



FACTS *against* MYTHS

VIKAS ADHYAYAN KENDRA

Vol VI # 8/2000

INFORMATION BULLETIN

Dark Era or Foundations of Syncretism Myths on Medieval History – Part I

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COMMENT

Communalism derives its sustenance from also the mythical projection of history. One witnesses today the gross abuse of history in the spread of communal hatred towards the 'other'. It is THE favourite weapon in the hands of those rooting their politics on the hatred of others' religions. Muslim and Hindu communal forces, in contrast to the nationalist forces, resorted to the gross communal interpretation of history. "Our past it seems has never been as crucial for our present and future as it appears now. History – the image of the past – is being conveniently and indiscriminately used for political myth-making. They have comparisons between the "good" British rule and "bad" Muslim rule." (Habib, TOI, March 13, 1994) It is another matter that the Muslim ruling clans were socially mixed up with the local elite and the synthetic culture evolved in contrast to the British who remained socially aloof from the locals. Neither did Muslim rulers repatriate the wealth of the country as the British rulers.

Since the two contesting streams of communalism were Hindu and Muslim ones, the major period of history, which has been subjected to such gross abuse, is the medieval period when in major part of the country the Mughal emperors ruled. The same period of history is interpreted in two contrasting ways. While Muslim communal historians glorify, Hindu communal historians and the imperial historians project it as a period of tyranny of Muslims over Hindus. While the former project Aurangzeb as the greatest Muslim King

upholding the values of Islam, the latter see him as the most bigoted and cruel king in India's history. Chausalkar observes, "The communalists used the history as the opium of the people. They build up illusions of great past". Similarly Prof. Arjun Dev writes "The two antagonistic communal trends complemented each other, each finding in Aurangzeb justification of his variety of communalism; the Hindu communalists by believing that Aurangzeb's fanaticism was the final proof of irreconcilability of Hindus and Muslims. The Muslim communalists found him to be the pious Muslim who in a way laid the foundation of Pakistan." (quoted in Chausalkar)

Above all, communal historians, to justify their concocted version of history also associate the stigma of 'Untouchability' as the creation of the Muslims! The myth is propagated very particularly by ideologues of the Sangh Parivar, in pursuance of their political project of denigrating Islam and Muslims. The vile propaganda is an ulterior motive co-opting the Dalits and sections of 'low castes' into their fold primarily for electoral gains.

The logic of Sangh ideologues borders on outright mauling of history, showing their 'capacity' to distort history to no end, to suit Sangh Parivars' (SP) political agenda." Singhal (Sunday Observer, 30-7-95) in his interview shows his 'understanding' of history as follows: "all communities were equal and enjoyed the same rights till the advent of Islamic and Christian rule. Humiliation began to be heaped only after the Islamic invasion of our country. It was because of the repression of different communities that fought the Islamic invaders and defied conversion to Islam that they had to suffer humiliation and torture. These communities were uprooted from their home and hearth for defying the

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1512

invaders, and not giving up their religion, they became poor (and) came to be treated as untouchables"

This quote demonstrates the depths to which the ideologues of Sangh Parivar can stoop to 'doctor' mass-consciousness in a communal direction. In fact, the truth is something, which exposes the brutality of Brahminical ideology, which is at the core of Hindutva onslaught.

MYTH: *Indian culture was and is basically a Hindu culture and had always been so but for the invasion of alien Islamic and Christian cultures.*

FACT: On the contrary, Indian culture and civilisation is a pluralistic one, encompassing the cultural diversity of the country, incorporating and drawing deeply from all those people, who migrated and settled here. Even amongst Hindus there are multiple sects and culture is not uniform. Only the culture of the elite is being projected to be "the" Hindu culture at the exclusion of the culture of the downtrodden. Let us see:

Right since ancient times an extensive trade and commerce prevailed between the inhabitants on the Malabar coast and Arabs on the East African coast. India's contact with Islam was first through Arab traders. Many a coastal king had erected mosques for worship of these traders and for the local Muslim community, evolving through interaction with Arabs. The later arrival of the Mughals on the political arena led to multiple changes. Like any other rulers Mughals were ruthless exploiters and tyrants who used coercion as well as ideological maneuvers to govern. The impact of Islam and Mughal culture, however, led to a cultural synthesis i.e., the emergence of Hindustani culture, in all the fields: music, sculpture, architecture, literature, fine arts and so on. At the religious level Islam and local Hindu traditions interacted and strengthened each other. Sufi Saints and Bhakti Cults, both were very popular amongst subalterns.

Sufis were more tilted towards the spiritual side of Islam. They had to oppose the orthodox Ulema of Islam (those learned in Islamic Theology) who were close to the elite and power centres. These Sufis were close to Christians and Jew mystics and also to the spirituality of some Hindu sects. Moinuddin Ibn Arabi founded the doctrine of Wahadat-Al-Wajud (i.e. Unity of being), promoting spiritual universalism and demolished the barriers of caste and creed. It preached that a real being is one and we are all His manifestations. Baba Farid of Punjab wrote his poetry in Punjabi and his verses were quoted in the Adi Granth, (Granth Saheb) by Guru Nanak.

Mir Miyan another Sufi saint was requested to lay the foundation stone of Harmandir in Golden Temple. Sayyid Waris Shah wrote *Hir Ranzha*, greatest classic of medieval Punjabi literature. Despite the personal belief in the 'one Allah', according to Islam Nizamuddin Awliya that as per the Islamic understanding there are

as many ways of worshipping God as particles of sand. He was fond of *Bhajans* and *Kawwali*. Once whilst passing through bank of Jamuna in Dehli, accompanied by his celebrated disciple and noted poet, Khoosro, they saw some Hindu women bathing in Jamuna, offering prayers to the Sun. Hazrat said "O Khoosro these women are also praying to Allah. They have their own way of praying".

Sheikh Moinuddin Chishti was a great Sufi saint with a large following amongst both communities. While Ulema and Brahmins looked down upon others' mode of worship, Sufi and Bhakti Saints modified and integrated these modes into a new synthetic expression. They respected others' spiritual practices, and were away from power centers. Dara Shikoh was a great scholar and he wrote a book called *Majama-ul-Baharayn* (meeting of two great oceans, Hinduism and Islam)

MYTH: *The rich mosaic and wealth of Indian literature is a legacy purely of the Hindus and Hindu civilisation.*

FACT: On the contrary! It is again hard to find any reasoned basis for taking a "two nation" view of Hindus and Muslims. The heritage of contemporary India combines Islamic influences with Hindu and other traditions, and the results of their interaction can be seen in literature and the arts like music, painting, architecture, any many other fields. For instance, Indian literature witnessed a number of synthetic trends during this era. Shaikh Mohammed wrote Marathi poetry. Shivaji's guru, Ramdas, was all praise for Sheikh Mohhamed about whom he wrote- "Glory to Shaikh Mohammad: You alone unfold the mystery of the universe in such diction that baffles the reason and logic of ordinary mortal. You have truly perceived the fundamental unity and identity of the entire universe." Malik Mohamad Jayasi was a great poet of Avadhi and wrote the classic "Padmavat." Abdur Rahim Khan-e-Khan was a Hindi poet in the court of Akbar. Obviously, there is no communal line dividing Indian literature and the arts, setting Hindus and Muslims on separate sides. The tradition of integrated work continues straight through to modern art forms, such as the cinema, where Muslims and Hindus are thoroughly integrated; even films on Hindu religious themes, both past and present, frequently have Muslim actors and actresses.

MYTH: *Hindus and Muslims have always been aloof and thereby hostile to each other.*

FACT: It is true that the elite among these communities, given their vested interests, looked down on the other communities and religions. On the other hand, the poor in both communities visited pilgrimage sites and venerated the holy seers irrespective of their religious affiliations or persuasion.

Kabir had a large following amongst poor Muslims and Hindus. He criticised the orthodoxy of both the Ulema



Mazhar Jan-i-Jana said that Beda (Veda) was this revealed book of God and Ram and Krishna must have been prophets of God.

Ramanand founded the Bhakti movement, propounded the devotion to Ram and threw open the doors of his circle to all the low caste men and women and also to Muslims. Tulsidas was an ardent devotee of Ram, in fact the greatest 'Ram devotee' of all the times. He wrote his literature not in Sanskrit, but in popular Avadhi Language, so that it is accessible to all the people. Because of this he was not well accepted amongst other elite saints of his time. He used to live in Ayodhya in a mosque.

***A Slave of Rama is Tulsi
Whatever they say, let them say
On alms I live, the Mosque is my refuge
My give-and-take with this world is done!***

TULSIDASA
from 'Kavitavali'

and the Brahmins and pointed out that Ram, Rahim, Allah and Hari are the expressions of the same spiritual energy. As different ornaments are made from the same gold so are these holy seers, the outer manifestation of same divine power.

Guru Nanak founded a new religious movement blending the concept of Unity of God, which was closely allied to the Islamic concept with Hindu doctrine of rebirth, moral and spiritual reform. Abul Fazal in *Ain-i-Akbari* wrote that the king should be above all religious differences and see to it that religious considerations do not come in the way of duty, which he owes to every class and every country. Under his all-embracing care everyone should find peace and happiness so that the benefits conferred by the shadow of God are Universal.

To be more specific, there are records that document how the first Muslim scholars came to India before the advent of any Muslim ruler, in the spirit of learning rather than as conquerors. These scholars carried back from India several works of wisdom and these were then

translated into Arabic. Acknowledging this intellectual gift, Arab author Yaqubi wrote in 895: "The Hindus are superior to all other nations in intelligence and thoughtfulness. They are more exact in astronomy and astrology than any other people. The *Brahma Sidhanta* is a good proof of their intellectual powers. By this book the Greeks and the Persians have also profited". Another Arab historian Qazi Said wrote, "The Hindus have always been considered by all other people as the custodians of learning and wisdom".

Thus, the very first contacts were favourable, and these were strengthened subsequently at the upper level by certain liberal policies initiated by Akbar and retained by several Muslim rulers of the smaller kingdoms such as Bijapur, Mysore and Oudh. Akbar had initiated many good traditions. He respected and listened to the view of learned men from several religions including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and others. He gave liberal grants for the maintenance of Hindu temples. He even launched a translations department to get the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Bible translated into Persian. More important, at the grassroots level,

these ties were strengthened by the Bhakti and Sufi movements.

In the Deccan kingdoms, a 16th century king Ail Shah followed a similar path. He established a very good library to look after which he appointed a Sanskrit scholar Vaman Pandit. His descendent Ibrahim Adil Shah was called the 'Friend of the Poor' and world's teacher due to his policies of benevolence and goodwill. In his songs he often pays respects to Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning. He plays an important role in the development of some Hindu religious places.

- » In Kashmir, the 15th century king Zain-ul-Abdin sent messengers to call Hindus who had fled due to the intolerant policies of a predecessor. He was scholar of Sanskrit as well as Persian, and played an important role in translating parts of the Upanishads into Persian. He publicly participated in Hindu festivals and constructed temples.
- » In Bengal, Nathan kings like Sultan Nazir Shah and Sultan Hussein Shah followed similar policies and arranged for the translation of the *Mahabharata* and *Bhagwat Puran* into Bengali;
- » Of great relevance was the impact of the Bhakti and Sufi movements at the grassroots level. These troubadours and poets spoke out against the artificial and ritualistic divisions among communities and in favour of the basic unity of all religions.

Thus, despite several adverse setbacks and conflicts, a certain integration and assimilation of Hindu and Muslim population was taking place before the advent of British colonial rule. For instance, despite the colonial policy of divide and rule, this integration could be seen in the 1897 uprising against British rule in which Hindus united with Muslims to evict the colonial rulers. While Hindu rebels accepted King Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal ruler as their king, the Muslim rebels, as a mark of respect of Hindus, banned cow slaughter in the areas which were liberated for some time.

- » A governor of the Vijayanagar Empire at Mangalore committed some excesses and managed four mosques. On being informed of this, the Officer in Charge of the empire, Baicheya Dannayaka and to Emperor Devaraya II, they ordered payment of compensation to the Muslims and repaired the mosques;
- » The Portuguese visitor, Barbosa, who visited the Vijayanagar empire between 1512-14 said, "The King allows such freedom that everyman may come and go and live according to his own creed without suffering any annoyance

*If we have made Ajanta-Allora- Konark
Then they also have built Tajmahal, Kutubminar,
Charminar
We gave Kalidas, Banbhattacha, Ravindranath
They also gave Khusaro, Galib, Firaq
We gave Jayadev, Kumar Gandharva, Bhimsen Joshi,
Jasraj
They gave Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Bismilla Khan, Dagar
Bandhu
We gave Sahgal, Hemant, Lata
They gave Rafi, Noorjahan, Naushad*

– Alok Bhattcharya

and without any enquiry, whether he is a Christian, Jew, Moor or Heathen";

- » Bahmani Sultan Alla-ud-Din II (1436-58) was devoted to Narasimha Saraswati, a great Hindu rishi. Ibrahim II, the Adilshahi ruler of Bijapur (1580-1686) was also a devotee of Narasimha Saraswati. He built a small shrine near his place in Bijapur and placed the paduka (footwear) of the saint here.

MYTH: Urdu is an alien language and all the Muslim invaders used either Urdu or Persian.

FACT: On the contrary Urdu was a language, which arose as an interaction of Persian and Hindi. This language evolved in 13th century as a mixture of Persian dialect with western Hindi spoken in and around Delhi. This dialect was initially called Hindavi, Hindi, or Hindustani and later it was called as Urdu. Raja Todarmal, Akbar's finance minister ordered that all the accounts and correspondence to be kept in Persian. Mullah Abdul Kadir Badaunni in cooperation with Hindu Pundits translated *Athrv Veda* and Ramayana into Persian. Greatest writers of Persian in Medieval India were Abdul Fazl, Munshi Harakram, Chandrabhan Brahman, and Munshi Madhav Ram etc.

During Mughal times Persian was used in government offices where large number of employees were Hindus. In those times department of literary skills *Dar-ul-insha* [secretariat] was mainly manned by Hindus, and the word Munshi means a Hindu who could write good Persian.

Even in architecture the interaction resulted in lot of synthetic developments. Mughal architecture is a mix of Persian and Hindu styles. Jama Masjid [Fatehpur Sikri], gates [medieval period] and domes were built in Jain style. Domes of the Mosque of Mount Abu are also in Jain style. Mughal or Hindustani style can be seen in palaces of Raja of Chatarpur, memorials of Ranjit Singh [Lahore], and palace of Maharaja Bakhtavar Singh in Alwar.

MYTH: Islam was preached and people converted to Islam at the point of the sword!

FACT: Conversions were not the aim of Kings (except Ashoka). Formation of Muslim community took place in various stages. It first started emerging along Malabar coast when the Arab seafarers came to trade during 7th Century AD. They had a religious influence and many people through their interaction adopted Islam. Arab army conquered Sind early in 8th century, but it had a marginal impact on the society as far as conversions are concerned. The 11th and 12th Centuries Turkish invasion brought in a larger influence of Islam. Initially this resulted in emergence of Muslim military aristocracy. But this spread was restricted in numbers. Another small trickle came from Hindu upper-classes, some of whom became Muslims either out of conviction, or (mainly) out of hope of reward from the Muslim ruler.

The main conversions among poor low caste untouchables were severely oppressed by the upper caste Brahmins and Brahminism. To quote Vivekanand "Why amongst the poor of India so many are Mohammedans? It is nonsense to say that the sword converted them. It was to gain liberty from Zamindars and Priests..." (Collected Works- Vol. 8- Page 330). Later the converts swelled in number due to the impact of Sufi saints, who used local customs and rituals to propound humanistic aspects of Islam.

Finally, as Amarjeet Singh maintains in the journal, Spectrum (January 1994), Muslim invasions failed to vanquish cultural traditions that had grown and struck deep roots over centuries in Indian soil. To reiterate the initial clash inevitably led to co-existence and even synthesis. Muslim rulers came to consider India as their home and this resulted in the fusion of Hinduism and Islam. The end result was a characteristic Indo-Islamic culture by setting into motion the gradual Indiansation of Islam, which positively emerged from the 13th century onwards and went on till early 19th century. This assimilative process got manifested in every realm and sphere of Indian life and culture – ranging from the folk traditions of poetry and drama to the architectural designs and culinary skills and the art-forms of dance, music and theatre.

MYTH: Untouchability is a creation of Islam.

FACT: First and foremost, Untouchability was the accompaniment of 'caste' system in the first century AD. That is, from the first century itself, Untouchability is the social practice here. *Manusmriti*, written in 2nd and 3rd century AD, codifies the existing practices, which show in utmost clarity the type of despicable social practices, which the upper castes were imposing upon the weaker, lower castes. Now the major incursion i.e. invasions of Muslims began in the subcontinent from 11th century AD. And the British colonised South Asia in 16-17th century AD.

Demolition of Kashi Vishvanath Temple

Much has been said about Aurangzeb's demolition order of Vishwanath Temple at Banaras. But documentary evidence gives a new dimension to the whole episode while Aurangzeb was passing near Varanasi on his way to Bengal, the Hindu Rajas in his retinue requested that if the halt was made for the day, their Ranis may go to Varanasi, have a dip in the Ganges and pay their homage to Lord Vishwanath. Aurangzeb readily agreed, and army pickets were posted on the five mile route to Varanasi. The Ranis made a journey on the Palkis. They took their dip in the Ganges and went to Vishwanath temple to pay their homage. After offering puja, all the Ranis returned except one, the Maharani of Kutch. A thorough search was made of the temple precincts but the Rani was to be found nowhere. When Aurangzeb came to know of it, he was very much enraged. He sent his senior officers to search for the Rani. Ultimately they found that the statue of Ganesh which was fixed in the wall was a moveable one. When the statue moved they saw a flight of stairs that led to the basement. To their horror they found the missing Rani dishonoured and crying. The basement was just beneath Lord Vishwanath's seat. The Rajas protested. As the crime was heinous the Rajas demanded exemplary action. Aurangzeb ordered that as the sacred precincts have been despoiled, Lord Vishwanath may be moved to some other place, the Temple be razed to the ground and the Mahant be arrested and punished." This fact has been confirmed by the erstwhile curator of the Patna Museum, Dr. P. L. Gupta.

A late hymn of Rig Veda also provides the mythical origin of the castes: "when the gods made a sacrifice with the man as their victim, when they divided the man, into how many parts did they divide him? What was his mouth, what were his arms, what were his thighs and his feet called. The Brahmin was his mouth, of his arms were made the warrior *Kshatriya*. His thighs became the *Vaishyas*, and of his feet the *Shudra* were born" (Thapar, History of India vol. I. Page 39 - 40).

Over a period of time, caste was secured by hereditary and the basis of eating together and defining marriage limits etc. By and by the caste based hierarchy rigidified and *shudra* caste was excluded from the eating together, marriage limits, and became the victim of 'pollution-purity' paradigm, dictated by the Brahmins,

The 'credit' of breaking temples is shared by us along with them

We have also broken temples of Jains, Buddhists

And erected temples of Ram, Hanuman.

For establishing the religious state

We unleashed crusades also

The *punya* of killing those belonging to other religions

Is shared by us also.

It was our *Pushyamitra Shunga*, who changed the color of Earth from black to saffron, with the blood of thousands of innocent monks.

~ Alok Saxena

and treated as untouchable. These found their reflection in the rigid theories of Manu, whose *Manav-Dharmashstra* (Human Law Code) codified these practices into laws. M. S. Golwalkar upholds Manu, as the first greatest lawmaker of mankind, not only for his time, but for all the times to come. The later social struggles to escape the tyrannies of caste system are presented by Ambedkar as revolution and counter-revolution. He divides the 'Pre-Muslim' period as (a) Brahminism (the Vedic period) (b) Buddhism connected with rise of first Magadh-Maurya states and representing the revolutionary denial of caste inequalities and (c) 'Hinduism', or the counter revolution, which consolidates Brahmin dominance and the caste hierarchy!" (Omvedt, Dalit Visions pg: 50).

Thus, long before the invasion of Muslim Kings *shudras* were treated as untouchables and were the most oppressed and exploited sections of society. The intensity of caste system and untouchability worsened from post-Vedic to Gupta period. With the foundation of Muslim dynasties new social movements like *Bhakti*, directly and Sufi, indirectly, partly reduced caste oppression and untouchability. Later with Christian missionary activities also, the upper caste Hindu outfits felt the threat of 'loosing' their grip on the 'low castes', and as a response diluted their caste rigidities to the extent of merely superficially opposing the caste system.

MYTH: Muslim kings and rulers were responsible for the widespread destructions of Hindu temples.

FACT: Since the Babri-Masjid/Janam Bhoomi controversy a false image has been created in public mind of Muslim rulers as destroyers of Hindu temples. While a few wrong acts of intolerance may have taken place, the bigger picture is a) temples were also destroyed by Hindu kings and rulers and b) one of a large number of temples were maintained or even built with the help of Muslim rulers.

This makes it necessary to examine the policy of Mughal rulers towards the temples and other relevant details. For instance, the timeless of Vrindavan-Mathura region. The Hindu pilgrimage was nearest to Delhi and Agra, the two main centres of Mughal rule and so it is of significance to know the relationship which the Mughal rulers had with these temples and with their priests and devotees. Dozens of documents of those days are available to reveal the policy of Akbar, Jehangir and Shahjahan towards these temples. These documents are available in Vrindavan Research Institute and in some of the temples. Studies based on these documents show that Akbar enlarged and consolidated all grants to temples and temple-servants in the Mathura region by his '*firman*s' (dated August 27, 1598 and September 11, 1598) in Vrindavan, Mathura and their environs. Jehangir not only continued these grants he substantially added to these. He also added at least two temples to the list of the 35 already supported by Akbar's grant of 1598. In addition he provided 121 *bighas* of land for 5 families of temple sevaks. Jehangir also visited Vrindavan temples in 1620.

These documents also reveal that whenever temple priests had any serious problem they approached Mughal rulers or their senior officials and generally the rulers/officials took action to solve this problem. On one occasion the water supply to *Radha Kund* was stopped; in another case a tax was imposed on the cattle kept by temples; in another case some trees around a temple were pruned; and in yet another case gardeners of temples were made by priests or others connected with temples to the Mughal rulers or their senior officials. And in all the above-mentioned cases, prompt official action was taken to solve the problem. The fact that the priest's appeals were to the rulers/officials even for minor problems, indicated they expected to get favourable verdicts from them. In fact there are also documents to show that even when there were disputes among two priests or other religious persons connected with temples, the intervention of Mughal or their officials was sought to settle the dispute and the example of at least one such dispute between Damodardas Radhaballabh and Kshan Chaitan is mentioned in one of the documents.

Evidently, the plunder and destruction of temples was carried out by rulers and kings irrespective of their religion. Temples were repositories of enormous wealth. Ideological veneer was drawn from religion for plundering acts. The Marathas in Tipu's *sultanat* plundered Temples also. The Shirangapatanam temple was destroyed by Maratha armies but was repaired by Tipu Sultan. Attacking the temple was also a way of humiliating the other kings.

Muhammed Gazani looted the famous temple of Smooth. His main aim in this was to loot the huge quantities of gold kept in the temple. On his way to Smooth he first had to fight with Muhammed Fath

Dawood and in the process the mosque of Multan was damaged. Further, he allied with Anandpal the ruler of Thaneshwar, before attacking the temple. Many of his army generals (Tilak Sondhi, Rai Hind and Harzan were Hindus and a substantial part of his army was constituted by Hindu soldiers.) Later his son sent his army to destroy a mosque in central Asia.

King Harsha (Kashmir) also looted Temples, 11th century Kashmir. The mention of this is found in Kalhan's book "*Rajtarangini*", which says that he appointed a special officer to uproot the gold idols from the temples. This officer was designated as Devotpatan Nayak' (officer who uproots the Gods)

Parmar Kings (Shubhatvarman, 1193-1210 AD) destroyed Jain temples in Cambay and Dabhoi in addition to plundering temples in his own kingdom. Similarly Aurangzeb not only destroyed some temples and mosques, he also gave Jagirs to many a temples.

Mogul Kings like most other kings had political calculations as the influencing factors in their policy towards the places of worship, irrespective of the fact whether they belonged to this or that religion, or sect.

Mathura Vrindavan region where number of places of pilgrimage are located, the Mughal Kings had a very liberal policy towards them including Aurangzeb. The documents available from Vrindavan Research Center show that Akbar, Jahangir and Shahajahan gave number of Jagirs to these temples.

Finally, to believe that Muslim kings destroyed Hindu temples to convert the Hindus to Islam is baseless. "How can one imagine that the way of winning over the people's heart is to go and demolish its temples? It is significant that generally they are not demolished in Sultan's own empire, unless the temples become the centre's of conspiracy." (Mukhia) As shown above, there are instances, when Muslim rulers were quite cooperative.

MYTH: Medieval wars in the sub-continent were primarily inter-religious wars between Muslims and Hindu Kings.

FACT: Many of the renowned battles during the reign of the Mughal empire have been embedded in public memory as those between Hindus and Muslims. But this is far from the truth. The Mughal kings were basically statist quoist and did not disturb the existing social order or structure. Their empire had employed people from all walks of life comprising of a large numbers of courtiers, Rajas and Jamindars, belonging to both these and other religions.

- » Shivaji's army had a significant number of Muslims and that all through Aurangzeb's prolonged fight with Shivaji several Maratha nobles continued to occupy an important place in Mughal court and army. The names of these Maratha nobles in Aurangzeb's court are available in historical documents. Above all, the number of these

Babar's Will

Son, this Nation Hindusthan has different Religions. Thank Allah for giving us this Kingdom. We should remove all the differences from our heart and do justice to each community according to its customs. Avoid cow-slaughter to win over the hearts of the people of this land and to incorporate the people in the matters of administration. Don't damage the places of worship and temples, which fall in the boundaries of our rule. Evolve a method of ruling whereby all the people of the kingdom are happy with the King and the King is happy with the people. Islam can progress by noble deeds and not by terror. Ignore the differences of Shia and Sunni as this is the weakness of Islam. Keep the people following different customs integrated into a single whole so that no part of the body of this Kingdom becomes diseased.

(Translated from the original - National Museum)

Maratha nobles was higher in Aurangzeb's court than in the court of any other Mughal ruler before him;

- » It was also common for several Hindu kings and chiefs to have Muslim nobles. For instance, at Haldi Ghati, Sur and his Afghan soldiers had fought valiantly on the side of Rana Pratap. On the Mughal side there were many Rajput soldiers led by Raja Man Singh. Still earlier, at the battle of Khanawa, Mahmood Lodi and Hasan Khan Mewati had fought on the side of Rana Sanga against Babur's army.

The long and bitter battle between Rana Pratap and Akbar is well known. On their death, however, their sons had decided to stop fighting and called for peace. Emperor Jehangir and Raja Amar Singh, a great statesman himself, arrived at a highly honourable and mutually satisfactory agreement. Jehangir made no efforts at all to humiliate him in any way and in fact showed him utmost respect

In especially today's context historical events are distorted by communal-oriented historians and brazenly smuggled into especially discourses on history. The various hero myths of various cultures and civilisations around the world are no exceptions to the rule. But it is common knowledge that heroes and villains exist in all religions. It is not a feature or phenomenon of just one particular community or culture as is being projected today by the Hindutvadis. Today there are attempts to depict all Hindu kings who fought for 'their'

Kingdoms against the Muslim empire as as 'National Heroes': Shivaji, Rana Pratap, Guru Govind Singh. But many of them and their descendants 'allied' with Mughal Rulers e.g. Rana Pratap's son Amar Singh developed a friendship with Jehangir. Guru Govind Singh came to an agreement with Aurangzeb's successor, Bahadur Shah 1. If the Guru was so great as to forget and forgive even at that time, when the wounds were still raw, how can there be any justification to re-open them centuries later under the perverse logic of righting wrongs of the past but in process spreading hatred.

These illustrations clearly indicate that the famous battles of the days of Mughal rule were not battles between Hindus and Muslims; instead the armies which fought each other were of a mixed composition. In fact, there are even instances when Muslim fundamentalists had ganged up against Muslim rulers, and the Mughal ruler then sent an army under the leadership of Hindu rajas to quell such rebellions.

Describing this rebellion Prof. S. Chandra writes, "The rebellion kept the empire distracted for almost two years (1580-81) and Akbar was faced with a very difficult and delicate situation. Due to the mishandling of the situation by local officials Bengal and almost the whole of Bihar passed into the hands of the rebels who proclaimed Mirza Hakim as token ruler. They even got a religious devine to issue a *fatwa*, calling on the faithful to take the field against Akbar. Akbar did not lose his nerve. He despatched a force under Todar Mal against

Bihar and Bengal, and Raja Mann Singh to check the expected attack by Mirza Hakim".

It is well known that Shivaji's father, Shahji, had at one time agreed to fight on the side of the Mughals, although this agreement was soon breached – as the Mughals did not give him the promised *jahagir* around Pune. It is equally well known that Marathas had joined in large numbers the armies of Malik Ambar and other Muslim rulers of the Deccan region.

When the (Hindu) King of Bikaner was defeated by the King of Marwar, his family sought refuge in the court of Shershah Suri. When Shershah Suri defeated Humayun, he sought refuge with the (Hindu) King of Amarkot, Akbar's birthplace. Later in Ayodhya, Nawal Raj died fighting for Nawab Safdarjung.

The above makes it clear that the history of Mughal India is not a history of battles between Hindus and Muslims. Kings fought each other time and again, but generally there were mixed armies on both sides. Loyalty at all levels was for the region, land or for the kingdom and never for any religion in the politics of the past. At times a number of alliances were made between Muslim and Hindu rulers (see Box above) On some occasions individuals who demonstrated great valour and large heartedness happened to be Hindus, on some other occasions they happened to be Muslims. In fact the biggest heroes of the age were those who rose above all sectarian considerations to spread the message of universal love and brotherhood e.g. Sant Kabir, Guru Nanak among others.

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Produced and Published by :
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Malad West, Mumbai 400 064, INDIA

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Design & Layout : Kartiki Desai

Printed by : Omega Offset, 4574, Shetty Gally
Belgaum 590 002. ☎ 0831-424124 / 433429

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