Hussain Randathani

Beyond Temples: The Untold Story of Destroyed Mosques and Viharas

In 1849, the book *History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, written by Englishmen Elliot and Dowson, was the first to claim that Muslim rule was against Hindus. The book was deliberately written in a way that repeatedly mentioned the destruction of temples and forced conversions by Muslims, creating the impression that the British were the true protectors of Hindus. It was crafted with the malicious intent of dividing and ruling Hindus and Muslims.

Although many examples can be cited of temples and mosques being demolished, there is no evidence to suggest that these acts were motivated by religious reasons or were connected to the faith of common people. In fact, ordinary people were often unaware of the destruction of temples they were not even allowed to enter. However, Hindutva ideologues have used the above book as a tool for their anti-Muslim propaganda. They falsely claim that the Mughals destroyed 60,000 temples. Whenever they find a ruined temple, they automatically blame Muslims for it. This is the same tactic that was used to paint Tipu Sultan, a protector of temples, as a destroyer.

India has the highest number of temples in the world, with Tamil Nadu having the most among Indian states. A vast amount of wealth, left unused for productive purposes, has been stored in temples. Early temples were small and mostly cave temples. It was only from the first century onward that large temples began to replace cave temples, mostly built by rulers.

As caste rules became stricter and Brahmin supremacy was established, common people were denied access to temples. Over time, temples, along with forts, became symbols of royal grandeur, accumulating enormous wealth. When a king lost a battle, the victorious ruler would destroy the defeated king’s temple, which housed his patron deity (national deity), and plunder its riches. The purpose of destroying temples and forts was to diminish the defeated ruler's prestige. Temples were exclusively owned by the king and his family, with the deities usually being Vishnu or Shiva.

**Temple Destruction**

When it comes to demolishing an enemy’s temple, there is no difference between a Hindu and a Muslim. However, neither the British writers nor the Hindutva proponents mention instances where Hindus demolished temples belonging to their fellow Hindus or Hindu rulers destroyed mosques. If the goal was to foster animosity towards Muslims, such facts had to be concealed. Due to political and imperial conflicts in ancient and medieval times, many temples, mosques, palaces, and forts were either destroyed or damaged.

Where are the Jain and Buddhist monasteries that once flourished in ancient India? To find them, we need to dig beneath old temples. Dr. Ambedkar’s grandson has now demanded this. The number of stupas and monasteries destroyed by various rulers who governed India between the 8th and 13th centuries is countless. Chandragupta Maurya devastated the Buddhist center of Magadha. Ashoka, in his zeal to spread Buddhism, suppressed the Jains. Kshatriya kings destroyed Buddhist centers and built temples in their place. King Pushyamitra ruthlessly massacred Buddhist monks. Emperor Shashanka cut down the Bodhi tree under which Buddha meditated. In South India, Jainism and Buddhism were eradicated by Shaivites, Vaishnavites, and the rulers who supported them. In Kerala, foreign invaders destroyed monasteries, temples, and mosques alike. Such acts should be understood as part of political rivalries and Brahminical dominance, rather than as a deliberate policy of religious persecution.

**Hindu Rulers and Temple Destruction**

History records that rulers like Harsha, Shankaravarman, and Jayapala of Kashmir systematically looted temples and even appointed officials for this purpose. In 641 AD, Pallava king Narasimhavarman I looted the Ganesh idol from Vatapi, the capital of the Chalukyas. Later, the Chalukyas, after defeating several North Indian rulers, also plundered idols. In the 8th century, the Bengali army killed Kashmiri King Lalitaditya and destroyed the idol of his deity, Vishnu Vaikuntha. In the 9th century, Pandya King Srivallabha killed the Sinhalese king and took away the idol of Lord Buddha from Sri Lanka. Pratihara King Herambapala defeated the Shahi king of Kangra and looted the Vishnu Vaikuntha idol, which was later taken by the Kandel king and enshrined in his kingdom. Rajendra Chola I looted several idols from different regions and installed them in his capital. He defeated the Chalukya kings and took away Durga idols to his homeland.

In the early 10th century, the Rashtrakuta king completely destroyed the temple of the Pratihara rulers, who were their staunch enemies. They proudly documented this act in their royal records. In 1514, Vijayanagara ruler Krishna Deva Raya captured Udayagiri and seized the idol of Bala Krishna Deva. Six years later, he looted the idol of Vitthala Devi from Pandharpur. Even before the Turkish rulers established their dominance in India, the Paramara kings had already destroyed Jain monasteries in Gujarat and shattered idols.(Reference: R. E. Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States," Journal of Islamic Studies, 11/3, 2000)

Buddhists and Jains, finding it impossible to survive in India, either migrated to foreign lands or converted to Hinduism.

**Destruction of Mosques by Hindu Kings**

Hindu rulers also demolished mosques. When Raja Mahipal conquered Lahore, he destroyed its mosques and built temples in their place. At that time, the number of mosques was very few. Rajput ruler Rana Kumbha waged war against the Mughals and destroyed mosques. Rana Sanga’s assistant, Raisan, demolished several mosques and converted them into stables. Raja Bhim Singh invaded Gujarat and destroyed more than thirty mosques in one attack. (Kaviraj Shyamal Das, Veer Vinod; R.C. Majumdar, *Mughal Empire*, 1974, p. 351). During the Rajput-Mughal wars, Rajputs destroyed mosques in Rajasthan. Sikhs and Jats also joined in demolishing mosques and dargahs in various places. Jats even looted the valuable metals from the Taj Mahal and removed its golden crown of the main dome with the help of the British. They desecrated Emperor Akbar’s tomb and took out the bones of Akbar, by digging the grave and burned them. In 1760, Maratha ruler Sadashiv Bhau plundered Mughal monuments in Delhi, extracting their gold and precious stones.

**Turkoman Invasions and Temple Destruction**

During their military campaigns, the Turkomans destroyed temples, seizing their wealth. They also demolished abandoned Jain and Buddhist monasteries to build mosques. Temples were replaced with mosques to establish authority and replace Hindu deities with Allah as the supreme deity. Alauddin Khilji funded his wars against the Mongols by plundering temple wealth. Additionally, one of their strategies to weaken enemies was to destroy their fortresses and desecrate their sacred places. Just as victorious Hindu rulers installed their deities in the temples of the defeated, Muslim rulers built mosques on temple sites. Contemporary Islamic scholars and Sufi saints criticized the imperialist ambitions of Muslim rulers destroying temples. However, not all the mosques of India built on temples as alleged by the communalists. Most mosques, including the Babri Masjid, were built independently. Babur had initially planned to build three mosques in Sambhal, Panipat, and Faizabad. Some sources claim that Babri Masjid was an expansion of a small mosque that existed during the Lodhi rule and not by demolishing any existing temple there.

Like other conquerors, Turkish rulers also desecrated the deities of their enemies. In 1292, when Ulugh Khan conquered Gujarat, he seized the idol from the Somnath temple and sent it to Sultan Alauddin Khilji, ensuring that the idol would not provide protection to his enemies. Before that, Mahmud of Ghazni had attacked the same temple, looted its immense wealth, and carried away its treasures. When Firoz Shah Tughlaq conquered Odisha, he learned that the main deity of the defeated ruler was housed in the Jagannath temple of Puri. He seized the idol and transported it to Delhi. In 1518, when the Rajput ruler of Gwalior opposed Sultan Ibrahim Lodhi, the sultan’s forces seized his temple idol and placed it near the Baghdad Gate in Delhi. In 1579, Murahari Rao, a general of the Golconda Sultan, defeated Vijayanagar and captured the Ahobilam temple’s jewel-encrusted idol, presenting it to the sultan. The temple had been protected by the Vijayanagar rulers. Similarly, as a punishment for supporting Mughal rebels, the governor of Odisha desecrated the temple idol of the local ruler. Many temples were destroyed during wartime due to such power struggles.

**Temple Grants**

When Hindu kings paid tribute or maintained friendly relations, the Sultans and Mughals protected temples and even aided in their construction. According to a Sanskrit inscription, in the thirteenth year of Muhammad bin Tughlaq's rule in northern Deccan, he instructed a Muslim officer to repair and restore the Shiva temple in Kalyan, Bidar district, for worship. The Vijayanagar king built mosques for the Muslims in his kingdom. The Kashmiri ruler Sultan Shihabuddin (1355-73) had a Brahmin as his chief minister, who attempted to increase state revenue by melting and selling Hindu and Buddhist idols. The Sultan forbade this practice, stating:

"Some kings become famous by consecrating divine idols, some by worshipping them, some by preserving them, and some by destroying them. How sinful are the actions of those who destroy them! Sagara became renowned by creating oceans and rivers, Bhagiratha by bringing the Ganges, Dushyanta by devastating the world out of jealousy toward Indra, and Rama by killing Ravana for abducting Sita. If it is ever said that I, Shihabuddin, looted an idol, it would be more terrifying than death itself and would instill fear among people in the future."(S.L. Sadhu, ed., Medieval Kashmir, 1993, pp. 44-45). When Sultan Sikandar Lodi intended to demolish temples, Muslim scholars advised him: "You have no authority to destroy temples that have been worshipped since ancient times or to prohibit people from bathing in sacred tanks." (B. Day, trans., Tabaqat-i-Akbari (Nizamuddin Ahmad), 1927, Vol. 1, p. 186)

The famous Vishwanath Temple in Kashi was built by Akbar’s general Man Singh. The Neelkanth Temple in Mandu was constructed under Akbar's orders by Governor Shah Badgah in 1574. Akbar also increased grants for temples in the Mathura region. Jahangir granted land to temple priests for their maintenance. Aurangzeb further increased temple grants and allowed his Rajput chiefs to build temples. One of the greatest testaments to the Mughal rulers' admiration for temples is found in Babur’s autobiography, Tuzuk-e-Babri.

From Akbar’s reign onwards, temples and their priests were officially protected by the state. Akbar instructed his Rajput mansabdars to build temples wherever necessary. The Mughal rulers also restored the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Orissa. During the temple’s annual festival, Rajputs and Hindu nobles participated under the instructions of Shah Jahan. (Orissa Historical Journal, 10(3), 1961, p. 46)Aurangzeb followed a similar policy. In 1659, he issued orders to his officials in Varanasi to protect temples and priests:

"I have received reports that, due to hatred and hostility, Hindu householders and temple priests in Banaras and surrounding areas are being attacked. Some demand that these Brahmins be removed from temple administration, which has deeply distressed them. Upon receiving this letter, ensure that no harm comes to the Brahmins. They must be allowed to reside in their ancestral homes and pray for the Mughal Empire."(Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1911, pp. 689-90)

While Aurangzeb restricted new temple construction in Banaras, this rule did not apply elsewhere. He asserted that, according to Islamic law, ancient places of worship should be preserved. Temples continued to be built in various regions during his reign. (Eaton, Temple Desecration, p. 305)

The Mughal emperors had familial ties with the Rajputs. Akbar, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb all incorporated Rajputs into their administration. Aurangzeb had the highest number of Rajput military commanders. Raja Jai Singh was his general, and Raja Jaswant Singh, despite occasional conflicts, remained loyal until his death. Due to these ties, the Mughals maintained respect for Rajputs and their religious beliefs.

In 1635, Shah Jahan destroyed the famous Orchha temple, despite previously granting it passageway rights. The temple was managed by Mughal officer Raja Jajhar Singh, who had also received grants from the Mughal administration. When Singh rebelled against Shah Jahan, he was defeated, his properties confiscated, and the temple he maintained was destroyed. Similarly, when some Rajputs withdrew their support for Aurangzeb and waged war, their temples and forts in Rajasthan were also razed, as recorded in history.

However, during wars, the Mughals destroyed enemy temples to signify conquest, just as forts and palaces were razed. Aurangzeb demolished temples in Banaras, Mathura, and Rajasthan after suppressing rebellions. The Mathura incident was triggered by the killing of an imam in a local mosque. When Jats revolted, they destroyed numerous mosques and dargahs, even defiling Akbar’s tomb in Sikandra. Following this, Aurangzeb ordered the demolition of their temples. In 1635, Shah Jahan destroyed the famous Orchha temple, despite previously facilitating its construction. The temple had been administered by Raja Jajhar Singh under Mughal patronage and grants, but when he rebelled, his assets were confiscated, and the temple was dismantled. Similarly, some Rajputs withdrew their allegiance to Aurangzeb and waged war, leading to the destruction of their temples and forts.

**Cultural Assimilation and Syncretism**

The Mughal emperors embraced Hindu traditions in their courts. Since they had familial ties with Rajputs, they adopted many Rajput customs. Akbar built a temple in Fatehpur Sikri for his Rajput wives. The practice of *Jharokha Darshan*—greeting the public from a balcony—was followed by several Mughal rulers. Sanskrit learning was encouraged at the court, and during Akbar’s reign, *Atharva Veda* and *Mahabharata* were translated into Persian. Earlier, in the eleventh century, Al-Biruni had translated over 200 Sanskrit texts into Arabic, introducing Indian cultural richness to the Arab world.

Akbar’s *Ibadat Khana* (House of Worship) hosted discussions among scholars from all religions. His *Din-i-Ilahi* sought to integrate different religious philosophies. Rajputs held high positions in the Mughal administration, and temples were granted land and financial support. Shah Jahan’s son Dara Shikoh were well-versed in Sanskrit, and Dara Shikoh translated the *Upanishads* into Persian. Among Akbar’s *Navaratnas* (Nine Gems), four were non-Muslims, and they were given high status at the royal court. Mughal and Rajput dressing styles also influenced each other.

Indian festivals like Holi and Diwali were celebrated in the Sultan and Mughal courts. In 1327, Muhammad bin Tughlaq established his second capital at Daulatabad (formerly Devagiri), and he arranged for Ganges water to be transported there for his personal use. The Sultans of Bengal would ceremonially wash their hands with Ganges water before ascending the throne, signifying their belief in its sanctity.

The Deccan Sultans appointed Hindus to high administrative positions, integrating Hindu culture and literature into their courts. Hindustani and Carnatic music flourished under their patronage. These rulers granted lands to temples. Tipu Sultan provided endowments and passage rights to major temples in his Mysore kingdom, including those in Malabar. When Marathas plundered and desecrated a temple in his territory, he personally restored it.

Hindutva ideologues and their central government are rewriting history in a way that promotes communal divisions and anti-Muslim sentiment. The contributions of Muslims to India’s cultural heritage are being erased. The demolition of the Babri Masjid and the growing enthusiasm for destroying mosques reflect this revisionist agenda. The BJP government, along with certain sections of the Archaeological Survey of India and the judiciary, is complicit in this historical distortion, fostering sectarian tensions and endangering communal harmony in India.

**Wow, Aurangazeb!**

During the reign of Aurangzeb, the Ramayana was translated into Persian, titled *"Nargisthane Ram"*. This translation was done by Madhupuri at Chandraban Bedil. The book was dedicated to the emperor. In the preface of the book, Madhupuri writes:

*"Jahan ra Shah tha Aurangzeb ast; ye Hindustan ne rang vo na raib ast."* (As long as Aurangzeb rules, there will be no calamity in Hindustan.)

These lines can be interpreted as a tribute. Poets often write such things. Let us leave it at that.

Aurangzeb ruled India for fifty years, the longest reign among the Mughal emperors. He was closely related to the Rajput kings by blood, and he included them in his administration and military.His two wives belonged to Rajput clan. His army commander was a Rajput named Jai Singh. Aurangzeb granted all the facilities for Hindus to worship according to their traditions. His most loyal and highest-ranking officials were also Rajputs. Among the Mughal emperors, he was the wealthiest.

To ascend to the throne, Aurangzeb killed his brothers and imprisoned his father. There is no reason to forgive him for these cruel acts. This was the way of the old kings. To gain power, they used any vile means, but once they were in power, it was a different matter. We can take the example of the great Ashoka. To gain power, he killed over a hundred of his brothers. The cruelty he inflicted during the Kalinga War is beyond count. He later regretted and sought peace, but he never returned a single inch of the conquered land. He continually killed followers of Jainism. However, Ashoka is remembered as great because of the good governance he offered to Buddhism and the people. But even so, cruel acts cannot be forgiven. Similarly, the means that Aurangzeb used to rise to power cannot be justified. He ascended the throne while his father was alive, and this was criticized by the Sharif of Mecca and some Sufis. After coming to power, Aurangzeb declared that he would rule according to Islamic law. The ulema and Sufis accepted this in peace.

Aurangzeb made changes in his life as well. He moved from his palace to a modest dwelling and slept on a skin mat. He lived off money gained from copying the Quran. This could be seen as part of his repentance. These are his personal matters. We evaluate rulers based on what they did for the people. In this aspect, Aurangzeb was an exemplary ruler. Under his rule, India reached its peak economically. The country led in revenue, exports, and production.

Immediately after taking power, he abolished numerous taxes, including 80 of them. Taxes on pilgrimages, grazing, roads, death, and festivals were abolished. Muslims were required to pay zakat, and non-Rajput Hindus had to pay jizya. Women, children, priests, and Brahmins were exempted from the jizya tax. Agriculture expanded, irrigation increased, and trade flourished with the construction of roads and markets. Under his reign, India was number one in the world for textile production. The common people were content, and for fifty years, there were no major disruptions in his rule. During this time, Aurangzeb had the largest empire, with the most people under his control.

Although he may have lived in a simple cottage, he did not reduce the grandeur of royal celebrations. Festivals like Dasara and Holi were celebrated grandly, and during the Dasara festival, he would give gifts to his Hindu nobles. During festival times, everyone was free to celebrate, and even on Holi, there was revelry. Many temples in the country received grants, including significant aid to large temples. He gave stipends to Brahmins in Varanasi and other places and asked them to pray for him and the Mughal empire. He also gave special protection to Jain temples and leaders and lavished grants on Sikh Gurdwaras in Dehradun.

However, during wartime, many temples were destroyed. Rajput warriors and Jat warriors who fought against the emperor also destroyed many mosques. Akbar's tomb and the mosque there were destroyed by the Jat warriors. In 1763, under the leadership of Jatt leader Suraj Mal, the Taj Mahal was desecrated. They destroyed the golden apex of the tower and melted the silver doors. They also looted precious gems. This is all a result of war, and such destruction was common during medieval warfare.

The claim that the Emperor mocked the musicians and expelled them from his palace is absurd. It was merely a story repeated by others after being fabricated by someone. The Emperor's coronation anniversary was celebrated grandly, with fireworks, music, and exuberant dancing by performers.The chief musician of the Emperor was Kushal Khan Kalawant. Sweet melodies could be heard from the palace every day, as noted by the contemporary traveler Tavernier. Interestingly, the reign of Aurangzeb saw the highest number of books published on music. (*Modern Asian Studies*, Volume 41, January 2007, pages 77 to 120)

Aurangzeb, despite his many shortcomings, played a significant role in India's economic prosperity during his reign. His fifty-year rule left a lasting impact on the country's development. The destruction of temples or mosques had little to do with economic progress, as common people had limited access to these religious structures, which primarily served as symbols of grandeur for kings and the Brahmin elite. These elites, in the name of caste always oppressed the common people. However, acts of vandalism carried out by rulers and administrators cannot be justified in any manner. In this regard, Aurangzeb was not a divine figure but merely a ruler and an imperialist.