


Public Sentiment on Ayodhya Verdict by the Supreme Court of India: A Temporal Analysis on Twitter Data

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become one of the most important sources in understanding the opinions of people regarding important and trending topics. One such topic was the Supreme Court's verdict on the almost seven-decade-old Ayodhya land dispute case. On 9th November 2019, the apex court ordered that the disputed land in question be used for construction of Ram Temple. As it was one of the most anticipated judgements in India's history, Twitter was buzzing long before the date of verdict. To perform sentiment analysis, around 70,000 tweets pertaining to the verdict were collected from 26th Oct 2019 to 23rd Nov 2019. The dataset was then divided into three phases (i.e., pre-verdict, on day of verdict, and post-verdict), and NRC Lexicon has been used to analyze the results and extract positive, negative, and neutral tweets. Sentiment analysis of each phase indicates that the verdict has been accepted by the public.

KEYWORDS

Babri Masjid, Lord Ram, Machine Learning, Natural Language Processing (NLP), NRC Emotion Lexicon, Ram Temple, Text Mining, Twitter, VADER

1. INTRODUCTION

This study has its moorings in the actual socio-political context of the Indian sub-continent. In India, religious sites play a crucial part in manifesting the right to freedom of religion which is also a fundamental right. They also represent different religious communities in a multi-lingual and a multi-religious state like India. India happens to be the only country in the world consisting of a large number of diverse religions co-existing together. Hinduism is known to be India's major religion which has existed for more than 4,000 years (Dayal & Garg, 2020). The origin of the Ayodhya dispute dates back 500 years ago in 1528-29 when Mughal emperor Babur had the Babri Masjid constructed on the site marking the spot of Lord Ram's birth. (Timeline: Ayodhya holy site crisis, 2012). Since then, there has been a tussle between the two communities for ownership of that piece of land measuring 1500 square yards in the town of Ayodhya. This dispute and its associated verdict has garnered a lot of attention both in print media as well as social media.

Microblogging websites have off lately become the go to repository for all sorts of varied data. This is due to the very nature of microblogs which enable the users to post their views, complaints, voice their opinions and express their sentiments on almost everything in a few words with a lot of

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ease. In fact, many organizations resort to these microblogs to understand and assess the opinion of general public on their products and services. Sentiment analysis is a technique to analyze these opinions, emotions and attitudes of people from text, speech, and database sources and classify them into categories like “positive” or “negative” or “neutral” (Bilal et al., 2019; Karami et al., 2020; Bonta & Janardhan, 2019). In the present study one such popular microblog- “Twitter” has been utilized to analyze the public sentiment on the Ayodhya land dispute case verdict by The Supreme Court of India.

The main objective of the study is to understand the opinions of the general public on the Ayodhya verdict on the basis of their twitter posts. To achieve this end, in this paper, sentiment analysis has been applied to identify, analyze and extract important and relevant sentiments from tweets posted by users pertaining to the judgement on the Ayodhya land dispute case. Twitter data related to Ayodhya verdict is collected over a period of four weeks and temporal analysis is performed to understand public sentiment. Section 2 presents the literature review pertaining to Ayodhya verdict and sentiment analysis. In section 3, the overall research methodology related to obtaining dataset and the basis of dividing it into three parts has been explained. Section 4 entails the complete and detailed analysis and findings of data and is sub-divided into parts pertaining to each phase. Section 5 presents the discussion section while section 6 addresses the limitations and future scope of the study, lastly, conclusion is presented in section 7.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As the present study entails understanding the public sentiment on Ayodhya verdict, the literature review is divided into two sections. The first section provides a historical background of the Ayodhya case, and the second section deals with literature survey on using Twitter data for performing sentiment analysis.

2.1 Ayodhya Verdict: Historical Context

The Hindu community claimed that it was the birthplace of Lord Ram, which was demolished upon the conquest of the Indian sub-continent by Mughal Emperor, Babur. Muslim community claimed that it was the place where historic Babri Masjid was built by the Mughal Emperor, Babur on vacant land. The dispute in these appeals arise out of four regular suits which were filed at different places by both communities between 1950 and 1989. The first suit was filed in the year 1950 by a Hindu worshipper in which he stated that it was his right to offer prayers at the main temple. In the year 1959 a case was filed by the Nirmohi Akhara for management of the temple. In 1961, Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Board of Waqf staked their claim on the disputed site. In 1986, after 37 years, Faizabad district judge ordered to open the gates of Babri mosque, in favor of Hindu parties and allowed them to worship. Then Rajiv Gandhi govt allowed shilanyas at the site. Next to the Babri Masjid, The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), a Hindu nationalist organization formed in 1964, laid the foundation of a Ram Temple on the land (Ayodhya verdict: 6 things to know before the crucial ruling, 2019).

VHP organized various events mobilizing Hindus for the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya. In 1989, the last suit was filed on behalf of Lord Ram in which the law recognized both the idol and birthplace as juridical entities. Amidst all this, in 1990-91, Senior Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) leader LK Advani began his rath yatra with kar sevaks for Ram temple. Then on December 6, 1992, kar sevaks demolished the mosque which is considered as one of the deadliest religious riots the country had seen leading to the killing of about 2,000 people (Ayodhya verdict: 6 things to know before the crucial ruling, 2019). The mosque’s demolition and the horrific violence it triggered across India polarized the society and politics along communal lines (Ramachandran, 2020).

It is observed that over time the Ayodhya case has been given more of a political flavor than a mere land dispute (Dayal & Garg, 2020). Babri mosque destruction was an event that shaped India in a different way. BJP leader, LK Advani faced the charges of criminal conspiracy for demolition of the mosque. BJP had a hope that this act would fortify Hindu votes in their favor, but the party was

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