Background:

Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991: Enacted to maintain the religious character of places of worship as they existed on August 15, 1947. The Act prohibits legal proceedings aimed at altering the status of such sites, with the notable exception of the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute.

Recent Developments:

Supreme Court’s Observation (February 17, 2025): The Court expressed concern over the increasing number of intervention applications in the case challenging the constitutional validity of the Places of Worship Act.

Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna’s Statement: Emphasized the need to limit interventions, noting, “There is a limit to the number of interventions being filed.”

Next Hearing Scheduled: The matter is set to be heard by a three-judge bench in March 2025.

Key Parties Involved:

Petitioners Challenging the Act: Include BJP leader Ashwini Upadhyay, who argues that the Act denies legal recourse to communities seeking to reclaim places of worship altered during historical invasions.

Intervenors Supporting the Act: Political entities such as the Congress, CPI(ML), Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind, and AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi have filed applications defending the Act’s validity.

Legal Implications:

Supreme Court’s Directive (December 2024): Instructed lower courts to refrain from passing substantive orders or conducting surveys of religious sites until the apex court decides on the Act’s validity.

Pending Legal Disputes: At least 18 cases are ongoing in various courts, involving sites like the Gyanvapi Mosque in Varanasi and the Shahi Eidgah Mosque in Mathura.

Relevance for APSC Aspirants:

Constitutional Law: Understanding the balance between preserving historical religious sites and addressing contemporary claims.

Judicial Processes: Insights into how the judiciary manages multiple interventions in sensitive cases.

Communal Harmony: The role of legislation and judiciary in maintaining religious harmony in a diverse society.