Reimagining the Mughal Emperors Akbar and Aurangzeb in the 21st Century

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A B S T R A C T

The paper focuses on the reigns and policies of the two Mughal Emperors, Akbar and Aurangzeb, and analyses how they have been remembered in the wider social memory. While Akbar is glorified as a 'secular' and 'liberal' leader, Aurangzeb is often dismissed and ridiculed as a 'religious bigot', who tried to impose the Shari'ah law in diversified India. The paper traces and evaluates the construction of these two grand narratives which were initially formed by the British historians in colonial India and then continued by specific nationalist historians of India and Pakistan, after the independence of the two nation-states. By citing some of the most popular misconceptions surrounding the two Mughal Emperors, this study attempts to understand the policies of these two emperors in a wider socio-political narrative and attempts to deconstruct these 'convenient' misinterpretations. Concluding the analysis of how these two emperors are viewed differently in both India and Pakistan, the paper asserts the importance of leaving behind the modern concepts of 'liberal versus conservative' while understanding these emperors and reinforces the practice to understand these historical figures on their own terms.

Keywords: South Asian History, Akbar, Aurangzeb, Mughals, Mughal Emperor, India, Pakistan, South Asia.

INTRODUCTION

Amongst the six major Mughal Emperors, two monarchs that have been of particular interest to the South Asian and Western historians have been Abul Fath Jalal ud-din Muhammad Akbar or popularly known as Akbar and Abul Muzaffar Muhi-ud-din Muhammad Aurangzeb or Aurangzeb. In the collective memory, these two emperors are often presented as the opposites of each other whereby Akbar is portrayed as a secular, liberal, and tolerant leader who led the Mughal Empire to its zenith while Aurangzeb is looked upon as a religious fanatic whose intolerance towards Hindus did not only destroy the syncretic empire that his predecessors had created but also sowed the seeds for the downfall of the Mughal dynasty. The creation of this 'grand narrative' can be traced back to the work of colonial historians who, in an attempt to legitimise their presence in the Indian subcontinent, vilified the Mughal Empire and then exploited the resulting divide between Hindus and Muslims to effectively practice

their policy of 'divide and rule.' The establishment of the nation-states of India and Pakistan took this 'communalisation of history' further as each state searched for its heroes and villains in history. For instance, in India Akbar became the 'idol' Mughal Emperor while Aurangzeb was looked upon as a 'religious bigot' who demolished Hindu temples and imposed Sharia laws throughout his empire (Truschke, 2017). In Pakistan, the figures were the same, however, their perceptions got interchanged, making Akbar a villain who posed a threat towards the sanctity of Islam with his religious philosophy of Din-I-Illahi while Aurangzeb was perceived as a hero who preserved the purity of Islam by reintroducing the Islamic laws (Khaund, 2017: 1). The purpose of this essay is to deconstruct some of the popular perceptions that surround the Mughal Empires of Akbar and Aurangzeb and investigate how the historical narratives surrounding their reigns have been effectively molded by fundamentalists in modern-day India and Pakistan.

POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS SURROUNDING THE POLICIES OF AKBAR AND AURANGZEB

The historiography of colonial historians played a significant role in establishing the popular narratives surrounding the two Mughal Emperors, Akbar, and Aurangzeb. Therefore, to understand the conventional image of Akbar as a 'secular' ruler, it is important to look at how his religious and administrative policies have been deliberately analyzed from a one-dimensional perspective so that he could be portrayed as a liberal monarch. One such perspectival interpretation includes the widely held belief that all of Akbar's religious teachers and guides held unorthodox views who introduced him to the concept of sulh-i-kul, which means 'universal peace' or 'absolute peace' (Khaund, 2017: 2). Owing to this worldview of religious toleration and balance, Akbar started working towards the realization of a truly secular state in which the state would be separated from religious influences. The first major step to achieve this separation was Akbar's issuance of Mazharnama or Infallibility decree in 1579, which gave the royal decree a greater status than the Islamic laws and gave Akbar unlimited powers in both the spiritual and temporal spheres (Ikram, 1964: 159). Akbar also declared himself as Imam-i-Adil or Chief Interpreter of Islamic law. This allowed him to have the final say in all the judicial and religious matters, thereby curtailing the powers of orthodox Sunni Ulemas who had been historically biased towards non-Muslims (Khaund, 2017: 2). Another of Akbar's decisions, which was influenced by the worldview of sulh-i-kul, was the abolition of the jizya in 1564, which is a tax paid by the non-Muslim population of a state (governed by the Islamic law) to their Muslim rulers. This decision was heavily contended by the Ulemas who emphasized strict adherence to the Sharia law. However, Akbar's grand vizier Abul Fazl who was known for his 'liberal' views defended Akbar's decision by engaging with the Ulemas and contended that no distinction could be made between subjects on the grounds of their loyalty or religion (Khaund, 2017: 2). Akbar's liberal outlook towards religion was further strengthened by the discussions that took place in the Ibadat Khana which was established in Fatehpur Sikri in 1575. It was a place where every Friday Muslim theologians, Sufi Shayks, Hindu Brahmins, Jain munis, and later Christian missionaries would meet and discuss the specific teachings of their religions. These debates allowed Akbar to grasp the essence of all these different faiths and the innate oneness that they all shared. These discussions later aided him in the creation of his own religious tradition known as Din-i-Illahi, which was an attempt to combine the different elements and essences that were found in various faiths i.e., a syncretic approach towards Islamic, Jain, Buddhist, and Hindu teachings.

Akbar's attempt to create a 'secular' state can also be seen from his approach towards his administrative affairs and from his multi-ethnic/diverse nobility. To understand how Akbar included Rajputs in his nobility, it is imperative to analyze the mansabdari system that he introduced, whereby a numerical rank was assigned to each officer in imperial service. Each mansabdars' (an official holding a mansab) status, pay, range of official assignments, and titles were defined by his personal rank, known as zat (Richards, 1993: 24). Mansabdars under Akbar consisted of Turanis, Persians, Afghans, and Turks, however, the most important step in the transformation of the Mughal nobility was the influx of Rajput chiefs from 1556-75. Rajputs were given a high status from the very beginning in the Mughal court of Akbar and nobles such as Bhagwan Das and his son/successor Raja Man Singh Kachhwaha of Amber were awarded the status of 5000 mansabdar, the highest rank that any official could hold till the middle of Akbar's reign. By the end of Akbar's reign (1605), Rajputs and other Hindu nobles constituted about 22 percent of those officials who had a mansab of 500 zatand occupied roughly the same numbers for those who held a mansab of 1000 zator above (Khan, 2001: 30). The bond between Mughals and Rajputs was also sealed by marriages between the Emperor and Rajput princesses; oftentimes Rajput chiefs brought dolas themselves to marry the princesses to the members of the Mughal royal family (Zaidi, 1994: 79). A significant way in which Akbar deviated from orthodox Islamic beliefs was through the projection of a monarch as a divine being. This was achieved by Abul Fazl in Akbarnamain which he placed the Mughal Emperor on the top of the hierarchy of things in the world receiving Farr-i-izadi (divine light). In this way, the emperor was portrayed as a figure through which the divine light was disseminated to the earthly subjects and who became a source of spiritual and divine grace for his subjects (Khaund, 2017: 3). These interpretations of Akbar's religious and administrative policies show that despite being true in some respects such as his treatment of Rajput nobles, his

policies have been widely analyzed from a single perspective whereby the wider motivations for his decisions have been conveniently wiped out from the conventional historiography. These wider motivations will be deeply analyzed later in this paper.

Similar to the biased treatment of Akbar by colonial and nationalist historians, Aurangzeb's policies have also been analyzed from a very narrowed lens, which has aided the creation of his image as a religious fanatic who tried implementing Sharia law in his empire and vehemently opposed Hindus, their traditions and their places of worship. Despite being a successful Emperor under whom the Mughal Empire reached its territorial zenith, Aurangzeb is rarely commended for his strong-mindedness, shrewd politics, and administrative practicality that he showed despite being challenged by the uprising of numerous regional powers during his reign (Khaund, 2017: 4). On the contrary, Aurangzeb is often painted as an evil and cruel emperor for his treatment of his father and brothers, especially that of Dara Shikoh after the War of Succession (1657 to 1659). Dara Shikoh, in recent decades, has been hailed as a 'liberal-minded unorthodox' leader who was preferred as an heir to his father's (Shah Jahan) and had all the traits of a great successor/ruler, for his interest in arts and philosophy and his heterodox approach towards religion (Sarkar, 1920: 53). Aurangzeb's decision to execute the heir-apparent, Dara Shikoh, has been conveniently used to label him as an illegitimate leader who claimed the throne as the "Champion of pure Islam" to divert from the tolerant and heretical practices of his brother and his predecessors like Akbar (Khaund, 2017: 4). His decisions to re-impose jizya and pilgrimage tax, ban religious festivals like Holi and Nauroz, abolish practices of Tuladan(tradition of measuring the emperor in gold), and Jharoka darshan (a common practice of addressing the general public from the balcony every morning) and demolish Hindu temples have been widely interpreted as his attempts to ban 'un-Islamic' or Hindu inspired practices, which did not only alienate the Hindu populace such as the Marathas, Jats, and Rajputs but also destroyed the pluralistic fabric of the Mughal Empire that Akbar had introduced and perfected (Sarkar, 1920: 58).

ANALYZING THE AFOREMENTIONED 'MISINTERPRETATIONS' IN A WIDER CONTEXT

Now that we have discussed the popular narrative or rather the 'convenient interpretations' that have led

Akbar to be hailed as a liberal and a secular emperor and Aurangzeb to be looked upon as the black sheep of the Mughal history, it is important to look at the aforementioned actions, policies and defining decisions of both the rulers from a broader perspective and to situate them in their own cultural context, values, and background.

The first step that needs to be taken to ensure that we reach a balanced understanding of both the emperors is to cease the application of these modern binaries of 'liberal vs conservative' or 'secular vs religious' to a 17th Century Mughal India. In this part of the paper, we'll attempt to deconstruct some of the widely accepted notions that surround both of these Mughal figures. The first notion that needs to be deconstructed is the idea that Akbar abolished the pilgrimage and jizya tax in 1562 and 1564 respectively because he adhered to the principles of sulh-i-kul, which prevented him from carrying on such discriminatory policies as he was an equal leader for all his subjects. In order to understand why Akbar's unorthodox worldview of sulh-i-kul the main reason for the abolition of these taxes was not, we need to shed light on the fact that there are numerous indications in historical accounts of Akbar to believe that he started his rule as a devout, orthodox Muslim who had great reverence for orthodox theologians of the court like Makhdum-ul-Mulk and Shaikh Abdul Nabi (Ikram, 1964: 156). S.M Ikram, in his book, Muslim Civilization in India contends that Ibadat Khana was initially established by Akbar out of sincere religious zeal. However, the hateful conduct of Muslim theologians Makhdum-ul-Mulk and Shaikh Abdul Nabi towards each other during these debates eventually drove Akbar out of his orthodoxy. Subsequently, the event that prompted Akbar to finally distance himself from these Ulemas was when Shaikh Abdul Nabi ordered the execution of a rich Brahman, who had constructed a temple by forcibly taking possession of building materials reserved for the construction of a mosque (Ikram, 1964: 158). This incident led Akbar to not only question the Shaikh's decision but also forced him to analyze the power and influence that such Ulemas held in their hands. Two years later, in 1579, this self-questioning is what led Akbar to release the 'Mazharnama' or the 'Infallibility decree' thereby challenging the notion that this decree was a step taken by Akbar in the pursuit of establishing a secular state (Ikram, 1964: 158-59). This brief explanation allows us to understand why sulh-i-kul

could have never been the sole reason for Akbar's ban on jizya as up until that point Akbar was still under the influence of the aforementioned orthodox theologians. Rather, this decision was one of the many politically incentivized moves that Akbar had taken to forge an alliance with the Rajput chiefs in order to persuade them to join his nobility as he wanted to curtail the influence and authority of Afghan nobles; a process which had been started by Humayun back in 1555 when he was trying to re-establish his rule in Delhi (Khan, 2001: 22).

The aforementioned strategic alliance that Akbar established with the Rajputs allows us to deconstruct some of the widely accepted notions surrounding his administrative policies. Akbar's decision to include Rajput chiefs in his nobility was not motivated by his desire to create a secular state but rather by his fixed goal to reduce the relative numbers and influence of his Central Asian nobles as they constituted a threat towards his rule. The small group of fifty-one nobles who returned to India with Humayun in 1555 were all foreign-born Muslims, out of which twenty-seven were from Central Asia who belonged to the Chagatai Turkish or Uzbek Central Asian clans. Although Uzbek nobles had returned to India with Humayun, their allegiance to the Timurids was not strong as they traced their lineage back to one of Babur's nemesis, Shaiban (Richards, 1993: 17). Moreover, being accustomed to a more egalitarian political tradition, the Uzbek's resented Akbar's imperious ruling style and were determined to test the young ruler as he established himself. This friction reached its culmination with the Uzbek Revolt in 1564, which despite being squashed by Akbar in the end, left him with the constant threat of being replaced by his half-brother, Mirza Muhammad Hakim (Richards, 1993: 17-18). Thereby, in an attempt to reduce this threat and to meet the needs of his enlarging empire, Akbar initially commenced the process of vigorously recruiting Shi'ite Persians into the service, who by 1580 numbered forty-seven as opposed to the Chaghatai and Uzbek Turanis who numbered forty-eight in the royal nobility. It was after this point that Akbar shifted his focus towards the recruitment of Indian Muslims into the service, which largely consisted of Afghans at that time. However, in the face of continued hostility and resistance by the Afghans in the east, Akbar was left with no choice but to exclude them and recruit Hindu Rajput leaders in his nobility, who along with few other non-Rajput Hindus numbered forty-three members of the nobility by 1580 (Richards,

1993: 21). Over the next two decades, Akbar created a diffused political system heavily based on paternal kinship and marriage alliances. As mentioned before, Akbar maintained matrimonial relations with the Rajputs as he did with the Turanis, Persian, and Shaikhzada families, however, the real intention behind such relations was to establish a strong bond with these important zamindars. Baburnamaand Akbarnama mention such marriages, which were contracted with the girls of local zamindars families 'to soothe the mind' of these zamindars. Therefore, Akbar's marriages with Rajput princesses, such as that with Raja Bharmal's daughter in 1562, were not necessarily because of his liberal or secular approach towards such matters but mainly because of their strategic importance for his rule (Zaidi, 1994: 79).

In modern times, Aurangzeb has been effectively portrayed as the 'black sheep' of the Mughal dynasty due to these same convenient misinterpretations. Therefore, it is imperative for us to analyze his religious and administrative policies in their own historical, cultural and social context in order to arrive at a more historically correct and holistic understanding of this 'disgraced' figure. Aurangzeb, like every other Mughal Emperor, was born a Muslim and practiced his inherited religion throughout his life. Although it is a well-established fact that Aurangzeb was more pious than his imperial predecessors, his approach towards his inherited religion was hardly puritanical as he consulted with prominent Hindu religious figures and Sufi's throughout his life (Truschke, 2017). Aurangzeb had a paternalistic attitude towards the subjects living under his regime and considered it his responsibility to not only ensure their physical well-being but also their 'moral' well-being. In an attempt to portray himself as a 'moral leader' Aurangzeb depended on the Islamic ideas of morality and justice, however, this did not mean that his moral principles were different for Muslims and Hindus. Rather, Aurangzeb would prescribe similar behavior for all his subjects regardless of their religion and would apply analogous principles even when addressing issues that were specific to one religious group (Truschke, 2017). The most common type of state policies that Aurangzeb used to promote such 'morality' included bans or restrictions on alcohol, opium, prostitution, gambling, and public celebration of religious festivals (Truschke, 2017). This analysis of Aurangzeb's moral character shows that his decision to

ban such activities was not motivated by a desire to implement Islamic law, as is widely believed, but rather by a desire to preserve the ethical character of his subjects.

In addition to this, some of the other popular and factual misconceptions that need to be addressed revolve around the nature of the limitations that Aurangzeb imposed on the public observation of religious festivals and holidays, claims of widespread conversion under his supervision, and a ban on the composition of music and other literary works within his empire. Firstly, the decision taken by Aurangzeb in the eighth year of his reign to constraint the widely celebrated religious festivals did not only include Hindu festivities of Holi and Diwali but also included major Muslim holidays and commemorations of Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, and Muharrum (Truschke, 2017). These restrictions were partly placed because of Aurangzeb's distaste for such exuberant celebrations and partly because of public safety concerns. It is well-reported that religious festivals were hazardous affairs in Medieval India and would often result in chaotic law and order situations. Foreign travel accounts are replete with descriptions that corroborate these claims. For instance, a French traveler named Jean de Thevenot reported that Muharram commemorations in 1666-67's Golconda were so wild that 'violence was standard' (Truschke, 2017). Hence, as mentioned above, these bans had nothing to do with the un-Islamic nature of such festivals. The second claim regarding a state-sponsored conversion under Aurangzeb isn't historically correct because if any such policy was introduced by him, then any success in its achievement should have been recorded by the contemporary chroniclers of that time. The only occasional conversions that did take place were those of local zamindars or petty state employees who converted expecting preferential treatment or job positions, which were only restricted for Muslims such as that of a jizya tax collector (Truschke, 2017). Similarly, the claims regarding Aurangzeb's ban on music throughout the empire have also been historically misunderstood. He only limited certain types of music within his own court, which was more a matter of personal renunciation because of his religious convictions and was not forced upon other connoisseurs (Brown, 2007: 102). It is reported that several prominent nobles of Aurangzeb actively patronized musicians and more musical treatises were composed in

Aurangzeb's period than in the period of his predecessors (Chettry, 2018: 49). As far as the composition of literary works such as poems is concerned, they were never banned during Aurangzeb's period as he enjoyed satirical poetry (a popular genre at that time) in his court.

ABOLITION OF JIZYA AND THE INSTANCES OF TEMPLE DESECRATIONS UNDER AURANGZEB'S RULE
Before we conclude our discussion on Aurangzeb, it is important to analyze and challenge two specific claims that have been used by colonial and nationalist Indian historians to successfully paint Aurangzeb as a religious bigot in popular memory. The first claim revolves around Aurangzeb's policy to re-introduce jizya in 1679, which was abolished by his predecessor, Akbar. Aurangzeb, like earlier Mughal rulers, clashed with the Ulemas, especially in their role as qazis (Muslim judges) throughout his reign (Truschke, 2017). The ulama were a key component in the balance of Mughal power even during Akbar's reign, however, this did not mean that they were above the emperor's scrutiny as Akbar openly ridiculed the more uptight and critical members of the ulama class. Aurangzeb was no different than Akbar in this regard and ensured the displacement (exile) of certain problematic members of the ulama class, such as that of Shah Jehan's chief qazi, Abdul Wahab. However, when possible, Aurangzeb also took a softer approach of placating the ulama, especially by providing them with income (Truschke, 2017: 74). Owing to this relationship between Aurangzeb and the Ulemas, historians believe that the decision to re-impose jizya was Aurangzeb's attempt to improve his reputation amongst the ulama class, especially the ones who were suspicious of the religious sincerity of kings. The money that was obtained as a part of jizya was deposited in a separate account called the khazanah-i-jizya, which was then given as a charity to the members of the learned class and theologians. The officials who were responsible for the collections of jizya and khazanah-i-jizya were all staffed from the ulema class. This system didn't only appease these Ulemas with a source of income but also aided Aurangzeb in maintaining his public persona of a Mughal leader who ruled according to the teachings of Sharia (Chettry, 2018: 49). The second reason that is often cited by historians for the re-imposition of jizya focuses on the political developments that were taking place in 1679. Aurangzeb imposed jizya, a whole 22 years after he

ascended the throne, which raises a significant question that if Aurangzeb was really concerned about upholding the teachings of the Islamic law, and then why did he not take this decision earlier in his rule? Historians point out that during 1679, Aurangzeb was facing a myriad of political problems, which included the rebellious behavior of Sikhs in areas around Punjab along with a conflict with the Rathore that had only intensified over the years. Similarly, the Deccan region also posed a significant challenge to Aurangzeb's rule as the Marathas under Shivaji would constantly harass the Mughal army and encroach on the Mughal territories. Lastly, to make matters worse, Aurangzeb's policy of shoring up the Bijapur and Golconda state against the Marathas severely backfired as these states became more willing to ally with Shivaji than with the Mughal state. Therefore, in an attempt to gather the support of his Muslim subjects during such political disruption, Aurangzeb strategically reverted to the rhetoric of an orthodox state by reimposing jizya (Chettry, 2018: 51). This analysis of wider social and political contexts proves that Aurangzeb re-introduced jizya so that he could appease the ulama class and gather the support of their Muslim followers as it was one of the major political requirements of that time.

The second claim that has been advanced by nationalist historians like Jadunath Sarkar and S.R. Sharma to prove Aurangzeb's bigotry and anti-Hindi nature revolve around the instances of temple desecrations. Aurangzeb's order to destroy the Vishvanatha Temple in Benaras in 1669 and the Keshava Deva Temple in Mathura in 1670 are often presented as evidence for such claims. Although, none of these pieces of evidence is incorrect; the underlying motivation for these events have been largely misunderstood and require a wider contextual analysis. To start this analysis, we need to understand that the events of temple desecration were a very politically motivated action in the context of pre-modern India that had been in practice even before the advent of Islam into India. Royal Temples, in pre-modern India, were highly charged political institutions as they were a visual expression of a king's claims to legitimate authority (Eaton, 2019: 39). These royal temples housed the state deity's image, usuallyin the form of a Siva or Vishnu, which expressed the sovereignty of the king thereby allowing such temples to serve as sites where kingship was created, legitimized and often revitalized (Chettry, 2018: 51). However, these magnificent and elaborate structures also held great risks for their royal patrons as the enemy kings who wanted to show their power would primarily target the most visible sign of a king's sovereignty - his temple (Eaton, 2019: 39). Keeping this historical context in mind, it is important to understand that Aurangzeb's decision to desecrate temples followed the same political tradition of pre-modern India whereby these Hindu temples were considered as legitimate targets of punitive state action. Vishvanath Templehad been brought down due to political concerns.   Jai Singh, the Rajput chieftain from Amer, was suspected by Aurangzeb to have played a role in the fleeing of Shivaji and his son Sambhaji from the Mughal court in 1666. Similarly, the Kesha Dava Temple in Mathura was also destroyed due to layered political reasons as Mathura Brahmins were also suspected to have assisted Shivaji in his flight from Agra. Moreover, the Jat uprising in the region in 1669-70 had caused Mughal's heavy casualties thereby acting as another immediate reason for Aurangzeb's decision (Truschke, 2017). Throughout his reign, Aurangzeb's default policy was to ensure the well-being of Hindu religious institutions and places of worship. Aurangzeb, as mentioned above, was highly derived by his notions of justice, which in most cases prompted him to extend state security to Hindu Temples and to provide his non-Muslims subjects with enough freedom to exercise their own religion. However, it is also true that state interests often constrained religious freedom in Mughal India, and Aurangzeb ensured that religious institutions and leaders considered to be immoral or seditious faced the consequences of their actions. In a wider context, there was no attempt made by Aurangzeb to destroy Hindu Temples on a large scale as he understood the extreme nature of temple destruction and so used it sparingly (Truschke, 2017).

NATIONALIZATION OF HISTORY IN MODERN-DAY INDIA AND PAKISTAN

Since the establishment of the nation-states of India and Pakistan, the attempts to approach history on their own terms have further diminished whereby historical figures in Mughal India have been constantly misinterpreted to fit the wider nationalist narratives and to legitimize the existence of these nation-states. In recent decades, certain saffronist elements have effectively tried to 'communalize' history in India whereby historical facts have been deliberately

misrepresented to create communal divisions within the population. Hindu nationalist organizations like RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and its political wing BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) have effectively exploited these communal divisions for their political advantage, which even allowed them to win the national elections in 2014 and 2019. Surprisingly, a major trend that can be noticed after this widespread acceptance of the Hindutva ideology by the masses concerns the treatment of the Mughal rulers. Mughal rulers like Akbar who were once hailed for their 'secular' approach by nationalist historians like Jawaharlal Nehru have been effectively compartmentalized in the same category as rulers like Aurangzeb. Instead of being depicted as opposites of each other and seen from the traditional distinctions of liberal vs conservative, the saffronization of history has conveniently placed both rulers in the same category whereby they are seen as any other Muslim king who sought to destroy the Hindu roots of Ancient India. Furthermore, in their attempt to 'saffronize' history, the fundamentalist BJP is not only trying to erase India's Mughal legacy from its landscape but also from its history books. For Instance, in May of 2015, several street signs in New Delhi carrying Muslim names, including the Aurangzeb Road, which was named after the sixth Mughal Emperor, were painted black by mobs of Shiv Sena Hindustan, a right-wing Hindu organization (Ahmad, 2018). Later, in that year, the ruling BJP party officially changed the name of the Aurangzeb Road to APJ Abdul Kalam, who served as the 11th President of India from 2002 to 2007. However, critics claim that this change wasn't necessarily done to honor the achievements of Mr. APJ Abdul Kalam as an ex-president, but rather to honor his support for the BJP party over the years. In October of 2018, the officials of the ruling BJP decided to change the names of the city Allahabad to Prayagrajas the city was founded by the Mughals. The decision to implement these orders even though this city was founded by none other than the hailed 'secular' ruler Akbar further proves that the mainstream representatives of Hindutva ideology have effectively vilified the entire Mughal past of India. This growing trend of changing names of cities, airports, and roads shows that the ruling BJP party is making consistent efforts to increase the prominence of Hindu symbols in India without realizing the long-term consequences that it might have for a nation that is as diverse as India.

The attempts to saffronize education by the Modi government are evident from the implementation of policies such as the National Education Policy (NEP) which was introduced in 2020 and has been the first major make-over of India's educational policy since 1986 except for a few modifications that took place in 1992. This new educational policy was presented as a reform that would make India ready for the 21st Century and in the words of Narendra Modi make India 'future ready' (Athreya & Haaften, 2020). However, critics argue that this couldn't be any further from the truth as they claim that this policy is yet another attempt by the BJP and its ideological wing RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) to relegate India to a mythical past of Hindu glory. Under this new education policy, a significant emphasis has been given to India's ancient and modern history, whilst ignoring the Medieval period as it includes the Mughal Era. Recently, the BJP government even removed the works of renowned Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore and former President Dr. S. Radhkrishnan from the English syllabus of Classes 10 and 12 in the states of Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh (Ruby, 2021). Moreover, the new history syllabus that was drafted by the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India earlier in March is yet another evidence of this process of 'saffronisation'. Amongst the readings suggested for papers, works by prominent historians such as Irfan Habib's have been replaced by the works of little-known authors - some of whom are considered to be 'pro-Sangh'. All of these numerous instances are evidence of the attempts in which the history of India has been effectively communalized.

In Pakistan, a similar approach has been taken towards these two historical figures whereby their actions have been effectively molded to fit a certain nationalist narrative. Just like in India, this narrative has been widely spread through educational curriculums and state-approved history textbooks, and here again, the two Mughal emperors Aurangzeb and Akbar are portrayed as opposites of each other. However, in Pakistan, Aurangzeb has taken the image of an orthodox and pious Muslim who sewed prayer caps and copied the Quran for his livelihood. Akbar, on the other hand, is seen as 'anti-Islamic' for his attempts to combine the salient features of Islam and Hinduism in his religious philosophy of Din-i-Illahi. However, an important concern that should be pointed out with the interpretation of Akbar's new religious policy is that it has been significantly misunderstood in both India and

Pakistan due to the 'mischief' of historians and translators like Henry Blochmann. Blochmann's translation of Ain-i-Akbari heavily relies on the accounts of Abd al-Qadir Badayuni who had always been critical of Akbar's administrative measures and religious conduct. As a result, numerous historians have paid scant attention to Abul Fazl's informative sections on Akbar's religious approach contained in his Akbar-Nama and Ain-i-Akbari (Ikram, 1964: 161-62). Blochmann habitually converts the expressions of iradatand muridi (discipleship), used by Abul Fazl and Badayuni respectively, as 'divine faith' thereby portraying a religious order (or even a bond of loyalty) into a new religion (Ikram, 1964: 161). Moreover, he also translates the expression ain-i-iradatgazinan, which originally means 'rules for the royal disciples,' as the 'principles of divine faith,' and gives the subsection the heading 'ordinances of the divine faith,' although no such heading exists in the original text (Ikram, 1964: 161). These misinterpretations by colonial historians have effectively led masses on both sides of the border to not only misunderstand Akbar's Din-i-Illahi but also numerous other policies of the entire Mughal era. In this regard, we can also see that most of the misinterpreted works were a product of India's colonial era, which did not only help them to legitimize their presence in a Mughal India but later also allowed the two states of India and Pakistan to legitimize their creation, especially on religious and communal grounds.

CONCLUSION

This paper has made an attempt to show that historical figures like that of Akbar and Aurangzeb can only be historically understood when we are ready to know about them in their own context. By deconstructing several claims about these two Mughal figures that have been ingrained in our social memory through botched colonial translations and narrative-based interpretations, this paper shows that when analyzed from a wider perspective, these figures appear in a different light. When narratives are set aside and an attempt is made to understand history for its own sake, the underlying motivations of historical figures appear to be more humanistic. As a concluding remark, one should always keep the following words by EH Carr in his mind while examining the historicity of any historical figure - "History consists of a corpus of ascertained facts. The facts are available to the historian in documents,

inscriptions, and so on, like fish in the fishmonger's slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him" (Carr, 1961: 9).

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