



Places of Worship Act, 1991

Why in News

The Supreme Court in its recent **Ayodhya verdict** made mention of the **Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991** which **prohibits the conversion of religious places of worship** as it existed at the time of Independence.

Significance of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991

- The Act was passed in September **1991**, over a year before the demolition of the Babri Masjid (1992).
- **Purpose:**
 - **Section 3 of the Act** bans the conversion of a place of worship or even a section of it into a place of worship of a different religious denomination or of a different segment of the same religious denomination.
 - The Act also imposes a **positive obligation** on the State **to maintain the religious character of every place of worship** as it existed at the time of Independence.
 - This legislative obligation on the State to **preserve and protect the equality of all faiths** is an essential **secular feature** and one of the **basic features** of the Indian Constitution.
- **Exemption:**
 - The disputed site at **Ayodhya is exempted** from the Act. Due to this exemption, the trial in the Ayodhya case proceeded even after the enforcement of this law.
 - The Act also does not apply to any place of worship which is an ancient and historical monument or an archaeological site covered by the **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958**.
- **Penalty: Section 6 of the Act** prescribes a punishment of maximum three-years imprisonment along with a fine for contravening the provisions of the Act.

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