the doctrine, tenets and beliefs of the religion. What Dr. Dhavan contends is that Constitution Bench in ***Ismail Faruqui***'s case without there being any consideration of essentiality of a religion have made the questionable observations in paragraph 82 as noticed above.

54. We have to examine the observations made in paragraph 82 of the Constitution Bench judgment in the light of the above submission, law and the precedents as noticed above. The statement "a mosque is not essential part of the practice of religion...." is a statement which has been made by the Constitution Bench in specific context and reference. The context for making the above observation was claim of immunity of a mosque from acquisition. Whether every mosque is the essential part of the practice of religion of Islam, acquisition of which *ipso facto* may violate the rights under Articles 25 and 26, was the question which had cropped up for consideration before the Constitution Bench. Thus, the statement that a mosque is not an essential part of the practice of religion of Islam is in context

of issue as to whether the mosque, which was acquired by Act, 1993 had immunity from acquisition.

55. The above observation by the Constitution Bench has been made to emphasise that there is no immunity of the mosque from the acquisition. We have noticed that Constitution Bench had held that while offer of prayer or worship is a religious practice, its offering at every location where such prayers can be offered would not be an essential or integral part of such religious practice unless the place has a particular significance for that religion so as to form an essential or integral part thereof. The above observation made in paragraph 78 has to be read along with observation made in paragraph 82. What Court meant was that unless the place of offering of prayer has a particular significance so that any hindrance to worship may violate right under Articles 25 and 26, any hindrance to offering of prayer at any place shall not affect right under Articles 25 and 26. The observation as made in paragraph 82 as quoted above has to be understood with the further observation made in the same paragraph where this Court held:

"82....Obviously, the acquisition of any religious place is to be made only in unusual and extraordinary situations for a larger national purpose keeping in view that such acquisition should not result in extinction of the right to practice the religion, if the significance of that place be such. Subject to this condition, the power of acquisition is available for a mosque like any other place of worship of any religion. The right to worship is not at any and every place, so long as it can be practised effectively, unless the right to worship at a particular place is itself an integral part of that right. "

56. The Court held that if the place where offering of namaz is a place of particular significance, acquisition of which may lead to the extinction of the right to practice of the religion, only in that condition the acquisition is not permissible and subject to this condition, the power of acquisition is available for a mosque like any other place of worship of any religion. Thus, observation made in paragraph 82 that mosque is not an essential part of the practice of the religion of Islam and namaz even in open can be made was made in reference to the argument of the petitioners regarding immunity of mosque from acquisition.

57. The submission which was pressed before the Constitution Bench was that there is no power in the

State to acquire any mosque, irrespective of its significance to practice of the religion of Islam. The said contention has been noticed in paragraph 65 of the judgment as extracted above.

58. The sentence "A mosque is not essential part of the practice of the religion of Islam and namaz(prayer) by Muslims can be offered anywhere, even in open" is followed immediately by the next sentence that is "Accordingly, its acquisition is not prohibited by the provisions in the Constitution of India" which makes it amply clear that the above sentence was confined to the question of immunity from acquisition of a mosque which was canvassed before the Court. First sentence cannot be read divorced from the second sentence which immediately followed the first sentence.

59. No arguments having been raised before the Constitution Bench that Ram Janam Bhumi-Babri Masjid is a mosque of a particular significance, acquisition of which shall extinct the right of practice of the religion, the Court had come to the conclusion that by acquisition of mosque rights under Articles 25 and 26 are not infringed. We conclude that observations as

made by the Constitution Bench in paragraphs 78 and 82 which have been questioned by the petitioners were observations made in reference to acquisition of place of worship and has to confine to the issue of acquisition of place of worship only. The observation need not be read broadly to hold that a mosque can never be an essential part of the practice of the religion of Islam.

"Comparative significance" & "Particular significance".

60. Dr. Rajiv Dhavan submits that the Constitution Bench has entered into the comparative significance of both the places that is birth place of Ram for Hindus and Ram Janam Bhumi-Babri Masjid for Muslims. He submits that India is a secular country and all religions have to be treated equal and the Court by entering into comparative significance concept has lost sight of the secular principles which are embedded in the Constitution of India. It is true that the Constitution Bench has used phrase "comparative significance" but comparative significance of both the communities were noticed only to highlight the significance of place which is claimed by both the parties and to emphasise that the impact of

acquisition is equally on the right and interest of the Hindu community as well as Muslim community. In paragraph 51 of the judgment following has been noticed:

"51. It may also be mentioned that even as Ayodhya is said to be of particular significance to the Hindus as a place of pilgrimage because of the ancient belief that Lord Rama was born there, the mosque was of significance for the Muslim community as an ancient mosque built by Mir Baqi in 1528 A.D. As a mosque, it was a religious place of worship by the Muslims. This indicates the comparative significance of the disputed site to the two communities and also that the impact of acquisition is equally on the right and interest of the Hindu community. Mention of this aspect is made only in the context of the argument that the statute as a whole, not merely Section 7 thereof, is anti-secular being slanted in favour of the Hindus and against the Muslims. "

61. Dr. Dhavan has also taken exception to the phrase 'particular significance' as is occurring in the Constitution Bench judgment. He submits that all religions are equal and have to be equally respected by all including the State. All mosques, all churches and all temples are equally significant for the communities practicing and professing such religions. The concept that some places are of particular significance is itself faulty. We have bestowed our consideration to the

above aspect of the matter. We have already noticed that the Constitution Bench held that acquisition is a sovereign or prerogative power of the State to acquire property and all religious places, namely, church, mosque, temple etc. are liable to be acquired in exercise of right of eminent domain of the State. The Constitution Bench also observed that acquisition of place of religious worship like church, mosque etc. per se does not violate rights under Articles 25 and 26. The Court, however, has noticed one fetter on such acquisition. The Constitution Bench held that if a particular place is of such significance for that religion that worship at such place is an essential religious practice and the extinction of such place may breach their right of Article 25, the acquisition of such place is not permissible. A place of particular significance has been noticed by the Constitution Bench in the above context. When acquisition of such place results in extinction of the right to practice the religion, there is violation of Article 25, which was an exception laid by the Constitution Bench while laying down general proposition that acquisition of all places

of worship is permissible. Thus, no exception can be taken to the Constitution Bench having used expression 'place of particular significance' for carving out an exception to the general power of acquisition of the State of religious places like church, mosque and temple or gurudwara. The above exception carved out by the Constitution Bench is to protect the constitutional right guaranteed under Article 25.

'Particular significance' of place of birth of Lord Rama

62. Dr. Dhavan has taken exception to observation of Constitution Bench, where, place of birth of Lord Rama, has been held to be of particular significance. He submits that the above observation was uncalled for since there cannot be any comparison between two religions. We have observed above that phrase "particular significance" was used by the Constitution Bench only in context of immunity from acquisition. What the Court held was that if a religious place has a particular significance, the acquisition of it *ipso facto* violates the right of religion under Articles 25 and 26, hence the said place of worship has immunity from acquisition. It is another matter that the place

of birth of Lord Rama is referred as sacred place for Hindu community, which has been pleaded throughout. In any view of the matter acquisition under Act, 1993 having been upheld, the use of expression "particular significance" has lost all its significance for decision of the suits and the appeals.

RES-JUDICATA

63. Shri Parasaran submits that appellants are precluded from questioning the **Ismail Faruqui's** judgment. The petitioner in **Ismail Faruqui's case** represented the right of the Muslim public, hence, all persons interested in such rights for the purposes of Section 11 be deemed to claim under the persons so litigating and are barred by res-judicata in view of Explanation VI to Section 11, CPC. He further submits that judgment in **Ismail Faruqui's case** is part of the judgment in the suit itself, in view of the fact that IA in suits were transferred and decided alongwith petitions under Article 32. The appellants are thus clearly bound by the judgment in **Ismail Faruqui's case**.

64. Dr. Dhavan replying the submissions of Shri Parasaran submits that **Ismail Faruqui's case** was about a

challenge to the Act, 1993, the Presidential reference and further as to whether in the light of Act, 1993 the suits abated due to Section 4(3) of the Act. The cases under appeal are from suits where the issues are entirely different. The suits having never been transferred to be decided with **Ismail Faruqui's case**, the decision rendered in **Ismail Faruqui's case** cannot be said to be part of the judgment in suits. He submits that the issues which were raised in **Ismail Faruqui's case** were not the issues which are directly and substantially in issue in the suits. He further submits that *res judicata* is not attracted in the present proceedings.

65. The principle of *res judicata* as contained in Section 11 of Civil Procedure Code as well as the general principles are well settled by several judgments of this Court. For applicability of the principle of *res judicata* there are several essential conditions which need to be fulfilled. Shri Parasaran, in support of his submission, states that the parties in **Ismail Faruqui's case** represented the interest of Muslim community and those petitioners bonafidely litigated in respect of

public rights, hence, all persons interested in such rights be deemed to claim under the person so lititgating attracting the applicability of Explanation VI of Section 11, CPC. He placed reliance on judgment of this Court in **Ahmed Adam Sait & others versus Inayathullah Mekhri & others, 1964 (2) SCR 647**. In the above case, in suit under Section 92, CPC, a scheme had already been framed by Court of Competent Jurisdiction. Another suit was instituted under Section 92 of CPC praying for settling a scheme for proper administration of the Jumma Masjid. The plea of *res judicata* was urged. Upholding the plea of *res judicata*, following was laid down:-

"... In assessing the validity of this argument, it is necessary to consider the basis of the decisions that a decree passed in a suit under s.92 binds all parties. The basis of this view is that a suit under s.92 is a representative suit and is brought with the necessary sanction required by it on behalf of all the beneficiaries interested in the Trust. The said section authorises two or more persons having an interest in the Trust to file a suit for claiming one or more of the reliefs specified in clauses (a) to (h) of sub-section (1) after consent in writing there prescribed has been obtained. Thus, when a suit is brought under s.92, it is brought by two or more persons interested in the Trust who have taken upon themselves the

responsibility of representing all the beneficiaries of the Trust. In such a suit, though all the beneficiaries may not be expressly impleaded, the action is instituted on their behalf and relief is claimed in a representative character. This position immediately attracts the provisions of explanation VI to s.11 of the Code. Explanation VI provides that where persons litigate bona fide in respect of a public right or of a private right claimed in common for themselves and others, all persons interested in such right shall, for the purposes of this section, be deemed to claim under the persons so litigating. It is clear that s.11 read with its explanation VI leads to the result that a decree passed in a suit instituted by persons to which explanation VI applies will bar further claims by persons interested in the same right in respect of which the prior suit had been instituted. Explanation VI thus illustrates one aspect of constructive res judicata. Where a representative suit is brought under s.92 and a decree is passed in such a suit, law assumes that all persons who have the same interest as the plaintiffs in the representative suit were represented by the said plaintiffs and, therefore, are constructively barred by res judicata from rearguing the matters directly and substantially in issue in the said earlier suit."

66. Learned Counsel for both the parties have referred to and relied on Constitution Bench Judgment of this Court in **Gulabchand Chhotalal Parikh versus State of Gujarat, AIR 1965 SC 1153**. Whether a decision of High

Court on merits on certain matters after contest in a writ petition under Article 226 of the Constitution operates as *res judicata* in regular suit with respect to the same matter between the same party was the issue considered by this court. This Court after referring to almost all relevant judgments on the subjects laid down following in paragraphs 60 and 61:-

"60. As a result of the above discussion, we are of opinion that the provisions of S.11, C.P.C., are not exhaustive with respect to an earlier decision operating as res judicata between the same parties on the same matter in controversy in a subsequent regular suit and that on the general principle of res judicata, any previous decision on a matter in controversy, decided after full contest or after affording fair opportunity to the parties to prove their case by a Court competent to decide it, will operate as res judicata in a subsequent regular suit. It is not necessary that the Court deciding the matter formerly be competent to decide the subsequent suit or that the former proceeding and the subsequent suit have the same subject-matter. The nature of the former proceeding is immaterial.

61. We do not see any good reason to preclude such decisions on matters in controversy in writ proceedings under Arts. 226 and 32 of the Constitution from operating as res judicata in subsequent regular suits on the same matters in controversy between the same parties and thus to give limited effect to the principle of the finality of decisions after full contest. We therefore, hold that, on the general principle of res judicata, the

decision of the High Court on a writ petition under Art.226 on the merits on a matter after contest will operate as res judicata in a subsequent regular suit between the same parties with respect to the same matter."

67. In **Daryao and others versus State of U.P. & others, AIR 1961 SC 1457**, this Court held that on general consideration of public policy there seems to be no reason by which the rule of *res judicata* should be treated as not admissible or irrelevant in deciding writ petition filed under Article 32.

68. A Constitution Bench of this Court in **Sheodan Singh versus Daryao Kunwar, AIR 1966 SC 1332**, after elaborately considering the principles underlined under Section 11 of the CPC, held that there are five essential conditions which must be satisfied before plea of *res judicata* can be pressed. In paragraph 9 of the judgment, the conditions have been enumerated which are to the following effect:-

"9. A plain reading of S.11 shows that to constitute a matter res judicata, the following conditions must be satisfied, namely -(I) The matter directly and substantially in issue in the subsequent suit or issue must be the same matter which was directly and substantially in issue in the

*formar suit; (II) The former suit must have been a suit between the same parties or between parties under whom they or any of them claim; (III) The parties must have litigated under the same title in the former suit; (IV) The court which decided the former suit must be a Court competent to try the subsequent suit or the suit in which such issue is subsequently raised; and (V) The matter directly and substantially in issue in the subsequent suit must have been heard and finally decided by the Court in the first suit. Further Explanation I shows that it is not the date on which the suit is decided, so that even if a suit was filed later, it will be a former suit if it has been decided earlier. In order therefore that the decision in the earlier two appeals dismissed by the High Court operates as *res judicata* it will have to be seen whether all the five conditions mentioned above have been satisfied."*

69. One of the submissions put on forefront by Dr. Dhavan is that issues which were involved in **Ismail Faruqui's case** are not issues which are directly and substantially involved in the suits giving rise to these appeals, hence, the plea of *res judicata* should fail on this ground alone. One of the conditions as enumerated by this Court in **Sheodan Singh's case(supra)** is that "the matter directly and substantially in issue, in subsequent suit must have been heard and finally decided by the Court in the first suit." Dr. Dhavan elaborating

the principle of directly and substantially in issue has relied on judgment of this court in **Sajjadanashin Sayed vs. Musa Dadabhai Ummer, (2000) 3 SCC 350**. This Court while considering the condition of "directly and substantially in issue" in reference to Section 11 laid down following principles in paragraph 12, 13 & 14:-

"12. It will be noticed that the words used in Section 11 CPC are "directly and substantially in issue". If the matter was in issue directly and substantially in a prior litigation and decided against a party then the decision would be *res judicata* in a subsequent proceeding. Judicial decisions have however held that if a matter was only "collaterally or incidentally" in issue and decided in an earlier proceeding, the finding therein would not ordinarily be *res judicata* in a latter proceeding where the matter is directly and substantially in issue.

13. As pointed out in Halsbury's Law of England(Vol.16, para 1538, 4th edition), the fundamental rule is that a judgment is not conclusive if any matter came collaterally in question[R.v.knaptoft Inhabitants; Heptulla Bros. v. Thakore WLR at p.297(PC)]; or if any matter was incidentally cognizable [Sanders(otherwise Saunders)v. Sanders (otherwise Saunders) All ER at p.771].

14. A collateral or incidental issue is one that is ancillary to a direct and substantive issue; the former is an auxiliary issue and the latter the principal issue. The expression "collaterally or incidentally" in issue implies that there is another matter which is "directly and substantially" in issue(Mulla's Civil Procedure Code, 15th

edn.,p.104).

Difficulty in distinguishing whether a matter was directly in issue or collaterally or incidentally in issue and tests laid down in various courts.

70. In **Mahila Bajrangi(dead) through Lrs. versus Badribai w/o Jagannath and another, (2003) 2 SCC 464,** above principle was reiterated in following words in paragraph 6 which is to the following effect:-

"6.....That apart, it is always the decision on an issue that has been directly and substantially in issue in the former suit between the same parties which has been heard and finally decided that is considered to operate as res judicata and not merely any finding on every incident or collateral question to arrive at such a decision that would constitute res judicata."

71. The impugned judgment has also categorically held that issues, which have been raised in the suits are not the issues, which can be said to have been noticed and adjudicated by this court in **Ismail Faruqui's** case. The High Court has clearly held that the authority of the Superior Court laying down a law is binding on the courts below provided a matter has been decided by the court. In Para 4054, following has been held:-

"4054. The mere fact that some facts have been noticed by the Government of India in White Paper and those facts have simply been noticed by the Apex Court while referring to the facts mentioned in the White Paper, it cannot be said that those facts can be construed as if they have been accepted by the Apex Court to be correct and stand adjudicated. The law of precedent is well known. The authority of the superior Court laying down a law is binding on the Courts below provided a matter has been decided by the Court. An issue can be considered to be decided by a superior Court when it was raised, argued and decided and only then it is a binding precedent for the other courts."

72. We have noticed above that the issues which were involved in **Ismail Faruqui's case** were validity of Act, 1993. One of the issues which was taken up by **Ismail Faruqui's case** was as to whether by virtue of Section 4 sub-section (3) of Act, 1993 suits pending in Allahabad High Court stands abated. The Presidential Reference No.1 of 1993 was also heard along with the writ petitions and transferred cases. The issues which have been framed in the suits giving rise to these appeals are different issues which cannot be said to be directly and substantially in issue in **Ismail Faruqui's case**. Non-fulfilment of this condition itself is sufficient to reject the plea of *res judicata* as raised by Shri

Parasaran.

73. We may further notice submissions of Shri Parasaran that IA which was filed in the suit was also taken up along with the **Ismail Faruqui's case**, hence, the judgment rendered in **Ismail Faruqui's case** shall be treated to be the part of judgment in the suits which preclude the appellant to reagitate the same issue. For appreciating the above submissions we need to look into as to what matters were before this Court in **Ismail Faruqui's case**.

74. The Act, 1993 was preceded by an ordinance which was issued on 07.01.1993. Section 4(3) of the Ordinance contemplated that suit, appeal or other proceeding in respect of right, title or interest having to any property vested in Central Government under Section 3 shall abate. After the ordinance plaintiff had applied for amendment of plaints challenging the legality and validity of the Ordinance. High Court in the suits framed the issue namely "whether the suits have abated or survive". Many writ petitions were also filed in the High Court challenging the Ordinance. **Writ Petition No.208 of 1993, Mohd. Aslam versus Union of India & Ors.**

was also filed under Article 32 in this Court. The Union of India had filed transfer petitions under Article 139A for transferring of writ petitions filed in Allahabad High Court. By an Order dated 24.09.1993 passed in **Union of India & Others versus Dr. M.Ismail Faruqui and others, (1994) 1 SCC 265**, this Court allowed the transfer application transferring five writ petitions to be heard alongwith the Presidential Reference and writ petitions filed under Article 32. The preliminary issue which was framed by the High Court in both the suits was stayed. It is useful to extract paragraph 4 and 7 of the order:-

"4. After the issuance of the Ordinance it appears that in the pending suits renumbered O.O.S. Nos. 3 and 4 of 1989 the plaintiffs applied for amendment of the plaints challenging the legality and validity of the Ordinance by which the suits abated. The Full Bench of the High Court heard the said applications and passed an order on March 15, 1993. By the said order the High Court framed the question 'whether the suit has abated or survives' and since the said issue necessarily touched upon the validity of the Ordinance, the Court ordered notice to the Attorney General and listed the case for hearing of the issue on April 26, 1993. Although this order was passed in Suit O.O.S. No. 4 of 1989, it was also to govern the amendment application in Suit O.O.S. No. 3 of 1989. It also appears that in the meantime as

many as five Writ Petition Nos. 552, 925, 1351, 1532 and 1809 of 1993 came to be filed in the High Court challenging the validity of the Ordinance, now the Act. Besides these proceedings in the High Court a Writ Petition No. 208 of 1993 also came to be filed in this Court under Article 32 of the Constitution challenging the legality and validity of the very same law.

7. In the result, we allow this application by ordering the withdrawal of the five Writ Petition Nos. 552, 925, 1351, 1532 and 1809 of 1993 to this Court to be heard along with the Presidential reference and Writ Petition No. 208 of 1993 pending in this Court. The hearing of the preliminary issue framed by the High Court 'whether the suit has abated or survives' in both the suits will stand stayed till further orders. In order to expedite the hearing we direct as under:"

75. From the above, it is clear that suits which were pending in the High Court were never transferred to be heard alongwith Presidential Reference and writ petition filed under Article 32. This Court had only stayed the hearing of preliminary issue framed by the High Court as to whether the suits have abated or survive. It is also relevant to notice that in Special Reference No. 1 of 1993, individual notices were issued to the parties to the proceeding which stood abated by virtue of Section 4(3) of the Ordinance but mere issuance of notice when the suits were not transferred by this Court to be heard

alongwith Presidential Reference is not sufficient to conclude that the judgment of **Ismail Faruqui** should be treated as part of judgment in suits. We, thus, also do not accept the submissions of Shri Parasaran that judgment of **Ismail Faruqui** is part of the judgment in the suit itself. We, thus, do not find any substance in the above submissions raised by Shri Parasaran.

Reliance on the judgment of Ismail Faruqui

76. Dr. Dhavan submits that **Ismail Faruqui's** judgment goes to the core of the issues in these appeals and it permeates throughout the impugned judgment in the suits. He submits that observations concerning comparative significance of the disputed site and the observation that a mosque is not an essential part of the practice of the religion of Islam, have permeated the impugned judgment as the Hindu parties have successfully claimed that the disputed site, which is allegedly the birthplace of Lord Ram is protected by Articles 25 and 26. Dr. Dhavan has referred to various observations of the HIGH Court in the impugned judgment to support his submission. He has also referred to various grounds

taken in the appeals filed against the judgment of the High Court.

77. Shri Parasaran and Shri Tushar Mehta refuting the above submission contend that even if the judgment of **Ismail Faruqui** has been referred to in the submission of the counsel for the parties before the High Court and has been noticed in the impugned judgment, the impugned judgment in no way is affected by the observations made in **Ismail Faruqui's** case.

78. It is relevant to notice some of the observations made by the High Court in the impugned judgment and certain grounds taken in some of the appeals, which are before us. Justice S.U.Khan referring to **Ismail Faruqui's** case in his judgment made following observations:-

"A mosque even if its construction remains as a mosque cannot be treated to be mosque if no prayers are offered in it and it is in the possession, occupation and use of non-Muslims as held by the Privy Council in Mosque known as Masjid Shahid Ganj Vs. S.G.P.C. Amritsar, AIR 1940 P.C. 116 approved in Dr. M. Ismail Farooqi Vs. Union of India, 1994 (6) S.C.C. 360. Accordingly, unless it is proved that prayers were being offered in the premises in dispute, or the Hindus had not exclusively possessed the constructed portion and inner court yard it cannot be held to be a mosque

or a continuing mosque upto 22nd/ 23rd December, 1949. The case set up and the argument of some of the Hindu parties that till 1855 no prayers (Namaz) were offered in the mosque is not at all acceptable. If a mosque is referred to as mosque in several gazetteers, books etc. and nothing else is said then it means that it is a mosque in use as such. A defunct mosque where prayers are not at all offered, whenever mentioned as mosque, is bound to be further qualified as defunct and not in use. If construction of mosque could not be obstructed, how offering of prayer in it could be obstructed. Moreover, there was absolutely no sense in dividing the premises in dispute by railing in 1856 or 1857 if Muslims were not offering Namaz in the constructed portion till then. In the riot of 1855 seventy Muslims were killed while taking shelter in the premises in dispute. After such a huge defeat Namaz could not be for the first time started thereat."

79. Justice Sudhir Agarwal in his judgment has also noticed **Ismail Faruqui's** case. Dr. Dhavan referred to the submissions made by Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad in Paras 3501 and 3502 of the impugned judgment:-

"**3501.** Sri Prasad argued that belief of Hindus that Lord Ram as incarnation of Vishnu having born at Ayodhya forms an integral part of Hindu religion which cannot be denied to be practised, observed and performed by them and refers to Commissioner of Police and others v. Acharya Jagadishwarananda Avadhuta and another, (2004) 12 SCC 770 (para 9) and Sri Adi Visheshwara of Kashi Vishwanath Temple, Varanasi (supra). In order to show

what constitutes public order under Article 25 of the Constitution, he also placed reliance on Dalbir Singh and others v. State of Punjab, AIR 1962 SC 1106 (para 8).

3502. Next he submits that applying the doctrine of Eminent Domain, the place in dispute, having special significance for Hindus, cannot be touched at all either by any particular person or even by State and the provisions of even acquisition would not apply to it though with respect to the alleged mosque, it has been already held and observed by the Apex Court that the disputed building could not be shown to be of any special significance to Muslims. He refers to Dr. M. Ismail Faruqui and others v. Union of India and others, (1994) 6 SCC 360 (para 65, 72, 75 and 96); Acharya Maharajshri Narendra Prasadji Anandprasadji Maharaj and others v. State of Gujarat and others, (1975) 1 SCC 11. The relief sought by the plaintiff (Suit-4) is barred by Section 34 Specific Reliefs Act, 1963 and reliance is placed on Executive Committee of Vaish Degree College, Shamli and others v. Lakshmi Narain and others, (1976) 2 SCC 58 (para 20 and 27); American Express Bank Ltd. v. Calcutta Steel Co. and others, (1993) 2 SCC 199 (para 22)."

80. Justice Sudhir Agarwal has noticed **Ismail Faruqui's** case in Para 2723 in following manner:-

"2723. In Ismail Farooqui (supra), Supreme Court has considered the plea of validity of acquisition of land under Land Acquisition Act that once a waqf of mosque is created, the property vests in almighty and it always remain a waqf hence such a property cannot be acquired. While negating this plea, the Apex Court said that a plea in regard to general religious purposes cannot

be said to be an integral part of religion which will deprive the worshippers of the right of worship at any other place and therefore, such a property can be acquired by the State. However, the position would be otherwise if the religious property would have been of special significance and cannot be one of several such kind of properties. It will be useful to reproduce the relevant observation in this regard:

"78. It appears from various decisions rendered by this Court, referred later, that subject to the protection under Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution, places of religious worship like mosques, churches, temples etc. can be acquired under the State's sovereign power of acquisition. Such acquisition per se does not violate either Article 25 or Article 26 of the Constitution. The decisions relating to taking over of the management have no bearing on the sovereign power of the State to acquire property."

"82. While offer of prayer or worship is a religious practice, its offering at every location where such prayers can be offered would not be an essential or integral part of such religious practice unless the place has a particular significance for that religion so as to form an essential or integral part thereof. Places of worship of any religion having particular significance for that religion, to make it an essential or integral part of the religion, stand on a different footing and have to be treated differently and more reverentially."

81. There are references of judgments of **Ismail Faruqui's** case in various other places in the judgment of Justice Sudhir Agarwal like Para 5 in the judgment

where it has been observed that area of the land in dispute, which is to be adjudicated by this Court (High Court) is now restricted to what has been referred to in **Ismail Faruqui's** case. Para 5 of the judgment is as follows:-

"5. In view of the decision of the Apex Court in Dr. M. Ismail Faruqui etc. v. Union of India and others, (1994) 6 SCC 360 : AIR 1995 SC 605, the area of land in dispute which is to be adjudicated by this Court is now restricted to what has been referred to in para 4 above, i.e. main roofed structure, the inner Courtyard and the outer Courtyard. In fact, the area under the roofed structure and Sahan, for the purpose of convenience shall be referred hereinafter as "inner Courtyard" and rest as the "outer Courtyard". Broadly, the measurement of the disputed area is about 130X80 sq. feet."

82. Dr. Dhavan, in his written submissions, has mentioned details of several other places, where Justice Sudhir Agarwal has referred to **Ismail Faruqui's** case in the impugned judgment.

83. Justice Dharam Veer Sharma, while giving a dissenting judgment has referred to submission of parties in **Ismail Faruqui's** case at Paras 3038 and 3039 of Volume III, following observations have been made

while considering the Issue No.19(d):-

"On behalf of defendants it is contended that the building in question was not a mosque under the Islamic Law. It is not disputed that the structure has already been demolished on 6.12.1992. According to Dr. M. Ismail Faruqui and others v. Union of India and others, (1994) 6 SCC 360, the Hon'ble Apex Court held at para 70 that the sacred character of the mosque can also be lost. According to the tenets of Islam, minarets are required to give Azan. There cannot be a public place of worship in mosque in which Provision of Azan is not available, hence the disputed structure cannot be deemed to be a mosque."

84. Further, Justice Dharam Veer Sharma while noticing submission of Shri H.S. Jain has observed as follows:-

"Shri H.S. Jain, advocate relied upon para 78 of **Ismail Faruqui's** judgment to argue that since birth place of Lord Ram was considered as a place of worship which was integral part of religious practice of Hindu from times immemorial. The deity stood on a different footing and had to be treated reverentially."

85. Justice Sharma has observed that, in para 78 of the **Ismail Faruqui's** judgment, the Apex Court held that the place of birth has a particular significance for Hindus and should be treated on a different footing. At page 3455, following observations have been made by Justice Sharma while referring to **Ismail Faruqui's** case:-

"Hon'ble Apex Court upheld the validity of provisions of Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya, 1993 in Dr. Ismail Faruqui case (supra) and held that the Central Government can acquire any place of worship. At para-78 Apex Court held that the place of birth has a particular significance for Hindus and it should be treated on different footing, which reads as under:

"78. While offer of prayer or worship is a religious practice, its offering at every location where such prayers can be offered would not be an essential or integral part of such religious practice unless the place has a particular significance for that religion so as to form an essential or integral part thereof. Places of worship of any religion having particular significance for that religion, to make it an essential or integral part of the religion, stand on a different footing and have to be treated differently and more reverentially."

On behalf of Hindus it is urged that the plaintiffs are not entitled for the relief claimed and as such the relief is barred by the provisions of Section 42 of the Specific Relief Act, 1877 which is at par with Section 34 of the Specific Relief Act, 1963 on the ground that they have superior fundamental rights. Contentions of Hindus are as under:

The Hindus have superior fundamental right than the Muslims under articles 25 & 26 of the Constitution of India for the reasons that performing customary rituals and offering services worship to the lord of universe to acquire merit and to get salvation as such it is integral part of Hindu Dharma & religion in view whereof it is humbly submitted that the instant suit is liable to be dismissed with exemplary cost:"

86. Dr. Dhavan further submits that Justice Sharma has relied on submissions advanced by Shri P.N. Mishra, who had relied on paragraphs 77, 78, 80 and 82 of **Ismail Faruqui's** case. Dr. Dhavan has also referred to submission of Shri Ravi Shankar Prasad, which was noticed by Justice Sharma that the right of Hindus to worship at the Rama Janam Bhumi, continuing since times immemorial was an integral part of their religious right and faith and was also sanctified by judicial orders since 1949. This right has concretised and has to be protected.

87. Although Dr. Dhavan has referred to various passages from impugned judgment, where reference has been made of **Ismail Faruqui's** case but main paragraphs where findings have been returned in reference to **Ismail Faruqui's** case are Paragraphs 4049 to 4054 (Vol. II) of judgment of Justice Sudhir Agarwal, as has been pointed out by Shri Tushar Mehta, learned Additional Solicitor General.

88. Paragraphs 4049 and 4050 are to the following effect:-

"4049. Some of the learned counsel for the

parties sought to rely on the Constitution Bench decision in Dr. M. Ismail Faruqui (supra) by reading certain passages in a manner as if the Apex Court has expressed its opinion on certain aspects which are contentious issues before this Court in the suits pending before us and said that the said observations are binding on this Court and, therefore, those aspects cannot be looked into.

4050. Sri Iyer, Senior Advocate sought to read the aforesaid judgement where the contents of the White Paper issued by the Central Government quoted to suggest that these are the findings of the Government of India having taken note by the Apex Court and, therefore, should be treated to be concluded. It is suggested that the issues, if any, in those matters should be deemed to be concluded by the judgement of the Apex Court."

89. The above submission was noted and expressly rejected by the High Court in Paragraph 4051, which is to the following effect:-

"4051. We, however, find no force in the submission. The Constitution Bench considered the validity of Ayodhya Act, 1993 whereby certain land at Ayodhya including the land which was subject matter in these suits sought to be acquired by the Government of India. Further, the Apex Court was considering the special reference made by the President of India on 7th January, 1993 under Article 143 of the Constitution seeking opinion of the Apex Court on the following question: "Whether a Hindu temple or any Hindu religious structure existing prior to the construction of Ram Janma Bhumi-Babari

Masjid (including the premises of the inner and outer courtyard of said structure) in the area on which the structure stood."

90. The High Court has clearly held that mentioning of certain facts in **Ismail Faruqui's** case does not mean that those facts stood adjudicated by this Court for the reason that those facts were neither in issue before the Supreme Court nor had been adjudicated. The relevant discussion in the above context is contained in Paragraph 4053, which is to the following effect:-

"4053. It is in this context that certain facts place on record are mentioned therein but it cannot be said that those facts stood adjudicated by the Apex Court for the reason that those facts neither were in issue before the Court nor actually have been adjudicated. The only one question which has specifically been considered and decided that was necessary in the light of challenge thrown to the power of acquisition of land over which a mosque existing. It appears that pro-mosque parties raised a contention that a mosque cannot be acquired because of special status in Mohammedan Law irrespective of its significance to practice of the religion of Islam. This argument in the context of acquisition of land was considered from para 68 (AIR) and onwards in the judgement. The Court has held that the right to worship of Muslims in a mosque and Hindus in a temple was recognised only as a civil right in British India. Relying on the Full Bench decision of Lahore High Court in Mosque Known as Masjid Shahid Ganj Vs. Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar, AIR 1938

Lahore 369 where it was held that a mosque if adversely possessed by non muslims it will lose its sacred character as mosque, the Apex Court held that, "the view that once a consecrated mosque, it remains always a place of worship as a mosque was not the Mahomedan Law of India as approved by Indian Courts." The Lahore High Court also held that, "a mosque in India was an immovable property and the right of worship at a particular place is lost when the right to property on which it stands is lost by adverse possession." Both these views were approved by the Privy Council and the Apex Court followed the said view. Besides, independently also the Court took the view that the sovereign power of the State empowers it to acquire property. It is a right inherent in every sovereign to take an appropriate private property belonging to individual citizens for public use. This right is described as eminent domain in American Law and is like the power of taxation of offering of political necessity and is supposed to be based upon an implied reservation by the Government that private property acquired by its citizens under its protection may be taken or its use can be controlled for public benefit irrespective of the wishes of the owner. The Court also considered the right of worship whether a fundamental right enshrined under Article 25 or 26 of the Constitution and observed, "while offer of prayer or worship is a religious practice, its offering at every location where such prayers can be offered would not be an essential or integral part of such religious practice unless the place has a particular significance for that religion so as to form an essential or integral part thereof. Places of worship of any religion having particular significance for that religion, to make it an essential or integral part of the religion, stand on a different footing and have to be treated differently

and more reverentially". Ultimately the law has been laid down by the Constitution Bench by majority that under the Mohammedan Law applicable in India title to a mosque can be lost by adverse possession. If that is the position in law, there can be no reason to hold that a mosque as a unique or special status, higher than that of the places of worship of other religions in secular India to make it immune from acquisition by exercise of the sovereign or prerogative power of the State. A mosque is not an essential part of the practice of religion of Islam and namaz (prayer) by Muslims can be offered anywhere even in open. The Court also held that unless the right to worship at a particular place is itself an integral part of that right, i.e., the place is of a particular significance, its alienability cannot be doubted. The Apex Court having answered the various questions on the validity of the Act 1993 decline to answer the reference and returned the same as such as it is. The suits having been revived due to striking down of Section 4(3) of the Act, this Court trying the original suits has to decide the entire matter on merits unless it can be shown that a particular issue which is engaging attention of this Court in trial of the original suit has already been raised, argued and decided by the Apex Court. The learned counsels for the parties have not been able to show any such finding in respect to the matters which are involved in various issues before this Court and, therefore, we are not in agreement with the counsels for the parties as argued otherwise."

(underlined by us)

91. The High Court has clearly held that an issue can be considered to be decided by a superior Court only when

it was raised, argued and decided. Following was held in Paragraph 4054:-

"4054. The mere fact that some facts have been noticed by the Government of India in White Paper and those facts have simply been noticed by the Apex Court while referring to the facts mentioned in the White Paper, it cannot be said that those facts can be construed as if they have been accepted by the Apex Court to be correct and stand adjudicated. The law of precedence is well known. The authority of the superior Court laying down a law is binding on the Courts below provided a matter has been decided by the Court. An issue can be considered to be decided by a superior Court when it was raised, argued and decided and only then it is a binding precedent for the other courts."

92. The above view expressed by majority judgment in appeal, thus, makes it clear that the High Court has held that judgment of **Ismail Faruqui's** case does not decide any of the issues which are subject matter of the suit. Whatever observations have been made in the judgment of **Ismail Faruqui** are not to govern the decision in suits and the suits were to be decided on the basis of the evidence on record. The questionable observations made in **Ismail Faruqui's case** have to be treated as only observations and not for the purpose of deciding suits and these appeals, they are not to be

treated as governing factor or relevant. The said observations are to be understood solely as observation made in context of land acquisition and nothing more.

93. It is due to above finding of the High Court that in several appeals filed against impugned judgment by the plaintiff of Suit Nos.1 and 5 grounds have been taken which grounds have been referred to and relied by Dr. Rajiv Dhavan in his submission as noted above. The grounds taken in the appeal, to which exception is being taken by Dr. Dhavan are:

(i) Partition of the site would effectively extinguish the right of Hindus to worship at the site protected by Article 25 being a site which is integral and essential part of Hindu religion;

(ii) The purported Muslim structure on the area was never pleaded to be an essential or integral part of the Islamic religion.

94. The above grounds are yet to be looked into and considered by this Court in these appeals.

95. We have already dealt with and noticed the extent and nature of the observations made by this Court in

Paragraphs 78 and 82 of **Ismail Faruqui's** case. The expression "particular significance" and "comparative significance" as occurring in the judgment in **Ismail Faruqui's** case has also been noted and explained by us in foregoing paragraphs. The observations of this Court in **Ismail Faruqui's** case has to be understood as above. The question as to whether in the impugned judgment, reliance on **Ismail Faruqui's** case affects the ultimate decision of the High Court and needs any clarification or correction is a task, which we have to undertake with the assistance of learned counsel for the parties in the present appeals. We, thus, conclude that reliance on the judgment of **Ismail Faruqui** by the High Court in the impugned judgment and reliance by learned counsel for the appellants and taking grounds in these appeals on the strength of judgment of **Ismail Faruqui's** case are all questions, on the merits of the appeals, which need to be addressed in these appeals. Thus, the above submission does not help the appellant in contending that judgment of **Ismail Faruqui's** case needs reconsideration.

Additional grounds for reference to larger Bench

96. Shri Raju Ramachandran, learned senior counsel appearing for some of the parties has pressed for the reference to larger Bench for reconsideration of **Ismail Faruqui's** case on some additional grounds in addition to what has been canvassed by Dr. Rajeev Dhavan. Shri Raju Ramachandran submits that looking to the importance of the case the matter should be referred to the Constitution Bench for reconsideration of **Ismail Faruqui's** judgment. He submits that there are various instances, where this court had made reference to larger Bench looking to the importance of the matter. He submits that High Court vide its order dated 10.07.1989 had withdrawn the suits to be tried by the High Court by Full Bench looking to the importance of the case. The case being very important and appeals having been filed by all the sides, the case is of such magnitude that it is appropriate that matter may be referred to a Bench of a larger strength to consider the case. Shri Ramachandran has referred to and relied on several judgments of this Court, which shall be noted by us hereinafter.

97. The submission of Shri Raju Ramachandran has been

refuted by Shri K. Parasaran, learned senior counsel and Shri C.S. Vaidyanathan. They submit that if there are constitutional principles involved, the matter can be referred to a larger bench, but present is not a case where any principle of constitutional interpretation is involved, hence reference of the case to a larger bench needs to be refused. Shri Parasaran submits that present appeals arise out of a suit where for deciding the issues in a suit, the evidence is to be appreciated, which need not be done by five judges. He submits that five judges are to appreciate the evidence only in case of Presidential Election.

98. Before we enter into submission of learned counsel for the parties, the constitutional provision regarding reference of a case for hearing by the Constitution Bench consisting of five judges need to be looked into. Article 145(3) of the Constitution provides that minimum number of judges, who are to sit for purpose of deciding any case involving a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution or for the purpose of hearing any reference under article 143 shall be five. The proviso to Article 145(3) provides:-

“Provided that, where the Court hearing an appeal under any of the provisions of this Chapter other than Article 132 consists of less than five Judges and in the course of the hearing of the appeal the Court is satisfied that the appeal involves a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of this Constitution the determination of which is necessary for the disposal of the appeal, such Court shall refer the question for opinion to a Court constituted as required by this clause for the purpose of deciding any case involving such a question and shall on receipt of the opinion dispose of the appeal in conformity with such opinion”

99. As per proviso, the reference to a bench of five judges can be made by judges sitting in lesser strength than five judges while hearing an appeal, on fulfilment of following two conditions:-

- (i) The Court is satisfied that the appeal involves a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of this Constitution;
- (ii) The determination of which is necessary for the disposal of the appeal.

100. The proviso to Article 145(3) as noted above, thus, clearly indicate that on fulfilment of both the conditions as noticed above, a bench of smaller strength

than five judges can make a reference of a case to be heard by a Bench strength of five judges. This Court in **Abdul Rahim Ismail C. Rahimtoola Vs. State of Bombay, AIR 1959 SC 1315** had occasion to consider Article 145(3). In the above case, question pertaining to Article 19(1)(d), (e) and sub-section (5) of Article 19 came for consideration. A five Judge Bench in **Ebrahim Vazir Mavat Vs. State of Bombay and others, AIR 1954 SC 229** had already held that requirement that an Indian citizen to produce a passport before entering into India is a proper restriction upon entering India. Before two judge bench in **Abdul Rahim Ismail (supra)**, challenge was made to Rule 3 of Passport Rules, 1950, which provided that no person, proceeding from any place outside India, shall enter, or attempt to enter, India by water, land or air unless he is in possession of a valid passport. Contention raised was that Section 3 of the Act and Rule 3 of the Rules in so far as it purported to relate to an Indian citizen is ultra vires the Constitution, as they offended against the provisions of Articles 19(1)(d) and (e). This Court had held that issue having already been decided by a five judges Bench no substantial question

of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution arises. In Para 6, following was held:-

"6....It was, however, urged that as a constitutional question has been raised this matter cannot be decided by Judges less than five in number. Therefore, the case should be referred to what is described as the Constitution Bench. Article 145(3) of the Constitution states that the minimum number of Judges who are to sit for the purpose of deciding any case involving a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution or for the purpose of hearing any reference under Article 143 shall be five. It is clear that no substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution arises in the present case as the very question raised has been decided by a Bench of this Court consisting of five Judges. As the question raised before us has been already decided by this Court it cannot be said that any substantial question of law arises regarding the interpretation of the Constitution."

101. In **Bhagwan Swarup Lal Bishan Lal Vs. State of Maharashtra, AIR 1965 SC 682**, this Court held that a substantial question of interpretation of a provision of the Constitution cannot arise when the law on the subject has been finally and effectively decided by this Court. In Para 11, following has been laid down:-

"11.Learned counsel suggests that the question raised involves the interpretation of a provision of the Constitution and

therefore the appeal of this accused will have to be referred to a Bench consisting of not less than 5 Judges. Under Article 145(3) of the Constitution only a case involving a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution shall be heard by a bench comprising not less than 5 Judges. This Court held in State of Jammu and Kashmir v. Thakur Ganga Singh, AIR 1960 SC 356 that a substantial question of interpretation of a provision of the Constitution cannot arise when the law on the subject has been finally and effectively decided by this Court.....

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As the question raised has already been decided by this Court, what remains is only the application of the principle laid down to the facts of the present case. We cannot, therefore, hold that the question raised involves a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution within the meaning Article 145(3) of the Constitution."

102. A three Judge Bench in **People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) and Another Vs. Union of India and Another, (2003) 4 SCC 399** had also occasion to consider Article 145(3). Submission was made that a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution has arisen, hence, the matter may be referred to a Bench consisting of Five Judges. Three Judge Bench notices that question raised having already

been decided in **Union of India Vs. Association for Democratic Reforms and Another, (2002) 5 SCC 294 – (A Three Judge Bench Judgment)**, no other substantial question of law regarding interpretation of Constitution survives, following was laid in Paragraph Nos. 28, 32 and 78:-

"28. Mr Arun Jaitley, learned Senior Counsel and Mr Kirit N. Raval, learned Solicitor-General submitted that the question involved in these petitions is a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution and, therefore, the matter may be referred to a Bench consisting of five Judges.

32. From the judgment rendered by this Court in *Assn. for Democratic Reforms*¹ it is apparent that no such contention was raised by the learned Solicitor-General, who appeared in appeal filed on behalf of the Union of India that question involved in that matter was required to be decided by a five-Judge Bench, as provided under Article 145(3) of the Constitution. The question raised before us has been finally decided and no other substantial question of law regarding the interpretation of the Constitution survives. Hence, the matter is not required to be referred to a five-Judge Bench.

78. What emerges from the above discussion can be summarised thus:-

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(C) The judgment rendered by this

Court in *Assn. for Democratic Reforms* has attained finality, therefore, there is no question of interpreting constitutional provision which calls for reference under Article 145(3)."

103. On question of reference to a larger bench, one more Constitution Bench judgment of this Court needs to be noticed, i.e. **Central Board of Dawoodi Bohra Community and Another Vs. State of Maharashtra and Another, (2005) 2 SCC 673.** Constitution Bench of this Court while noticing provisions of Supreme Court Rules, 1966 and Articles 141 and 145(2) noticed in Paragraph 12 of the judgment that the law laid down by this Court in a decision delivered by a Bench of larger strength is binding on any subsequent Bench of lesser or coequal strength. A bench of lesser quorum cannot disagree or dissent from the view of the law laid down by a Bench of larger quorum. In case of doubt, the Bench of lesser quorum can do is to invite the attention of the Chief Justice and request for the matter being placed for hearing before a Bench of larger quorum than the Bench whose decision has come for consideration. Two exceptions were also noticed to the above noted principles in Para 12(3), which is to the following

effect:-

"(3) The above rules are subject to two exceptions: (i) The abovesaid rules do not bind the discretion of the Chief Justice in whom vests the power of framing the roster and who can direct any particular matter to be placed for hearing before any particular Bench of any strength; and (ii) in spite of the rules laid down hereinabove, if the matter has already come up for hearing before a Bench of larger quorum and that Bench itself feels that the view of the law taken by a Bench of lesser quorum, which view is in doubt, needs correction or reconsideration then by way of exception (and not as a rule) and for reasons given by it, it may proceed to hear the case and examine the correctness of the previous decision in question dispensing with the need of a specific reference or the order of Chief Justice constituting the Bench and such listing. Such was the situation in Raghbir Singh and Ors. and Hansoli Devi and Ors. (supra). "

104. In the present case, since the submission of Shri Raju Ramachandran and Dr. Dhavan is for a reference to a Constitution Bench to reconsider **Ismail Faruqui's** case, the question needs to be considered in view of the law laid down by this Court in reference to Article 145(3) as noticed above. Both Shri Raju Ramachandran and Dr. Dhavan have placed heavy reliance on order passed by this Court on 26.03.2018 in W.P. (C) No. 222 of 2018 – **Sameena Begum Vs. Union of India & Ors.** Learned counsel

submit that reference to the Constitution Bench has been made by a three Judge Bench of this Court looking to the importance of the issue. A perusal of the order dated 26.03.2018 indicates that challenge in those writ petitions pertains to the prevalent practice of polygamy including Nikah Halala; Nikah Mutah; and Nikah Misyar on the ground that they are unconstitutional. Referring to a five Judges Constitution Bench judgment of this Court in the case of **Shayara Bano etc. Vs. Union of India & Ors. etc., (2017) 9 SCC 1**, where this Court declared that practice of talaq-e-biddat or triple talaq is not protected by Article 25 and it is not an essential religious practice, it was contended that the five Judges Bench judgment in **Shayara Bano (supra)** has not dealt with the aspect of Nikah Halala; Nikah Mutah; and Nikah Misyar. Thus, the question as to those religious practices are protected by Article 25 was very much involved in the Writ Petition before three Judge Bench. The three Judge Bench also came to the conclusion that the above noted concepts have not been decided by the Constitution Bench, hence the reference was made to the Constitution Bench, looking to the importance of the

issue. The reference made by order dated 26.03.2018 was in the facts as noted above and does not support the submissions made by Shri Raju Ramachandran in the present case.

105. Now, we come to those cases, which have been relied by Shri Raju Ramachandran in support of his submission.

106. The Judgment of this Court in **Hyderabad Industries Ltd. And Another Vs. Union of India And Others, (1995) 5 SCC 338** was a case where a three Judge Bench had doubted the correctness of an earlier judgment, i.e., **Khandelwal Metal and Engineering Works and Another Vs. Union of India and Others, (1985) 3 SCC 620**. Similarly, **S.S. Rathore Vs. State of M.P., 1988 (Supp.) SCC 522** was also a case where correctness of a five Judges decision in **Sita Ram Goel Vs. Municipal Board, Kanpur and Others, AIR 1958 SC 1036** was doubted. Further, judgments of this Court due to difference of opinion in two judgments or conflict of opinion in judgments insisted reference, which are cases of this court in **Ashwani Kumar and Others Vs. State of Bihar and Others, (1996) 7 SCC 577** and **Balalaria Construction (P) Ltd. Vs. Hanuman Seva Trust and Others, (2006) 5 SCC 662**, hence these cases

also does not support the submission. The judgment of this Court in **Acchan Rizvi (I) Vs. State of U.P. and Others, (1994) 6 SCC 751** and **Acchan Rizvi (II) Vs. State of U.P. and Others, (1994) 6 SCC 752** are the cases where interlocutory applications in contempt petitions were filed and decided. No principle regarding reference was noticed, the said judgments have no relevance with regard to issue of reference of larger Bench. Similarly, judgment of this Court in **Mohd. Aslam alias Bhure Vs. Union of India and Others, (2003) 2 SCC 576** was a case where an interim order was passed by this Court with regard to acquisition of 67.703 acres of land as was noticed in **Ismail Faruqui's** case. This judgment has no relevance with regard to reference to larger Bench. Judgment of this Court in **Mohd. Aslam alias Bhure Vs. Union of India and Others, (2003) 4 SCC 1**, has been relied, which was a case decided by a five Judges Bench. A public interest writ petition under Article 32 was filed with regard to manner in which the adjacent land, i.e., adjacent land to the disputed structure should be preserved till the final decision in the suit pending in the High Court, which was revived consequent

to judgment in **Ismail Faruqui's** case. The five Judges Bench noticed various observations and directions passed in **Ismail Faruqui's** case and ultimately had directed that interim order passed by this Court on 13.03.2002 as modified on 14.03.2002 should be operative until disposal of the suits in the High Court of Allahabad not only to maintain communal harmony but also to fulfil other objectives of the Act. The Writ Petition was disposed of accordingly. No principle regarding reference to larger Bench was laid down in the said case, which may support the submission of learned counsel.

107. A two Judge Bench judgment in **Vinod Kumar Shantilal Gosalia Vs. Gangadhar and Others, 1980 (Supp.) SCC 340** has also been relied, in which following order was passed:-

"After having heard counsel for the parties we reserved judgment. On going through the judgment of the Judicial Commissioner and the documents and after a careful consideration of the arguments of the parties, we find that these appeals involve a substantial question of law of great importance which is likely to govern a number of cases arising out of mining leases in the present territory of Goa, Daman & Diu. We, therefore, direct that this case be placed before a larger Bench. Let these appeals be placed before the

Hon'ble the Chief Justice for orders."

108. The above order was passed by two Judge Bench, which had directed the appeal to be placed before Chief Justice for hearing the matter by a larger Bench due to the fact that appeal involves a substantial question of law of great importance. The said matter cannot be read as an order directing the matter to be placed before a Constitution Bench nor any proposition regarding reference to Constitution Bench is decipherable from the above order, which may help the learned counsel. Another judgment, which was relied by Shri Ramachandran is an order passed by Justice E.S. Venkatramiah - Vacation Judge in **Ram Jethmalani Vs. Union of India, (1984) 3 SCC 696**. The above order was passed in a Writ Petition (Criminal). Issue in the above case involves release of Sikh leaders detained after Punjab action. One of the issues noticed in the order was that it relates to personal liberty of a sizeable section of the community. Court was of the view that question involved are too large and complex for the shoulders of a Single Judge. The Court opined that these and other cases of

like nature should be heard by a seven Judges Bench of this Court. The above order was passed in the peculiar circumstances as noticed in the judgment and no principle of law has been laid down in context of reference of a case to a Constitution Bench. The above order was, thus, in peculiar facts of the case.

109. In **Krishan Kumar Vs. Union of India and Others, (1989) 2 SCC 504**, the Court noticed that on the issue, there are no decided cases of this Court, hence the Court observed that in the above view, the matter should be referred to a larger Bench. That again was a judgment of two Judge Bench and there was no direction that reference should be made to a larger Bench contemplated in the order, which might have been a Bench of three Hon'ble Judges deciding the issue. In **Union of India Vs. M. Gopalakrishnaiah, 1995 Supp. (4) SCC 81**, an earlier Constitution Bench judgment in **Delhi Transport Corporation Vs. D.T.C. Mazdoor Congress and Others, 1991 Supp (1) SCC 600** was noticed and the question as to whether the reasoning of the decision in the **Delhi Transport Corporation (supra)** and **Central Inland Water Transport Corporation Limited and Another Vs. Brojo Nath**

Ganguly and Another, (1986) 3 SCC 156, which applied to permanent employees can be extended to the Director on their fixed tenure in the Scheme should be considered. Thus, whether the Constitution Bench Judgment applied in aforesaid case was the question referred, which is again an order passed in the peculiar facts of the case and does not contain any ratio pertaining to reference to larger Bench.

110. Similarly, in **Syndicate Bank Vs. Prabha D. Naik and Another, (2002) 10 SCC 686**, a two Judge Bench made a reference to larger Bench to consider the interpretation of Article 535 of the Portuguese Civil Code and applicability of the Limitation Act. The reference was not to a Constitution Bench and was only to a larger Bench, which might be to a three Judge Bench. Similarly, in **Charanjeet Singh Vs. Raveendra Kaur, (2008) 17 SCC 650** looking to the importance of the question, a two Judge Bench had made reference to a larger Bench. Two Judge Bench reference was not to a Constitution Bench, hence, does not support the submission. To the similar effect is the judgment of this Court in **Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Vs. Bharat Sanchar Nigam**

Limited (2014) 3 SCC 304, where two Judge Bench has made a reference to a larger Bench. In **Securities and Exchange Board of India Vs. Sahara India Real Estate Corporation Limited and Others, (2014) 8 SCC 751**, an earlier order passed by three Judge Bench was sought to be enforced, hence reference was made to a Three Judge Bench, which again was not a case for reference to a Constitution Bench of five Judges. Judgment of this Court in **Rajeev Dhavan Vs. Gulshan Kumar Mahajan and Others, (2014) 12 SCC 618** was a case pertaining to a contempt petition, which is not relevant for the present controversy. Last judgment relied by Shri Ramachandran is **Vivek Narayan Sharma Vs. Union of India, (2017) 1 SCC 388**. The three Judge Bench was considering the issue of notification dated 08.11.2016 demonetizing currency notes of Rs. 500/- and Rs. 1000/-. Various aspects of demonetization came for consideration in the writ petition filed under Article 32 and the transfer petitions, where this Court noticed following in Paragraph 3:-

"3. Keeping in view the general public importance and the far-reaching implications which the answers to the questions may have, we consider it proper to direct that the

matters be placed before the larger Bench of five Judges for an authoritative pronouncement. The Registry shall accordingly place the papers before the Hon'ble the Chief Justice for constituting an appropriate Bench."

111. In the above background, the three Judge Bench has directed the matter to be placed before larger bench of five judges.

112. Present is a case where appeals have been filed against judgment dated 30.09.2010 of Allahabad High Court by which Four Original Suits, which were transferred by the High Court to itself have been decided. Four Civil Suits were filed claiming title to the disputed structure. Parties lead elaborate evidences running in several thousands pages. The Court, after marshalling the evidences before it has decided the Civil Suits giving rise to these appeals. The issues, which have arisen in these appeals are no doubt important issues, which have to be heard and decided in these appeals. Normally appeals arising out of suits are placed before a Bench of Two Judges but looking to the importance of the matter, the present appeals have already been placed before three Judge Bench. For the

aforesaid reasons, we do not agree with the submission of Shri Raju Ramachandran that these appeals be referred to Constitution Bench of Five Judges to reconsider the Constitution Bench judgment in **Ismail Faruqui's** case.

113. Before we close we remind us as well as members of both the major communities of this country, Hindus and Muslims, the thoughtful message given by Justice S.U. Khan in his judgment as well as the words of Justice J.S. Verma, speaking for majority in **Ismail Faruqui's** case. Justice S.U. Khan made following appeal:

'Muslims must also ponder that at present the entire world wants to know the exact teaching of Islam in respect of relationship of Muslims with others. Hostility-peace-friendship-tolerance-opportunity to impress others with the Message-opportunity to strike wherever and whenever possible-or what? In this regard Muslims in India enjoy a unique position. They have been rulers here, they have been ruled and now they are sharers in power (of course junior partners). They are not in majority but they are also not negligible minority (Maximum member of Muslims are in huge majority which makes them indifferent to the problem in question or in negligible minority which makes them redundant. Indian Muslims have also inherited huge legacy of religious learning and knowledge. They are therefore in the best position to tell the world the correct position. Let them start with their role in the resolution of the conflict at hand."

114. Justice J.S. Verma in paragraph 156 of the judgment expressed great hope into Hinduism which is a tolerant faith. In paragraph 156 it was observed:

"156. Before we pass final orders, some observations of a general nature appear to be in order. Hinduism is a tolerant faith. It is that tolerance that has enabled Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism to find shelter and support upon this land. We have no doubt that the moderate Hindu has little taste for the tearing down of the place of worship of another to replace it with a temple. It is our fervent hope that that moderate opinion shall find general expression and that communal brotherhood shall bring to the dispute at Ayodhya an amicable solution long before the courts resolve it."

115. We are also reminded of rich culture and heritage of this ancient country which has always been a matter of great learning and inspiration for the whole world.

116. The great King Asoka in 245 B.C. (Before Christ), had given several messages to the world which are engraved in rock edicts which shows reverence towards faith of others. The Twelfth Rock Edict of the great King Asoka stated:

"The King, beloved of the Gods, honours every form of religious faith, but considers no gift or honour so much as the increase of the substance of religion; whereof this is

the root, to reverence one's own faith and never to revile that of others. Whoever acts differently injures his own religion while he wrong's another's.' 'The texts of all forms of religion shall be followed under my protection.'"

117. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, most Learned and respected former President of India, in his celebrated book "**The Hindu View of Life**" while dealing with the subject of "conflict of religion" has expressed great hope with Hindu view of life. Dr. Radhakrishnan in prophetic words states:

"That the Hindu solution of the problem of the conflict of religions is likely to be accepted in the future seems to me to be fairly certain. The spirit of democracy with its immense faith in the freedom to choose one's ends and direct one's course in the effort to realize them makes for it. Nothing is good which is not self-chosen; no determination is valuable which is not self-determination. The different religions are slowly learning to hold out hands of friendship to each other in every part of the world. The parliaments of religions and conferences and congresses of liberal thinkers of all creeds promote mutual understanding and harmony. The study of comparative religion is developing a fairer attitude to other religions. It is impressing onus the fundamental unity of all religions by and the need of the hour determine the emphasis in each religion. We are learning to think clearly about the inter-relations of religions. We tend to look upon different religions not as incompatibles but as

complementaries, and so indispensable to each other for the realization of the common end. Closer contact with other religions has dispelled the belief that only this or that religion has produced men of courage and patience, self-denying love and creative energy. Every great religion has cured its followers of the swell of passion, the thrust of desire and the blindness of temper. The crudest religion seems to have its place in the cosmic scheme, for gorgeous flowers justify the muddy roots from which they spring."

118. We are confident that observations made by Justice S.U. Khan of Allahabad High Court as quoted above as well as observations of Justice J.S. Verma made in paragraph 156 of the judgment are observations which shall guide both the communities in their thought, deed and action.

119. To conclude, we again make it clear that questionable observations made in **Ismail Faruqui's case** as noted above were made in context of land acquisition. Those observations were neither relevant for deciding the suits nor relevant for deciding these appeals.

120. In view of our foregoing discussions, we are of the considered opinion that no case has been made out to refer the Constitution Bench judgment of this Court in

Ismail Faruqui case (supra) for reconsideration.

121. We record our appreciation to the valuable assistance rendered by the learned counsel for both the parties, especially Shri Ejaz Maqbool and P.V. Yogeswaran who have rendered great assistance to the Court in compiling various volumes in orderly manner which had been of great help to the Court, both, in hearing and deciding the issue.

122. The appeals which are awaiting consideration by this Court for quite a long period, be now listed in week commencing 29th October, 2018 for hearing.

.....CJI.
(DIPAK MISRA)

.....J.
(ASHOK BHUSHAN)

**NEW DELHI,
SEPTEMBER 27, 2018.**