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Saudi royals destroying home of Muhammad

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Something is rotten in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. But let me come back to that later.

In December 1992 a mob of 150,000 Hindu nationalists attacked a 15th-century mosque in the Indian city of Ayodhya. Within hours, the mosque was reduced to rubble and in the weeks to follow, thousands of Indians died in Hindu-Muslim riots.

The Muslim world reacted in outrage. Among the countries that expressed anger at the destruction of the centuries-old Indian mosque by Hindu extremists was Saudi Arabia. Here in Canada, imams gave fiery sermons and urged congregations to protest.

Although more than a dozen years have passed since the destruction of the mosque, there is still bitterness in the air. Muslims worldwide feel a sense of betrayal and impotence at not being able to control their own destiny and protect their historical religious sites.

However, a Muslim site far more significant than the Babri mosque is facing destruction, but there is barely a murmur in protest. The site is none other than the home of Prophet Muhammad in the city of Mecca.

The demolition of Muhammad's 1,400-year-old home is not going to take place at the hands of non-Muslims or some occupying western army, but by the very people who have taken the title as protectors of Islam's two holiest mosques in Medina and Mecca: the Saudi royal family.

What makes this demolition worse is the fact that the home of the Prophet is to make way for a parking lot, two 50-storey hotel towers and seven 35-storey apartment blocks; a project known as the Jabal Omar Scheme, all within a stone's throw of the Grand Mosque.

Yet despite this outrage, not a single Muslim country, no ayatollah, no mufti, no king, not even a Muslim Canadian imam has dared utter a word in protest.

Such is the power of Saudi influence on the Muslim narrative.

The question is this: Why is it that when the Babri mosque was demolished, hundreds of thousands of Muslims worldwide took to the streets to protest, but when Saudi authorities plan to demolish the home of our beloved Prophet, not a whisper is heard?

Is it because Muslims have become so overwhelmed by the power of the Saudi riyal currency that we have lost all courage and self-respect? Or is it because we feel a need to cover up Muslim-on-Muslim violence; Muslim-on-Muslim terror; Muslim-on-Muslim oppression?

However, in this climate conducive to cowardice, there still are a few giants that stand tall. Dr. Sami Angawi is one of them.

An eminent Saudi architect, he is a brave man in a country where courage is scarce. Today, he leads a one-man campaign to save the home of Muhammad.

He told the London newspaper, *The Independent*, "The house where the Prophet received the word of God is gone and nobody cares ... this is the end of history in Mecca and Medina and the end of their future."

The cultural massacre of Islamic heritage sites is not a new phenomenon. It is said that in the last two decades, 95 per cent of Mecca's 1,000-year-old buildings have been demolished. In the early 1920s, the Saudis bulldozed and levelled a graveyard in Medina that housed the graves of the family and companions of Muhammad.

Today, the religious zealots in Saudi Arabia are not alone. Commercial developers have joined hands with them and are making hundreds of millions in profits as they build ugly, but lucrative highrises that are shadowing the Grand Mosque know as the Kaaba.

The Muslim Canadian Congress has strongly condemned this outrage and called it a cultural massacre of Muslim heritage for the sake of profit. In a letter to the Saudi ambassador in Ottawa, Niaz Salimi, president of the MCC, has demanded an immediate stop to these demolitions and the placing of a moratorium on all future destruction of Muslim heritage sites.

She writes, "The sacred places of Islam, regardless of where they are located, belong to the Muslim community worldwide. The countries where they are located are simply trustees and have no right to destroy them."

Today Saudi petrodollars have the ability to silence even its most vocal critics, but when all is said and done, history will render a harsh judgment on those who try to wipe out its footprints and steal the heritage of all humanity.

In the words of Lady Macbeth,

Here's the smell of blood still:

All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.

Oh! oh! oh!

Tarek Fatah is a founding member of the Muslim Canadian Congress and host of the weekly TV show, The Muslim Chronicle.

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