From Aurangzeb to Colonial Policy: Temple Desecration and Popular Perception

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation looks at temple desecration during the Mughal period, particularly under Aurangzeb, and during the colonial era. It emphasizes political, economic, and administrative contexts rather than focusing only on religion. The study argues that temple desecration should not be seen just as an act of religious hostility. It must be understood through various interconnected factors like power, sovereignty, urban changes, and regional politics. The first section examines temple desecration under the Mughals, especially during Aurangzeb's reign, with a focus on Mathura, Banaras, and the Deccan. It shows that the destruction of temples in these areas was influenced by religion, political assertion, administrative strategies, and the economic role of temples. The study also highlights that the Mughal state, including Aurangzeb, provided support and land grants to various temples while many temples continued to operate during his time. This reflects the complicated, dual nature of Aurangzeb's policies rather than a simple, one-sided story. The second section addresses temple destruction during the colonial period, especially after 1857, a topic that has often been overlooked. It examines how the British impacted temples through urban planning policies, land acquisition, administrative changes, and municipal improvement projects. Unlike the more direct actions related to certain medieval conflicts, colonial interventions often happened through bureaucratic means and the language of clearance and development. The final section explores popular perceptions and collective memory of these events today. It studies how local communities remember temple desecration and how modern media, such as television, cinema, and social media, have shaped and amplified selective historical narratives. The dissertation concludes that temple desecration was a complex historical occurrence influenced by political authority, administrative processes, economic interests, geography, and regional conditions, rather than religion alone.

Keywords: temple desecration, Aurangzeb, colonial period, popular perception, sacred spaces.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach to analyse the historical, perception and political dimensions of temple desecration. The methodology integrates primary and secondary sources to construct a nuanced narrative of the temples and their destructions. Primary sources: key Mughal era chronicles and biographies such as Maasir-i-Alamgiri, inscriptions and farmans of the time period of Aurangzeb (such as land confiscations, temple grants), Newspaper (Akhbarat-i-Darbar-i-Mu'alla), European traveller's accounts such as of Bernier, Tavernier and Portuguese and Jesuits records and accounts for 18th century interpretations; for 19th-20th century, there are Imperial Gazetteers, marine records and factory companies in India, missionary ethnographies, Supreme court judgements, laws and regulations from British East India Company, Early Archaeological Survey Investigation reports. Secondary sources: scholarly works and books such as of Richard Eaton, Muzaffar Alam, Audrey Truschke, Satish Chandra, Bernard Cohn, Zahiruddin Faruki, Jadunath Sarkar and peer-reviewed journal articles. Integrated Framework: This study utilizes a comparative-historical method of tracing temple desecration in the three contexts: Mughal imperial strategy, and colonial reconfigurations. Utilizing case studies and dialogic methods towards debates in historiography, the dissertation aims to abandon communal dichotomies and place temple desecration within broader politics of power, legitimacy, and memory.

INTRODUCTION AND LITERTAURE REVIEW

"Sacred spaces are meant to be inviolable. Yet they are among the first to be targeted during the political crisis."

A question often raised is that of reasons why temples and shrines were often seized or destroyed by rulers or governments during periods of political instability, wars, and economic decline in ancient times. The answer to this question is quite simple. Temples were often quite politically and economically influential as sacred places of worship. Temples, monasteries, mosques, and shrines often accumulated wealth and were often associated with power.

- Landed wealth
- Administrative authority
- Cultural legitimacy
- Ritual power tied to kinship

For all of the above reasons, sacred institutions have remained in the supervision and control of the ruling powers since ancient times, whether in India, Southeast Asia (including Cambodia, Malaya, Japan, and Thailand), the Middle East, or Europe. Temples and shrines, for that matter, have therefore been the most common targets during periods of political transition, conflict, and economic turbulences. This can be attributed to the fact that **"the necessity inherent in the above observation is the reality that lies behind all such instances."**

The desecration of places of worship like temples and shrines has possibly been seen as a strange occurrence uniquely particular to India or as an outcome of religious bigotry and hatred. Nevertheless, an exploration into history unfolds a far more complex and nuanced tale. Temples and shrines are a reflection of identity, and their desecration has probably occurred for a variety of political, social, and strategic purposes. The desecration of temples or shrines generally carries a variety of political implications in the Indian subcontinent. The desecration of temples is mainly invoked for political purposes, like community consolidation, and these tales have possibly gained currency and are drawing references even in modern politics, even while advancing causes like election politics, polarization, and heritage sites conservation. The application and references to history appears to have a strong potential for undermining the integrity of civil society through non-secular ideologies and the development of hate against a particular section of citizens and must hence be recognized as a tool that is being used primarily as a means to an end and needs to be tested and explored further through an analysis of these sets of history and narratives with reference to facts and reality.

The simplest yet the most important question arises is **"what is desecration?"** it does have different meaning for different parties. It is because for some it represents the actual demolition of the shrines or temples for the exertion of power over others, such as Aurangzeb, who was the Mughal Emperor, and in the 18th Century he demolished the Kashi Vishwanath Temple for certain reasons.[1] For others it might be symbolic possession, as in cases when the British chose to keep certain shrines untouched for themselves, failing to understand the surreal significance behind them, such as the Lal Jain Mandir opposite the Red Fort, etc.[2] There were some cases of reusing and adapting, that means changing one place into other, such as from the accounts in history, in the olden days, a certain shrine in the Islamic world was changed to a mosque after the Arab conquest.[3]

This current dissertation argues that such an act of destroying temples cannot be viewed solely from a religious perspective but rather should also embrace political, strategic, punitive, symbolic, administrative, and urban-planning viewpoints. Throughout this current dissertation, several definitions are proposed that illustrate such diverse but conceptually different perspectives. Notable among these are: Iconoclasm, where icons or images are so destroyed or damaged due to religious or ideological reasons; Ritual Defilement, where there is deliberate indulgence in the degradation or damaging of cultural or religious icons or images that are invaluable to society; Political Punishment, where political leaders indulge in such acts of destruction with a punitive motive on those

[1] Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017)
[2] David A. Johnson, *New Delhi: The Last Imperial City* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
[3] Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007)

perceived to be threats to their power or ideology; and lastly, Urban Improvement and Restructuring, which engages colonial interventions, migrations, and governmental policies. By so doing, this current dissertation seeks to achieve a different and pervasive definition of such acts of desecration.

These categories carry out different meanings rather than same viewing lens. For instance, the destruction of shrines near Kashmere Gate, Red Fort and Chandini Chowk, is rarely seen as the destruction by some historians rather it is seen as the Urban Improvement or Restructuring during the Making of Delhi.[4] Same as the shrines, monasteries' destruction by Marathas during the wartime between Maratha and Mysore is seen as the Wartime rivalry conflict.[5] Whereas the temple desecration by Aurangzeb, the Mughal Emperor is seen as the Iconoclasm, according to the British historiography, which is seen as the act of violation of sacred spaces which leads to the hurting of religious sentiments.

Historians of Colonial rule like James Mill, H. M. Elliot, and John Dowson focused mainly on the fact that the act of desecrating temples was carried out with specific intent to violate a particular religion. Most significantly, this portrayal was linked with the British image of being protectors of the Hindu population and their places of worship. Similarly, Hindu nationalists like Jadunath Sarkar and Sita Ram Goel focused on the fact that religious intolerance itself was an act of desecration of temples, but they did not agree with the British protection of temples and religious places. Nationalist historians like S. A. A. Rizvi and Zakir Husain sought to reinterpret the colonial accounts by emphasizing the aspect of desecration of temples as an exercise of political authority rather than a religious one. Marxist historians like Richard Eaton, Satish Chandra, Audrey Truschke, and the broader revisionist tradition have tried to look at the issue from another angle by stressing the symbolic nature of the exercise of state authority, warfare, and supremacy that is represented here. Finally, Historians like William Dalrymple, Richard H. Davis, and Narayani Gupta have highlighted the aspect of the desecration or transformation of sacred spaces in the context of colonial rule, especially as far as the remaking of Delhi in the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857 is concerned.

There are historical gaps which always and only looks in the single-repeated site in the history which is, it is always religion-driven narratives, for example in the case of destruction of Kashi Vishvanath Temple, Varanasi (Banaras), there has been an underuse of the primary and vernacular sources, whereas focus on the colonial historiography which gives the biased view of temple desecration and neglection in the study of other regional power's shrines desecration for example, under Maratha's shrines destruction in Sringeri during the Maratha-Mysore war[6], British colonial desecration in the Making of Delhi.[7] There is no mention of other ancient historical records for reference of religious sites destruction like in Thailand, Cambodia, Japan and Great Arab. This study challenges the insulations created by the historiography especially through the colonial historiography.

This research is mainly concerned with areas that have generally not been thoroughly explored, especially in terms of a strict application and utilization of vernacular sources. Some of these sources include akhbārs, specifically those related to the reigns of Aurangzeb, along with gazetteers related to the eras controlled by the East India Company and the Crown. Additionally, this research looks into cases related to instances of desecration of shrines carried out by the East India Company, and the Crown, in comparison to other instances of the desecration of sacred shrines in India under previous regimes, as well as instances in other countries such as Japan, Cambodia, Thailand, and the Islamic world. By this method, this research aims to counter some of the existing biases, not just of history, but of lay perceptions as well, which have been shaped largely through colonial historiography that views desecration of temples/shrines as an act of religion, not through any form of political calculi, administrative, or expansionist intent.

[4] Narayani Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires, 1803–1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981)
[5] William Kirkpatrick, ed. and trans., *Select Letters of Tippoo Sultan to Various Public Functionaries* (London: Black, Parry, and Kingsbury, 1811)
[6] *Poona Residency Correspondence*, vol. 3, *The Allies' War with Tipu Sultan, 1790–1793*, ed. N. B. Ray (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1937)
[7] Charles John Griffiths, *A Narrative of the Siege of Delhi: With an Account of the Mutiny at Ferozepore in 1857*, ed. Henry John Yonge (London: John Murray, 1910)

Generally speaking, in contemporary popular discourses that prominently feature the issue in contemporary Indian public discourse, the issue of temple and shrine desecration appears to have religious roots. Nevertheless, such an approach to understanding the issue represents an overly simplistic understanding of the historical complexities of the issue. When the historical and geographic scope of the issue of temple and shrine desecration is expanded to incorporate the regions of Southeast Asia, Europe, and the Middle East in the period of the Great Arab Conquests, the manner in which it is understood changes considerably. Indeed, across pre-modern Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, sacred spaces often materialized as principal targets in a slew of claims to authority and power in times of turmoil or transition. Usually, patronage and destruction of religious sites formed complementary strategies of governance and domination resorted to by rulers. In this paper, the dynamics are explored with the help of certain case studies drawn from four major regions: Cambodia, Thailand, the Islamic world-with particular reference to the Arab conquests-and Japan.

Reference 1-

As far as Cambodia is concerned, after the shift in power from the Cham Dynasty of Indrapura in 875, the ruler of the dynasty, Indravarman (II), on ascension to the throne, built an enormous Buddhist edifice that marked the emergence of Mahayana Buddhism in Champa, later known as the Buddhist remains of Dong-Duong to the southeast of Mi-son.[8] The earlier ruler of Cambodia, Jayavarman VIII, in 1295, endowed a new temple (known as the Mangalartha in Angkor Thom) with the villages, workers, and dedicated it to the Shaivite scholar, Jayamangalartha. This was the only important building to be built during his reign; nevertheless, he contributed extensively to enhancing the appearance of other structures that had been constructed before, as well as desecrating the Buddhist monuments of his predecessors.[9]

The period of c.1177-1181, involved the sack of Angkor by Chams Dynasty, during which many Khmer religious sites were plundered and destroyed by them. Later in the years, Jayavarman VII established the Buddhist Cults in the Hindu dominated society in Cambodia. This paved way for the incorporation of numerous Buddhist idols and stripping off of Hindu idols in order to prove Buddhist supremacy over the Hindu supremacy. Looting of the temple during the war took place where gold, silver, etc. were destroyed.[10]

This case study shows the details of the temple lootings and destruction during the wartime and transition of power, i.e., from one dynasty to another dynasty. In the Khmer Empire of Cambodia, successive kings altered, defaced, or rededicated Hindu and Buddhist temples depending upon their political agendas.[11]



Figure 1: Temple attacked by Thai army of Cambodia https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501811278/thai-attacks-on-ancient-khmer-temples-assault-on-heritage/

Reference 2-

In the case of Thailand, it shows the history of Ayutthaya or Siam, where one province, Ayutthaya was changed as capital to another new province, Sukhothai to another province, which is now the capital of Thailand,

[8] George Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, ed. Walter F. Vella, trans. Susan Brown Cowing (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968), 123
[9] Charles Higham, *The Civilization of Angkor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 133
[10] Thomas S. Maxwell, "The Stele Inscription of Preah Khan, Angkor," *Udaya, Journal of Khmer Studies* 8 (2007), 77, 82, 101
[11] Charles Higham, *The Civilization of Angkor* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001)

Bangkok. European travellers in the 16th and 17th century, placed Ayutthaya or Siam amongst the powerful province in Asia with China and India. In their accounts, it shows that the province of Ayutthaya was reckoned with lot of Gold in the temple treasuries. But in 1767, Ayutthaya was destroyed by the Burmese armies.[12] Not much of the accounts were recorded because it was somewhere saved from being colonialised like India but some accounts such as the Royal Chronicle of Thailand, mentions about the destruction done by the Burmese Armies. A lot of historical records were lost and some not recorded. There has been a little mention about the conversions into Christianity in the province of Siam, Thailand.[13]

Some records cannot be reliable as laws cannot be dated, monuments were destroyed by later rulers, and so on. These problems are no different from those with historical sources. Another thing that is observed is the destruction of Wat Mahathat, which is an important royal temple, during the siege of 1767. King Taksin repaired the temples that had been destroyed in 1767.[14] These records in detail were somewhere lost during the Burmese attack and crisis.

This case study shows how there was the transition of the capitals, i.e., from Ayutthaya to Sukhothai to Bangkok, the then and now capital of Thailand. This also shows the less but some records of how the shrines/temples were targeted during the political rivalry and wartime, which shows that the temples and shrines were not only destructed due to religious actions but also due to political rivalry and wartime.



Figure 2: Vishnu idol destroyed by Cambodian army in Thailand https://world.thaipbs.or.th/

Reference 3-

The case of Islamic world in Syria and Iraq, after the Arab Invasion/Conquest in ca. A.D. 570-632, explains the view which undertook a careful examination of the social and political organization in the Arabian Peninsula on the eve of Islam and at the ways in which the rise of Islam affected the realities of the Arabian life. This case shows about the Islamic Conquest and Arab migration- which led to the transition of power-leading to the destruction of the temples and shrines and people migrating of Arab-speaking and some nomads from one part of Arabian Peninsula into new areas within the domains conquered by Islamic state, and their settlement there.

During the migration and settlements in Syria, some cases mention about the Arabian Muslims, who came to Syria, led to the vacancy of considerable number of houses and Byzantine Orthodox Churches, and dominated the Byzantine local administration and economic resources with the arrival of Arabian Muslims. Some texts note about the vacant spaces led to the conversion of Houses and Churches into Muslim Prayer-rooms. However, it

[12] Richard D. Cushman, trans., *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, ed. David K. Wyatt (Bangkok: Siam Society, 2000)
[13] Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Ayutthaya: Siam's Greatest Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 9
[14] Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, *A History of Ayutthaya: Siam's Greatest Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 217, 512

does not mean that at times, the Muslim Arabs were responsible for the destruction of the orthodox churches but rather formulated a pact that there should never be any new construction of churches in Syria.[15]

Understanding the Arab Conquest in 17th and 18th centuries is based on the written and archaeological accounts. Sources mention about that there no single town or village, which was left without destruction or burning and it all talk about the Arab conquests in the world of Syria and Iraq. Later in the texts, it mentions about how the Umar ordered to build a new mosque for the Caliph, in the place of the rock on which Herod's temple stood once. During the arrival of them, the men left the town carrying their precious and portable goods with their women and children. There were conversion of the places and churches, as mentioned earlier, into mosques but the images and statues were intact and placed in the mosques and they prayed behind those pieces. Nor were times always easy for the Christians and their friends, as some believed that conversion to Islam was necessary, and this resulted in the shutting down of the temple of fire worship and the erection of mosques on the Temple Rocks.[16]

The destruction done by them was rare but this case study shows about the destruction of the temples and churches by the Arab Conquests.

Reference 4-

The case of Japan, shows the destruction of Buddhist statues and structure during the early Meiji period (late 1860s) during the movement to separate Shinto and Buddhism (shinbutsu bunri). It discusses about the 'Restoration of Shinto' and the growing of the anti-foreignism that gave rise to the removal of the "foreign" elements of Buddhism from the Shinto traditions. The passage also talks about the 'Great Promulgation Campaign' wherein Buddhism's rituals were removed from the Shinto shrines and emphasis was placed on following the traditions of Shinto over those of Buddhism.[17]

The text further goes on to explain that there was another campaign known as the 'Echizen Goho Ikki' of 1870 and a campaign of 1867 conducted by Fukuba Bisei, where many temples were closed down and eradicated, and property owned by temples was destroyed, as Buddhist idols were removed from the shrines to cleanse them.[18] The reading term from Japanese text for this campaign of separation and removal of Buddhist statues from Shinto is Haibustu Kishaku. It focuses on the bureaucratic and ideological ideas of the Ministry of Divines from the removal and seizure of the temple lands.

In the later texts of Japan, there is a detailed mentioning of the proper number of the elements and temples removed from the Shinto traditions, such as, elimination of 4,500 Buddhist temples and halls, and replacing with the Shinto-based systems. It also mentions about the banning of the Buddhist rituals in the society of Shinto rituals.[19] It shows the religious as well as the political rivalry and transition of power.

Country	Year	Ruler	Temple/Shrine Desecrated	Reason
Cambodia	• c. 857 • c.1177-1181 • c. 1295	• Indravarman (II) • Chams Dynasty • Jayavaraman (VIII)	• Buddhist ruins of Dong-Duong south-east of Mi-son. • Sack of Angkor and plundering and destruction of religious sites.	Political Agendas

[15] Fred M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 245-246
[16] Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests: How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live In* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2007), 30, 93, 121, 356
[17] Helen Hardacre, *Shinto: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 358, 375-376, 446
[18] ibid, 582, 629
[19] James Edward Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990)

			• removal of Hindu images to assert the Buddhist dominance.	
Thailand	1767	In Ayutthaya by Burmese Armies	Destruction of royal temples as well as Wat Mahathat.	Transition of Power
Syria and Iraq	A.D. 570-632	Great Arab Conquest	Conversion of temples and houses to mosques for Arab Muslims.	Religious, Transition of Power and Political Invasion
Japan	Late 1860s	Early Meiji Period	Closing and eradicating of several temples and destruction of several temple properties with the removal of Buddhist statues to purify the Shinto shrines and tradition.	Religious as well as Political Rivalry

Table 1: Desecration in other countries (South-East Asia, Middle East)

This historical background matters for this research because this shows three main views: -

1) **Destruction is not just the Religious Action-** According to historian Richard Eaton, and also historians such as Romila Thapar and Satish Chandra, the desecration of the places of worship cannot be construed as a religious act; rather, it has to be understood in many different contexts such as economic troubles, wars, and conquests.

2) **Sacred spaces are centre of Symbolic Capital-** Targeting sacred spaces sends a significantly more impactful message than routine acts of violence because sacred spaces function as primary loci of power both in antiquity and in contemporary society. Through both patronage and sacrilegious acts, sacred spaces function as assertations and legitimations of power.

Furthermore, the regions chosen for the process, i.e., Banaras, Mathura (Aurangzeb era), and Delhi (Colonial era), give a strong foundation upon a broader comparative frame of reference, establishing the fact that the shrines were desecrated by various kingdoms as a measure of exerting power. Different forms of the process of desecration were visible in the forms of iconoclasm, political retribution, ritual pollution, and urbanity. One of the most controversial issues in the historical writings of South Asia was temple desecration and its connection to state power. While earlier colonial historians viewed temple desecration largely as a symbol of religious intolerance, later historians rejected this approach and stressed the fact that in South and Southeast Asia temples were both centers of religion and politics and economic activities. In particular, temples in the region were seen as part of kingship and sovereign power, and thus their destruction was often related to issues of political and dynastic power, resource control, and royal authority. Comparative history of South Asia, including the study of Indian states, Cambodia, and Japan in East Asia, can shed light on how temples interacted with state power. According to historiographical accounts, the earliest interpretation of this phenomenon that came into vogue was offered by colonial historians like James Mill, Elliot, and Dowson, wherein they interpreted temple desecration through a narrow perspective of religious hostility between Hindus and Muslims. In their version, it was held that Muslim kings were iconoclastic rulers with strong anti-idol worship tendencies. Colonial historians made selective use of Persian chronicles to argue that a Hindu-Moslem conflict continued throughout this period. This account also played an important role in shaping the nature of communal politics in South Asia after colonization. Postcolonial historians challenged the communal interpretation and offered their own perspectives on the issue. One of the most prominent historians in this respect is Richard M. Eaton, who suggested that medieval Indian temple desecration should be understood in political terms rather than religious ones. The act of destruction or looting of a rival king's temple was indicative of the defeat of that particular king and a shift in sovereignty from the defeated to the victor. According to Eaton, there were about eighty instances of temple desecration that have been well-documented, which was much less compared to what the colonial narratives would like us to believe.

A political interpretation of art finds clear manifestation in South India. For example, during the Chola reign, temples were used as administrative centers, for collection of taxes, and also served as vehicles of kingship ideology. Chola kings like Rajaraja I and Rajendra I would erect elaborate temples like Brihadisvara Temple both for worship and for showing their power. Temples functioned as storehouses for money, provided employment opportunities, and also worked as distribution centers. When Chola rulers went out on military expeditions and defeated other kingdoms, idols from the latter were taken by force as trophies. The seized idols were not destroyed but taken to the winning kingdom where they were placed as symbols of political domination. It was interpreted not as a religious gesture, but rather as royal domination. Burton Stein has contributed immensely towards this line of thought. According to Stein, his "segmentary state" theory suggested that kings of South India had power based on networks of temples and local elites. Temples brought integration into political systems. Thus, temple desecration or re-endowment implied changes in politics. Romila Thapar is another major historian who brings to our attention that destruction of temples took place in pre-Islamic India too. She argues that when rival kings waged war against each other's dynasties, they destroyed the temples belonging to their enemies as temples were symbols of their legitimacy. The examples given thus help us gain a different perspective on history. This is because the temples in ancient times were not only considered sacred places but were also politically and economically linked with kingship.

The history of temple desecration by the kings of the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal era in North India is quite controversial from the historiographical perspective. On the one hand, there was the policy of temple destruction among the Mughal emperors, while on the other hand, many of them actually patronized these places and had Hindu aristocrats as ministers. For example, even Akbar had an accommodating policy towards various religious institutions and supported them. Although some historians have seen Aurangzeb as a destroyer of temples, he also provided grants to some other temples and Brahmans. Temple desecration among the Mughal kings, however, was mainly meant to punish regions that posed any political threat; the temples themselves were not a target because of their affiliation with other kings. Comparative analysis of various regions is especially helpful in the case of South-East Asia, where temples were directly associated with kingship, for example, in the Khmer Empire. The term devaraja in Khmer meant that the king had a divine form, and temples thus functioned as sacred places of political power. Historians suggest that whenever there were political shifts leading to a change in dynasties, temples would be modified, claimed by the new dynasty and re-consecrated according to the religion followed. For instance, a few Hindu temples became Buddhist temples at a later time in history. This does not imply that it was considered profane but rather that it signified a change in religious and sacred power along with the new form of political authority. The transition from Hinduism to Buddhism in the state of Cambodia is another example of how temples indicated ideology shifts. Inscriptions at the temples suggest that rulers employed patronage of religions to legitimize their rule and channel labor for their construction. Temples owned lands, irrigation systems, and man-power.

For the Ayutthaya Kingdom in Thailand, Buddhist temples contributed significantly to the legitimization of the monarchy. In the context of Thai history, monarchs portrayed themselves as protectors of Buddhism and supporters of the sangha community. Temples acted as educational, administrative, and financial centers. Moreover, invading armies often plundered the temples' riches during times of conflict since temples represented places where wealth was concentrated and demonstrated royal power. The Burmese invasion of Ayutthaya, which took place in 1767, involved burning and robbing temples, including the royal palace. This event is viewed by historians not only as a religious act but also as an attempt to disrupt the centre of Thai politics and culture. Thai historiography proves that the Thai monarchy always worked to rebuild the temples after each conflict in order to renew their legitimacy. Thus, the kings of the Chakri dynasty built or rebuilt temples to consolidate their power.

This theme can also be illustrated by looking at Japan, despite the fact that Japan is not considered to be part of South Asia. Japanese history, like South Asian history, has a similar connection between temples and state power. The Buddhist monasteries in medieval Japan enjoyed military might, economic resources, and political influence. In the sixteenth century, when warlords, like Oda Nobunaga, attacked Buddhist establishments, including Enryaku-ji, it was because of the threat that these religious centers posed to centralization of political power. In fact, Oda Nobunaga is famous for destroying Buddhist temples, such as Enryaku-ji in 1571. This act of the warlord is sometimes compared with the destruction of temples across Asia. According to historians, it

seems that the motive of Nobunaga in burning Enryaku-ji had little to do with anti-Buddhist sentiment and was more about subduing religion so as to strengthen political power. Later on, the Tokugawa shogunate also organized Buddhist temples to work in accordance with state power.

There are some similarities that exist in the comparative study of temples in India, Cambodia, Thailand, and Japan. First, temples served not only as centers of worship but also of wealth, land ownership, administration, and education. Second, rulers patronized temples to demonstrate their supremacy and divine right to rule. Third, attacks on temples happened mostly during wars and political contests, since the temples stood for the sovereignty of the other competing dynasties. Finally, temple desecration did not happen as an end in itself; temples were usually renovated, appropriated or rededicated after attacks. However, regional differences cannot be ignored. For instance, in India where Islamic and Hindus ruled, the history and historiography of temple state relations have been strongly influenced by religious controversies. In Southeast Asian countries, there is more interest in divine kingship and sacred space in shifting dynasties and religions. The Japanese, however, pay more attention to the battles between centralized states and militarized religious establishments. This shows that temple-state relations depended very much on the kind of politics, religion, and economy of that particular region. Rather, political symbolism, resource control, claims to sovereignty, and the interrelationship of religion and kingship take centre stage. Across Asia, temples played an important role in the establishment of states, and conflict surrounding temples had much to do with the struggle for power and legitimacy. In the historiography of temple desecration and state power, it is clear that it was important to see temples as political institutions as well as places of worship. Whether among the Chola and Mughal kingdoms of India, the Cambodian kings, the Thai kings, or the warlords of Japan, the interactions of kings with temples have been influenced by issues related to state formation, warfare, and power. In the comparative regional history of temple desecration and state power, one can learn not only what is similar but also what is unique about the interaction of temples and states in different parts of Asia.

The research is stated in total 2 chapters, each giving details and building the comparative understanding of the temple and shrine desecration as the political strategy by the rulers from mid-17th to mid-20th century (Mughal-British). Chapter 1 deals with the problem of temple desecration by Mughal emperors in general, and Aurangzeb in particular. It asserts that temple desecration was largely a product of political strategies rather than any religious considerations. It also poses important questions such as what prompted these temple desecrations—if it was a product of choice, compulsion, or even convenience—the locations of these events, and the geographical locations of these temple desecrations. It also critically evaluates the way these events have been portrayed in a skewed history and whether there are any points of convergence between these skewed histories and the official sources of those times. It also aims to shed light on the historical facts of temple desecration by the Mughal emperors, especially Aurangzeb. This chapter looks into the colonial period and shows how shrines and temples were impacted under British control. It reveals that these changes were often driven by political aims rather than just religious ones. Yet, many people hardly know this or mention it. The colonial rulers often changed or moved or took apart sacred spaces as part of wider city planning and administrative schemes. These actions were tied to city reorganization and revenue setups and rules for controlling power. Religious sites got tangled up with the economic and space-focused goals of the colonial state. So, the chapter shows that changes to sacred places carried on into the colonial times, influenced by political and economic and social aims.

The Chapter 2 starts with a definition of what can be called **“popular perception”** which can also be called distorted history. Popular perception is a reconstruction, reconfiguration, or even a distortion of past events based on selected facts, assumptions, and the needs of the present era. However, this perception of events is not totally independent of facts since it arises from the real occurrence of events, though not necessarily as they occurred. For example, some examples of temple desecration in Aurangzeb's era receive a lot of attention and publicity, whereas some other instances of patronage and protection of Brahmins are overlooked. This leads to a disconnection between the actual facts of history and the perceptions about them. In this chapter, there is a clear differentiation between facts and perceptions. Facts are based on sources, perspectives, and context. Perceptions, on the other hand, are mostly based on selective reading, an emotional narrative of the event, and generalizations. During colonial times and especially after colonization, the perceptions of certain periods were formed and reinforced by historians and administrators according to their own ideological biases. Media, historiography, and cinema all play a major part in this. Contemporary media and films depict history in a distorted way that

emphasizes the dramatic aspects and messages, thus giving up on objective truthfulness. It results in the construction of images that fit in with current political rhetoric. Films tend to simplify complex historical processes, reducing them to a clash of groups or people and thus distorting their essence even further. Thus, history becomes controversial. In addition to becoming an academic study, it also functions as means of constructing and consolidating identity. Popular images of the past undermine traditional history writing and lead to the formation of perceptions that are biased and distorted. Thus, the chapter under discussion challenges historians to reconsider the methods and approaches through which history can be taught. It is clear from the analysis presented above that it is crucial to identify how such perceptions are created and why.

Power, Religion, And Representation: From Aurangzeb to Colonial India of Shrine Desecration.

The topic of temple desecration is of great significance in the current era, not only for the history of the destruction of temples and shrines but also for understanding the underlying motives for such activities—especially in terms of how political strategies, power, memory, and legitimacy functioned over a period of time. Rather than being a religious phenomenon in any way, the destruction or even the preservation of such sites was of great political and social significance over a period of time. Scholars such as Satish Chandra, Richard M. Eaton, and S. A. A. Rizvi have argued that the destruction of temples needs to be understood in the historical period rather than in terms of the religious ideologies of the current world. This chapter does not take one-sided view. Instead, it tries to understand the issue by looking at different aspects such as intention, geography, patterns, and reactions. It also examines how these events were recorded, remembered, and later interpreted. By doing so, the chapter aims to separate historical realities from later distortions and to see how local incidents became a part of larger narratives over time. The chapter is divided into two main parts: the first part examines the temple desecration during the Mughal period, while the second part looks at the similar processes during the colonial era, especially post-1857 in Delhi. By comparing these periods, the chapter aims to show destruction of religious spaces was not unique to one regime, and that its meanings changed depending on context.

One of the important reasons for studying temple desecration is to overcome any kind of biased understanding of the phenomenon of temple desecration and to view it in terms of more than just the ideologies of religious identities, especially in the case of the subcontinent of India, where it has often been understood as a single and constant feature of religious intolerance. According to Satish Chandra, it has been argued that in medieval India, both under Hindu and Muslim rulers, temples were often considered symbols of political and economic power because they controlled landholdings, wealth, and labor and were often closely related to the ruling classes in terms of patronage relationships; hence, any attack on such sites was often a political strategy to weaken the political and economic power of rival rulers.[20] In this regard, Richard M. Eaton plays a crucial role in transforming the debate on this issue. He argues that the desecration of temples reflects a form of **"political interaction."** He also argues that the destruction of temples is closely linked to the undermining of the political legitimacy and sovereignty of other rulers. He also argues that only a small number of temples or shrines were targeted by a ruler during specific conflicts. This indicates that the issue of destroying temples is not related to any form of religious intolerance but is linked to political rivalry between rulers.

The desecration of temples, apart from being a product of political activities, has significant social implications throughout history. Temples were not only buildings; they were a symbol of memory, culture, and community identity. The destruction of a temple, apart from being a symbol of political decline, was also a symbol of economic and cultural decline for the community associated with it. However, it must be noted that not all communities were passive spectators during this time. Many communities, instead, displayed considerable resilience by rebuilding temple structures, moving deities, and modifying temple rituals to ensure continuity with the past. The desecration of temples has played a significant role in shaping community memory. Many events have been forgotten, and some have been recalled, shaping contemporary debates and perceptions on temple desecration. The revival of the importance of history in contemporary times makes the study of the subject all the more crucial. In contemporary times, the occurrence of historical events is invoked in a selective manner and without reference to the original context in which they happened. This has resulted in social tensions and

[20] Satish Chandra, *Medieval India: From Sultanate to the Mughals, Part II: Mughal Empire (1526–1748)* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 2005).

debates. By studying the issue of temple desecration in its original context, the role of the historian becomes crucial in the attempt to recreate the original context of the event through a more objective and broader lens. In a comparative study of the occurrence of temple or shrine desecrations in South-East Asia, the Middle East, and Western Europe, it is evident that the occurrence of such acts cannot be attributed to the presence of intolerance in the form of religion alone. This is because such acts were also part of political strategies.

In essence, it is important to learn about the history of temple desecration in order to gain a balanced, unbiased, and broader view of history rather than focusing on the current conflicts and debates pertaining to it. The history of temple desecration provides a broader view of religion, cultural identities, political conflicts, and economic power struggles of both the people and the ruling class of the region. It also provides a view of the social impact of temple desecration on society; therefore, it becomes possible for historians to view the rationale behind temple desecration from a political perspective rather than a religious one. It also provides a view of how both colonial and post-colonial history has influenced the popular view of history, which is often used in the current discourse pertaining to it. Even the desecration of the temples during the Mughal Empire is still a point of debate and controversy in the current context, primarily because of the popular perceptions and notions developed during the colonial and post-colonial periods. It is important to understand these acts not in terms of the expression of religious bigotry, as is popularly perceived, but within the larger context. This chapter will begin by taking a more analytical view of temple desecration under the Mughals. While it has often been described as a form of **"systematic iconoclasm,"** other historians have argued that temple desecration under the Mughals and other Islamic empires was closely related to specific political contexts and, in most cases, was highly selective in nature. In other words, temple desecration in these empires was closely related to demonstrating victory over rival emperors, whether they were Hindu or Muslim.

The Mughal Empire, like other empires in the pre-modern world, considered these shrines and temples important centres of political legitimacy. There are records of temple destruction by Mughal emperors, from Babur to Aurangzeb, in the northern region of India. However, there is substantial evidence of the presence and support of many temples and holy communities under the rule of the Mughals, in terms of land and wealth, etc. The historian, Richard M. Eaton, explains, "Destructions of temples in pre-modern times, especially under the Mughals, were surprisingly selective, and in many cases were performed in response to particular political circumstances."[21] The Mughal Empire was extensive and included many different emperors who had various characteristics, policies, and political concerns. For this reason, their strategies varied as well. The main aspect to take into consideration is the fact that medieval Indian temples were not solely spiritual buildings. In other words, destroying or attacking a temple was never only a spiritual issue but could be political as well. Mughal emperors pursued pragmatic strategies. Their chief goal was stability and power and not strict enforcement of religion. That is why it is possible to say that together with the destruction of temples, there were also instances of providing lands to temples by Mughal rulers. In fact, numerous temples remained operational even in the time of Mughal rulers, implying that destroying temples was not the part of a unified governmental policy intended to destroy a particular religion altogether. To my mind, the most significant misinterpretation of this problem consists in trying to consider it from a single perspective. For instance, when we say that Mughal rulers destroyed temples because of their hatred towards Hinduism, we ignore the political background of that time. Hence, we should consider desecrating of temples as an act that was situational, political, and in some cases religious in nature, although not consistent and uniform in essence.

The most frequently asked question in debates on the destruction of sacred spaces is "why"? Was it due to intention, convenience, or compulsion? To understand the motivation behind temple desecration, one has to move beyond these questions and try to understand these incidents in terms of political strategies and struggles. On initial observation, one might be tempted to think that the motives for temple destruction were religious. That has been the case in the popular perception as well. Nevertheless, on a closer inspection of past trends, it becomes clear that there was much more to it than just one cause.

[21] Richard M. Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States," in *Essays on Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

a) Political Assertion and Sovereignty– One of the main reasons for temple desecration is political assertion and sovereignty in rival regions. Temples were not just places of worship; they were also closely associated with political power and wealth. Hence, attacking these sites was, in a sense, an attack on the political and economic power of rival monarchs. This, in the words of Richard M. Eaton, means that "Temples were political communications; their destruction meant defeat."

b) Punishment for Rebellions– Sometimes temple desecration took place as a form of punishment against rebellions in these regions. For example, the destruction of the Kashi Vishvanath Temple in Banaras has been attributed by historians like Zahiruddin Faruki to rebellions in the region by landlords.[22]

c) Economic and Strategic Factors– Temples were places of great wealth due to their association with elite power and patronage; therefore, these places were targeted during military conquests and rebellions due to their wealth in land, gold, silver, etc. Strategically and economically prosperous regions were a major draw for rulers; therefore, some of these regions were targeted during rebellions.

d) Pragmatism and Convenience– Sometimes temple desecration took place due to pragmatism and convenience; sometimes these places were destroyed and rebuilt due to administrative requirements during rebellions and political upsets in these regions.

The best way to interpret this issue would be to see it as a synthesis of all aspects involved. Various circumstances have led to various motivations for committing such acts. Most modern interpretations have gone wrong because they try to focus on just one aspect at a time and fail to take into account all other aspects. This creates an incorrect impression of history altogether. The temple desecration should be viewed as an act that has been committed due to multiple motivations.

Desecration of temples during the Mughal period was not random, nor was it entirely systematic. There were certain patterns involved in the desecration of temples during the period. The areas where temples were desecrated were often those that were associated with rebellion against the Mughal Empire. Some such areas include Varanasi, Mathura, and the Rajput territories. Even though these areas were important from the point of view of religion, they were also important from the point of view of politics and economics, as they represented the power and sovereignty of the region.

Therefore, the desecration of temples during the period cannot be seen as an act of intolerance towards the religion. In the context of the questions **"who ordered"** and **"who carried out"** the desecration of temples during the period, the orders were generally given by the emperor or the officials, while the execution was carried out by military officials, etc.

The desecration of temples during this era can be seen as one aspect of a larger structure and not only an instance of vandalism alone. Geographically speaking, it is particularly interesting to note the pattern of temple desecration since it can reveal whether it was random or targeted. There was indeed an interesting geographical pattern involved.

If the desecration of temples was based on religious grounds alone, then they would have been desecrated randomly throughout all regions. But that is not the case. Such activities were mostly associated with certain locations that held strategic or political value. These regions were often seats of power or sites of rebellions. Since the temples in such regions were directly tied to the local lords or leaders, they were desecrated in times of political conflicts or rebellions against the ruling party.

Ruler	Date/ Period	Place	Temple/Site	Context	Who commissioned	Primary Source

[22] Zahiruddin Faruki, *Aurangzeb and His Times* (Bombay: D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co., 1935).

Babur	1528	Ayodhya	Ram mandir (disputed)	Political assertion after conquest	Commissioned by Babur and executed by Mir Baqi	-
Jahangir	c.1608-1613	Kangra	Kangra fort temples	Political conquest on hill state	Mughal forces	Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri
Shah Jahan	1632	Banaras (Varanasi)	New built temples	Assertion of imperial control	Imperial commanders	Persian chronicles
Aurangzeb	1669	Banaras (Varanasi)	Kashi Vishvanatha temple	Linked to political tensions, assertion of authority	Imperial orders	Maasir-i-Alamgiri
	1670	Mathura	Keshava Deo temple	After Jat rebellion	Imperial orders	Maasir-i-Alamgiri
	1670s	Mewar and Marwar	Temples of rebellious chiefs	Rajput rebellion	Mughal army	Persian chronicles
	Late 17th century	Deccan	Selected temples (limited destruction+patronage)	War conditions	Local officials and Mughal officials	Farmans

Table 2: Temple Desecration Under The Mughals

The period of Aurangzeb (c. 1658-1707) has been one of the most controversial periods in the history of the Mughal Empire. Aurangzeb has been described as an orthodox ruler, religiously intolerant, politically pragmatic, or even despotic. During his rule, the Mughal Empire expanded to its largest size, not only in northern and central India but also in the Deccan region through his victory over the Deccani Sultanates such as Bijapur and Golconda. However, his rule also witnessed considerable resistance, particularly from the Marathas. Thus, despite the fact that Aurangzeb expanded the empire to its largest size, his later years saw considerable political and economic problems that ultimately led to the decline of the empire in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Aurangzeb's idea of kingship was heavily influenced by the principles of orthodox Islam. This can also be understood from his patronage of works such as the Fatwa-i-Alamgiri, which is a compilation of Islamic Law.

It can easily be argued that under Aurangzeb's reign several big temples were torn down, and this is clearly documented in many historical writings. Therefore, his period of rule always stands out when it is contrasted to the rule of Mughal kings before him. Nevertheless, there have been suggestions made by some historians, for example Audrey Truschke, that policies during this time were not as straightforward as they seem to be. It has been brought to notice that besides demolishing these temples, Aurangzeb also allotted land for certain temples and allowed religious activities to go on as usual. Moreover, it seems as if all of these decisions made by Aurangzeb were affected by political factors as well. In other words, temples that were in areas where there were rebellions going on had a higher chance of being destroyed. Thus, religion may have played an important part in these policies, although it certainly was not the sole reason.

The locations of temple desecration were not accidental but strategic. One of the significant categories is political centres. Temples located in capital cities or other political centres were associated with rulers. The attack on these temples could demonstrate the victory of the opponents. Another critical category is rebellious territories. When there were some rebel forces against the Mughals, temples associated with rebels were destroyed. It could

be seen as an act of dominance and warning of punishment. Some historians claim that the most common location of temple destruction is pilgrimage centres. They are places that play crucial roles for communities, including religion, culture, and society. Moreover, pilgrims visit these locations, so their destruction can have psychological impacts. As Richard Eaton states, desecrated temples were located strategically and not randomly, which implies that temple destruction was associated with conflicts. Thus, the evidence shows that the Mughals were not targeting temples just because of religion.[23]



Figure 3: Regions under Aurangzeb https://www.google.com/

1st CASE STUDY: BANARAS- Varanasi has been one of the oldest living cities in the world, thanks to its status as a sacred destination for Hindus, as well as an important location of learning and worship practices. The religious geography associated with the city included numerous ghats, temples, and monasteries. The most significant of the city's numerous shrines was the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, where Hindus worship Lord Shiva, not only from the perspective of religion, but also due to its great economic importance. Thus, this temple was not just a place of worshipping God Shiva, but an important institution within the broader urban and political context. In particular, its establishment in the sixteenth century under Emperor Akbar could be viewed against the backdrop of his cooperation with such notable figures as Raja Todar Mal and Raja Man Singh I.[24] In other words, Kashi Vishwanath, as an example of such temples, was far from being a purely religious institution, and played a significant role in the economic and administrative structure of the empire. By the time the 17th century was around the corner, Banaras had already become an intricate web of religious organizations, Brahmins, and land-holding families. They were not simply guardians of ritual knowledge but also political players in the economic and political affairs of the locality. In this light, the construction of the Kashi Vishvanath Temple meant much more than faith but also authority, legitimacy, and ownership over religious land. Consequently, it becomes

[23] Richard M. Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States," in *Essays on Islam and Indian History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[24] Madhuri Desai, *Banaras Reconstructed: Architecture and Sacred Space in a Hindu Holy City* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017).

important to recognize that any attempt to act upon the building could hardly remain devoid of political connotations. The destruction of the Kashi Vishvanath Temple in 1669 under the rule of Aurangzeb is no exception to this general rule. Although there are a number of sources that speak of the event in question, the way it is interpreted has been largely influenced by ideologically-driven debates in modern times. Nevertheless, when examined against the background of history, the destruction seems to be rooted more in political concerns rather than faith-based intolerance.

The political atmosphere at the time also needs to be considered. The Mughal Empire during the late seventeenth century faced many problems such as regional defiance and administrative conflicts. As Banaras was an important city with religious significance, it was not an exception to all this. Involvement of the locals with some activities that seemed to be rebellious like association with Chhatrapati Shivaji would have raised the suspicion level even further. Even if there had not been much evidence of this, the mere fact that such rumours were spreading enough could lead to harsh actions on the part of the emperor. In this regard, the destruction of the temple could be seen as one of those actions. It was common practice in the Mughal Empire to attack symbols representing their opposition to show their authority. Considering the significance of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple, destroying it or making any changes was one of the most effective means of sending such a message. The second factor concerns the administrative rationale for this action. The Mughal Empire was an extensive political system which had to ensure stability throughout its territory. If some religious institutions were considered a source of discontent or any form of ideological activity, then it would be rational to control or even destroy them. Of course, this does not imply the existence of anti-Hindu policy, as such actions were dictated by political expediency.

The religious structures were viewed not as spiritual centres, but socio-political organizations whose power could undermine the existing order. However, one must note that Aurangzeb's policy toward Hindu institutions was not completely destructive. Based on farmāns, it becomes clear that the emperor continued providing financial and legal protection to different Hindu temples and Brahmins. For example, some religious communities in Varanasi were granted royal favor. Therefore, it can be concluded that some temples were allowed to function normally, while others were destroyed due to the current conditions. The example of Gyanvapi Mosque is another example of how complicated this issue is. As mentioned above, there have been very few cases when such monuments were built from scratch; more frequently, the construction of the mosque meant the alteration or renovation of a building that existed beforehand. Such an approach has not been limited to the Mughal period; one can find analogous practices before and after the Mughals.[25] In other words, the sacred space was constantly renewed to reflect the changed political and cultural environment. As far as I am concerned, the demolition of the Kashi Vishvanath Temple should not be considered a permanent act of religious enmity but a historically specific one. The reasons for its occurrence were connected with the peculiarities of Mughal rule in the seventeenth century and included issues of loyalty and management.

In order to have a better insight on the issue, it is imperative that both the demolition itself and its broader implications should not go overlooked. The Mughal Empire, along with many other pre-modern polities, functioned with elements of accommodation and coercion alike. It took part in interaction with local customs, promoted various religious establishments, and often resorted to forceful action in cases where it found any possible threats to its sovereignty. The history of Kashi Vishvanath Temple perfectly illustrates that dual approach. To conclude, the story of Banaras provides an important reminder that any event in history needs to be evaluated within a more comprehensive and context-dependent framework. The demolition of the Kashi Vishvanath Temple was certainly a significant event, but the interpretation of it cannot be limited to just one reason.

[25] Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Man and the Myth* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).



Figure 4: Kashi Vishvanath temple demolition and Gyan Vapi Mosque https://www.groundreport.in/

2nd CASE STUDY: MATHURA- Mathura has always been an essential element of India's religious and cultural heritage. Regarded as the birthplace of Lord Krishna, it emerged as a prominent centre of pilgrimage and drew many devotees, intellectuals, traders, and tourists from all over the country. Nevertheless, its significance is not confined merely to religious devotion. Along with other important places of worship, it served as a vital urban environment that combined religion, economy, and political power. In this way, it acquired the status of a city where both divine and political authority could be felt. One of the most important temples that had great significance in Mathura was the Keshavadeva Temple. Being an object of veneration for the local people, the temple became a symbol of continuity and pride. Simultaneously, it played a significant role in the life of the city because of its economic impact. Many pilgrims came here, and hence, it contributed to the local economy through numerous donations and market activities.

The demolition of the Keshavadeva Temple in the 1670s under the rule of Aurangzeb is one of the most frequently discussed historical events in India. Although usually interpreted through the lens of religious intolerance, this incident requires a more comprehensive understanding that goes beyond the mere categorization of religious intolerance. The events that took place in Mathura should be analysed along with the case of Banaras because this case study also falls into the category of a political and social rather than a purely religious act. One of the aspects to take into account while considering the events of the late seventeenth century is related to the political context in which they happened. It was characterized by the widespread rebellion of people from the Jat community in the area of Mathura. Such a rebellion undermined Mughal authority in the region, causing considerable problems for the government, who had to restore its power over this area through forceful actions. As a consequence of the importance of the Keshavadeva Temple, it was strongly associated with the collective identity of the local community. In case of any rebellious action, this building could be regarded as not only an object of worship, but also as the powerful centre of a potential opposition, thus, making its destruction the expression of the power of the ruling state and its political intentions. Through demolition of such an important cultural centre, the Mughals wanted to show the local community what would happen if there would be disobedience against the power of the state. In addition, the building of the Shahi Idgah Mosque in the place of the demolished temple must be regarded from this perspective as well.

The fact that the place of the old temple was transformed into another sacred place, which belonged to the ruling dynasty, should be taken as a demonstration of the political power and intentions of the Mughals. Another example of an attempt to alter the identity of Mathura lies in its name change to **"Islamabad"** in later texts. Even though this may not have been a universal change, it still underscores the effort to reconfigure the city's identity. As per my analysis, such efforts should be understood within the context of display of power. The ruler, in this case, tries to leave his imprint on both the physical space and the cultural landscape. However, it is essential not to isolate such instances. The reign of Aurangzeb involved a mixed and even inconsistent approach to religious establishments. While some temples were destroyed for particular reasons, others were left intact and even protected by him.

This inconsistency proves that the actions of the Mughal state were driven more by political motives than by religious principles. It would also be essential to consider how interpretations of these kinds of incidents have evolved through time. Contemporary representations may oversimplify history by classifying it into clear-cut terms like religious intolerance. As a result, they run the risk of superimposing their own modern preoccupations on the past, thereby distorting its true nature.

The examination of the Mathura case suggests that what transpired was not a simple case of one community displaying contempt for the other, but rather a mixture of rebellion, rule, and symbolic control. the demolition of the Keshavadeva Temple in Mathura should be seen as a much more complicated event that is deeply entrenched in the seventeenth-century social milieu. This is because it shows how religious shrines were susceptible of becoming places of political domination. By analyzing this example beyond the confines of simplistic interpretations, it becomes possible to understand the dynamics of religion in the Mughal era.



Figure3:KesavaDeotempleandEidgahMosque https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/

The colonial and post-colonial historiographies, as discussed in the works of James Mill, H. M. Elliot and John Dowson, have portrayed the Mughals as **"iconoclasts,"** (Davis, 1997) focusing on the destruction of temples and failing to mention instances of patronage of temples and Brahmins. This has led to the present-day situation, wherein the Mughals, especially Aurangzeb, are seen as intolerant and destructive of Hindu sacred spaces. Later historians like Satish Chandra, Harbans Mukhia, Richard M. Eaton, S. A. A. Rizvi, Audrey Truschke, Madhuri Desai, and Zahiruddin Faruki have tried to show instances of patronage of temples, religious institutions like maths, and Brahmins. In colonial historiography, the instances of Mathura and Banaras have been discussed in religious terms, which has led to the division between Hindu and Muslim. Later, post-colonial historiographies have tried to look at the matter in a different perspective, although in a selective manner.

According to the Mughal imperial records and other historical sources written by Madhuri Desai and Audrey Truschke, it is evident that not only did the Mughal rulers get involved with the temples during times of conflict, but they also patronized and protected the temples. An imperial farmān issued by Aurangzeb in the year 1669 mentions Banaras and instructs that Brahmins should not be harassed and should be given land.[26] Madhuri Desai asserts that Aurangzeb gave land to institutions like the Kashi Math and patronized other religious communities. She later asserts that Aurangzeb patronized several temples, including the Balaji Temple, Mahakaleshwar Temple, Someshwar Temple, Daoji Maharaj Temple, Jangambari Math, Umananda Temple, and some Jain Temples.[27] It is evident from the historical sources written, that the desecration of the temples by Aurangzeb was not random but selective. The desecration was not done by Aurangzeb in a single year but over time. For example, the desecration done by Aurangzeb in Banaras was done in the year 1669, while the desecration done by him in Mathura and other areas of the Deccan was done around 1670 and later in the seventeenth century.

[26] Ishwari Prasad, *Imperial Farmāns of the Mughal Emperors* (Delhi: Indian Press, 1924).
[27] Madhuri Desai, *Banaras Reconstructed: Architecture and Sacred Space in a Hindu Holy City* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017).

Therefore, it is evident that the desecration done by Aurangzeb was not done out of religious considerations but was context-specific.

The common query raised is that Aurangzeb never attacked any temples in the Deccan. However, it would be inaccurate to assume that he did not demolish some temples in the Deccan, especially when he was engaged in wars with the Deccani Sultanates like Bijapur, Golconda, and Ahmednagar. His operations were more focused in north and central India as opposed to the Deccan region. The reason for this may perhaps be best explained using political geography or politics. North India had always been the main region of Mughal power from Babur to Aurangzeb and even thereafter and temples located there were an expression of imperial power and sovereignty. The campaign to the Deccan by the Mughals was prolonged and expensive and demanded a new way of approach. The Mughal empire had a vast geographical extent and yet it was not one uniform empire with a fixed policy on how it was to be managed. Different policies were used to achieve the desired political results which included temple destruction, diplomacy, or any other form of military action as may have been necessary. Aurangzeb's response to the problems in the Deccan region was also influenced by regional particularities since in this place, the emperor had to deal with different kinds of opposition and choose the methods that would correspond to military and political struggles, not ritualistic actions such as temple destruction. Besides, in the pre-modern and early-modern times, the rulership of Mughal emperors was constantly challenged in various regions of the empire. Such cities as Mathura, Agra and Varanasi which had been ruled by the Mughals for a long time were used not only as the centres of faith but also as political and administrative centres of the empire.

Resistance to the Mughals in northern India was markedly different from that in the Deccan. During the latter part of the seventeenth century, there was an increasing number of uprisings and rebellions that not only posed a threat to each other but also to Mughal rule. The temples, maintained with financial support from upper-class members of society, became focal points for local communities, including the Jats, Satnamis, and some Rajput principalities like Mewar and Marwar that were not yet under the complete control of the Mughals. These uprisings needed to be suppressed by weakening the economic and political foundations of the rebels, which entailed not only their military capabilities but also their temples. On the contrary, resistance against Mughal authority in southern India, specifically in the Deccan, followed a different approach despite the fact that threats to Mughal supremacy were significant. Resistance was tackled through negotiation and diplomacy rather than warfare. This includes dealing diplomatically with the Deccani Sultanates of Bijapur, Golconda, and Ahmednagar and the Marathas. The policies of Aurangzeb were pragmatic and selective. For sustaining Mughal rule in the region for an extended period of time, it became imperative that good relations be maintained with the locals. Therefore, although there are some instances of destruction of temples in southern India, many others had the privilege of being endowed with lands and other favors. Firstly, it should be noted that the effectiveness of implementation of Mughal policy depended on the administrative power of the empire. For this reason, the issue of desecration of temples becomes more popular in the north, for this region has been characterized by the greatest administrative power of the empire. The second factor is the character of historical documents. Most of all, Mughal history books and other administrative documents refer to North India. There can be a possibility that there was also desecration of temples in South India, but it just was not written about. Thus, the difference between the North and South is not connected with religious toleration and intolerance.

The issue of agency is important in understanding temple destruction under Aurangzeb. Such activities did not occur randomly or through the mere decentralization of political power, but were instead part of a systematic imperial operation. These farmāns were usually signed by either the emperor himself or high-ranking members of the bureaucracy, and sent out to the regional or provincial governor. It was these military or administrative officers that would see to the execution of the order. From a macro perspective, the decision-making process took place in the imperial court, and was relayed to the provincial level of administration via the hierarchy of authority. Sources such as the Maasir-i-Alamgiri and the imperial farmāns prove that the orders for the destruction of certain temples, such as those in Mathura and Banaras, were made at the behest of Aurangzeb.

After the orders for desecration were received, these were fulfilled using the administrative and military resources of the Mughal Empire. Orders concerning temples and other matters would be implemented through provincial governors, military officers, and regional chieftains. In some cases, temple destruction might occur during military action when the temple was used as a sign or symbol of rebellion against the ruler's policies.

However, this opens up an important question as well. Namely, does it mean that every instance of destruction or desecration was done as per the ruler's instructions? Another factor that should not be overlooked involves local agencies. In some cases, the destruction of temples could also take place due to actions undertaken by local leaders or officials who sought personal benefit by doing this, including gaining resources or increasing their own power. This is especially true considering how premodern empires worked and that they were largely dependent on cooperation with local elites. This interpretation questions the assumption that temple destruction was merely a religious policy on the part of Aurangzeb. On the contrary, what this suggests is that there needs to be a need to analyse such incidents from within a larger historical perspective that considers the political and administrative aspects, as well as the local factors involved. Not only does this help clarify the issue of agency involved in the matter, but it also allows one to consider temple desecration as a larger aspect of Mughal governance.

The act of temple desecration needs to be contextualized within the larger paradigm of Mughal rule and its politics. One important issue here is whether this was part of a larger propaganda campaign on the part of the Mughals. To address this matter, one has to carefully consider the nature of Mughal sources and literature such as the Persian chronicle. Persian chronicles are important resources which cannot be considered as objective accounts of what had happened because they constructed narrative accounts that would provide explanation and justification for actions done by the Mughals. The notion of propaganda in the era of Mughals must be considered in a different way from what one considers today. The reason is that there was no mass media, which means that propaganda could not be executed by any form of wide-ranging communication. While historians can learn much from these documents regarding how Mughals interpreted their actions, these chronicles cannot be used to promote today's controversies. Historians need to analyse these writings in their proper historical context. Mughal India was very similar to the earlier pre-modern regimes like the Delhi Sultanate as far as religion is concerned. In such a case, any reference to desecration of temples cannot justifiably be seen as an expression of hostility towards religion or as a desire to destroy the religion altogether.[28] On the contrary, one must take such statements into account as one of the conventions of discourse at that time.

It should further be noted that temple desecration by the Mughals cannot be seen merely as an effect of iconoclasm and religious motivation. It should be noted, therefore, that temple destruction in this context did not imply any general campaign against particular religions. In some aspects, what could be referred to as **"Mughal propaganda"** consisted precisely in the demonstration of imperial power and authority. The destruction of temples, re-naming of cities and regions, and building mosques instead of temples all served a purpose. Nevertheless, these ritualistic performances were primarily directed towards the elite class, the courtiers, and the regional powers but not necessarily towards the masses. With the passage of time, such rituals have been interpreted in different ways, which has led to the connection between Aurangzeb and communal strife.

Equally vital to consider are the restrictions of the Mughal propaganda. Persian chronicles and archival documents were never meant to be read by the common people; instead, they were mostly disseminated to court nobility, members of the royal court, and local power brokers. Consequently, they do not provide a comprehensive account of the life experiences of the citizens of the Mughal Empire. This discrepancy paved the way for the emergence of local folklore, popular opinion, and oral history, which eventually pose problems in historical analysis. Studying Mughal propaganda requires discerning between representation and reality. One cannot accept the sources without scrutiny because they reflect the subjective views and intentions of their writers. For instance, despite being couched in religious terminology, the destruction of temples cannot necessarily reflect the motives of the act. Thus, the Mughal propaganda regarding the defiling of temples should not be analysed from just one point of view. Rather, a more holistic approach is required in which various interpretations and contexts will be taken into consideration. In instances where religion-specific terms are used in the source material, historians should probe beyond the surface level of the information provided to identify the true motive behind the act. It should be kept in mind, though, that this was not an organized or imperial-wide policy. Nothing indicates that Mughal kings had temple desecration as a routine means of shaping public

[28] Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

perception in different parts of their empire. Instead, it is better to look at it from this perspective as symbolic politics rather than propaganda. This way, it can be interpreted as actions intended to send out a certain message.

Although many historians and scholars have discussed temple desecration by the Mughals, especially during Aurangzeb's rule, with regards to political reasons, administrative system, and historiography, there is a need to analyse the social and cultural consequences of the act, including their effect on the collective memory of the society at that time. An important issue here is whether local societies had any emotional or sociocultural reactions following temple destruction. There is no record of large-scale rebellions or any other form of direct opposition in relation to temple desecrations in local sources. According to the works of historians, as well as Bhakars and Jat/Bundela oral traditions, rebellions were more related to general dissatisfaction with the rule of the Mughals in particular regions. In other words, although these acts might have disturbed the local people, their reaction was not one of opposition. However, some have claimed that the reaction taken was that of rebuilding temples at new places or transferring the deity from one place to another. It is quite the opposite of certain modern interpretations of history where there is an emphasis on how the people resisted through aggression. However, there were indeed negative effects brought about by the destruction of temples on the society. Temples played an important role not just in religion but also in economics and social affairs in the pre-modern Indian society.

Without modern means of communication, there was no way to disseminate news beyond a limited geographical radius. Probably, only the following people heard of temple pollution:

i. Residents of that area.
ii. Surrounding settlements.
iii. Travellers and merchants.

It was achieved by word of mouth. It was rather slow and not quite effective. Thus, many events stayed local ones and did not become general public knowledge. And it was very important since it did not fit modern ideas. Nowadays, one sees these events as matters of national importance, but, actually, it was not the case.

But it was not always the case that local societies needed to oppose such actions openly. Adaptability was an important characteristic of pre-modern local societies. Despite the great importance of temples, communities could adapt to changes by building new household temples, reconstructing temples elsewhere, making temporary sanctuaries, and moving gods. Therefore, it may be difficult to say that the act of destroying a temple automatically led to the collapse of pilgrimage cultures. The cultural influence of temple desecrations also had symbolic and identity-building effects. The destruction of one's own great temple, such as in the case of Varanasi, was a significant event for the community as it would be something that would have shaped its history and its relations with powers. Such events were often kept alive in the memory of the community, even without official documents. This change in how memories were understood was especially important during the early modern and colonial eras because it marked the advent of a new way of writing history. Occurrences like those at Mathura and Banaras came to be seen as allegories for religious confrontation despite the many other reasons that existed for these events.

It is essential to consider the following question, which is vital to all historians and societies: how did this event turn from being a local issue to becoming a national one? It is necessary to note that the process of turning local events into national issues took place at a later stage, particularly during the colonial and contemporary ages. The following factors have facilitated this process:

1) The compilation of past events by colonial historians.
2) The publication and dissemination of these histories.
3) The politicization of these histories in the contemporary era.

What is essential to highlight here is that historians recognize the nature of historical memory, which is constructed and not innate. In other words, history does not exist merely in events, but also in their interpretation and remembrance.

That is the method applied in the politics of our time. In fact, temple desecration has assumed much relevance in contemporary politics. Past events are exploited to mold current identity and politics discourse. The method involved includes:

I. The selection of certain events
II. The ignoring of some
III. The stripping off of historical context

In the case of Aurangzeb for instance, while incidents like the desecration of temples in Mathura, Deccan and Varanasi are always emphasized, incidents like patronage, grants and protection, etc. are ignored by the modern historians and communities. Historical context is stripped off leaving a wide gap that creates distorted histories. Complex historical facts are reduced to simple accounts in this process. That is one of the greatest challenges in the field of historical studies. While the use of history for political reasons makes it very complicated and divisive in some instances, it equally proves the strength of history. The way we choose to interpret past events can shape current reality and future possibilities.

Indeed, these memories have found new life and political significance during the modern era. The selective use of temple desecration during the modern discourse provides an important example of how historical memory may become politically instrumentalized in order to support particular agendas, often at the cost of sacrificing historical veracity. In addition, the legacy of temple desecration is also expressed by its ability to influence historiography, in which historians note these incidents while attempting to counter their misuses in modern times. The importance of this approach to analyzing temple desecration cannot be overestimated since it makes it possible to see why the topic retains such significance. The reason for this situation does not lie only in the nature of the events that took place centuries ago, but in how these events were perceived, interpreted, used, and distorted. By considering the social and cultural implications of temple desecration, this section brings another important aspect to the discussion.

From the above discussion of the temple destruction practices carried out during the reign of the Mughals, especially during the rule of Aurangzeb, it becomes apparent that the process can hardly be studied from one point of view alone or from one individual's experience. While it may not be accurate to attribute all acts of temple desecration to religious intolerance on the part of Muslim leaders, the process needs to be examined from a broader perspective, taking into consideration political motivations, regional tensions, symbolism, and imperialism among other factors. The importance of viewing temple desecration in relation to politics is one of the key lessons learned from this chapter, as it reveals the motivations involved as well as the style of governance at the time. However, on another hand, it becomes clear from this chapter that there was a larger perspective in history where apart from destroying temples, Aurangzeb also had other policies. While it may be true that he destroyed temples selectively, it must also be said that he made grants of lands and patronized Brahmins along with financially supporting many temples.

Yet another major issue addressed in the chapter is the reason why there seem to have been more cases of temple destruction in North India rather than in South India. This is significant for undermining the impression that Aurangzeb was driven by purely religious zealotry. Rather, such acts need to be seen in the context of the political situation and problems faced by the emperor. As already mentioned above, there were incidents of temple demolition in both South and North India, although in the former, their number was lesser. This can be explained by the varying geographical environment, along with different military-political strategies used in North and South India. Therefore, besides ideological reasons, different approaches to exercising imperial rule and patterns of interaction should also be considered. Moreover, an important aspect related to the issue of temple demolition relates to questions of agency and implementation of orders. In fact, according to the chapter, temple destruction in many cases was done in accordance with the orders given by Aurangzeb or the emperor himself, whereas local

governors, military elite, or provincial governors implemented the orders. At the same time, sometimes temples were demolished as part of a military operation being conducted. Additionally, there are times when these acts are committed without the approval of the emperor by his local representatives themselves.

This chapter also underscores the historiographical difficulties encountered when researching the issue of temple desecration. Colonialism and postcolonialism have radically transformed the discourse surrounding this issue, affecting the way people think about this issue as well as popular culture, including folk tales. Historian Harbans Mukhia contends that these kinds of historiographies need to be evaluated carefully because they present a selective version of history, one that reflects certain beliefs and political agendas, thus exacerbating Hindu-Muslim relations rather than providing an objective account of events.[29] Likewise, Audrey Truschke asserts that although imperial accounts are couched in religious rhetoric, it was common practice for religious language to be used in pre-modern societies since religion had a huge influence on people's lives.[30] Nonetheless, there were always ulterior political and other motives for such acts, which should not be overlooked. Finally, this chapter discusses the cultural and social aftermath of these events. It is true that temple desecration led to disruptions in social and cultural activities; however, it did not result in the abandonment of all religious rituals.

The events of 1857 have been significant for the history of Delhi since the British directly controlled the city and began the massive restructuring process thereafter. During this restructuring process, several areas of the city underwent demolition, alteration, and reconstruction processes. Not only the living quarters but also places of worship, such as Hindu temples and mosques, underwent these processes. It is necessary to understand that the British did not officially present themselves as destructors of places of worship and religion. On the contrary, they presented themselves as neutral towards all religious beliefs, as they claimed to be unbiased in these issues. Nevertheless, their policies of reconstruction influenced the places of worship significantly. According to Narayani Gupta, there was massive destruction of temples during the reconstruction period after 1857.[31] William Dalrymple argues that the British interventions caused the destruction of the old cultural landscape of the city.[32] The kind of violation of temples does not get much attention because it does not fit the model of religious conflict. When talking about the violation of temples in the period of the Mughal Empire, one can refer to the fact that such events relate to religious matters. However, the violation of temples at the colonial period is understood as a political decision. Nevertheless, though they had different intentions, their results were very similar – the destruction of the space where people could practice their religion and uprooting communities.

The motivations leading to the destruction were varied. In this case, it was mainly due to a combination of strategic, administrative, and urbanistic reasons. After 1857, the British viewed Delhi as a city that had to be carefully monitored and controlled in order to avoid any kind of revolt in the future. For that purpose, it was necessary to make drastic alterations in the layout of the city. Therefore, the area around significant landmarks such as Red Fort was cleared of structures in order to facilitate monitoring. The buildings that had to be demolished at the time included temples and shrines in the region, not out of religious motivations, but rather due to structural considerations. Swapna Liddle provides an example of the British re-planning of Delhi, which was done keeping in mind order, visibility, and control.[33] This usually entailed the demolition of any pre-existing building that would not align with their new plan. But again, to say that this is mere convenience seems rather wrong too. Although there was no religious intention, it had serious repercussions. Places for worship were demolished or relocated, and there were impacts on the community. Thus, while the Mughal era saw a balance of intention, compulsion, and convenience, the colonial era was one of convenience and control but with major religious repercussions.

[29] Harbans Mukhia, "Communalism and the Writing of Medieval Indian History," in *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1969).
[30] Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).
[31] Narayani Gupta, *Delhi Between Two Empires, 1803–1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981)
[32] William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006)
[33] Swapna Liddle, *Delhi 14: Historic Walks* (New Delhi: Westland Ltd., 2011)

The parts of Delhi, which came into view during colonial reorganization, were never by chance but rather chosen carefully based on certain strategic criteria. The regions that were affected most by reorganization include:

a. Areas around the Red Fort,

b. military camps, and

c. densely populated areas of Shahjahanabad.

In order to generate open and controllable spaces where the movement of people could be monitored and controlled, the regions were cleared, resulting in the destruction of temples and shrines. The entire neighbourhoods were demolished for security reasons, and therefore many religious establishments had been demolished. This is yet another example illustrating the point that temple destruction in the colonial era was not primarily due to religion but concerned issues of space and control. However, the religious aspect cannot be overlooked either.

Though there was no such thing as propaganda in its modern form among the British, they had means to manipulate history to suit themselves. They, for instance, would cite incidences of temple vandalism by the Muslim rulers whenever they referred to the early kings. This was done to show the chaotic nature of India before the advent of the British rule and make themselves look like orderly and impartial rulers who were needed to bring peace. William Dalrymple, from the colonial literature point of view, indicates that the literature would highlight differences among the Indians in terms of religion and ethnic origins.[34] It would, therefore, become easy for them to appear as peacekeepers among the Indians. Moreover, whatever they might have done, such as tearing down and organizing parts of Delhi, was simply an administrative act and did not have anything to do with culture or religion.

A number of the religious buildings that were destroyed during the colonial era may have been significant, but many more were small-scale shrines rather than the larger pilgrimage centres that had been seen during the Mughal era. It is crucial to note the difference from the previous time period, during which specific temples selected for destruction had been larger and symbolically more meaningful. Nonetheless, it is worth emphasizing that the destruction took place during the process of urban renewal rather than as a form of symbolic violence. These smaller structures were nonetheless very significant to the communities in which they existed. As noted, such spaces played a vital role in the culture of the people in Delhi.

Like during the Mughal era, the dissemination of information during the colonial era was restricted, particularly during the mid-19th century. The individuals who knew about the destruction were:

1) Delhi residents

2) Individuals living in nearby areas

3) Administrators

There was no modern media as we understand it today; hence, these incidences could not be immediately disseminated across all of India. From my point of view, this was one of the reasons why the destruction of temples during the colonial era did not become a major concern at that time.

[34] William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006)



Figure 4: Delhi region under British India https://en.wikipedia.org/

This is an important dimension and is frequently ignored. There are several reasons for which the issue of the destruction brought about by colonialism has not been brought up before. First, one must realize that the British were in control of the history narrative process. The British had succeeded in telling their story in such a manner that it portrayed their success, while downplaying their mistakes. Second, the destruction brought about by the colonists did not consider religious implications; rather, it was viewed from a political and military perspective. Thus, it was incapable of evoking feelings of sympathy. Thirdly, politics tends to favor religion in modern society; hence, anything that can be discussed in relation to religion gets wide coverage.

Case/Event	**Area**	**Who commissioned**	**Who Executed**	**Nature of Destruction**	**Primary Source**
Clearance around Red Fort after 1857	Delhi	British Colonial administration	British army and engineers	Large-scale demolition including temples/shrines for security buffer	Delhi Gazetteer (1857-1858 notifications), Military Proceedings (India Office Record)
Shahjanabad restructuring	Old Delhi	British authorities	Municipal committees, army	Removal of dense settlements including religious structures	Municipal Committee Records (Delhi), Punjab Govt. Proceedings (1860s)
Military Zone expansion	Delhi (around cantonment and Red Fort)	British Crown	Engineers, army	Temples/shrines were cleared for surveillance and control	Army Engineering Reports (Public Works Dept.), India Office Records
Road widening and urban planning	Delhi city	Colonial administration	Public Work Department	Indirect removal of shrines	Public Works Department, Delhi Improvement papers
Land acquisition policies	Delhi region	British Government	Revenue officials	Shrines lost due to land control and reallocation	Land Revenue Records, Settlement Reports (North-Western Provinces)
Removal of encroachment	Old Delhi	British authorities	Local administrators	Small temples/shrines demolished as "illegal structures"	Municipal bylaws, Delhi Administration Records (late 19th century)
Post-1857 punitive restructuring	Delhi	British Crown	Army and civil administration	Large-scale cultural and spatial transformation	Home Department Proceedings (1857-60), Correspondence of

					British officials (National Archives of India)

Table 3: Shrines destruction/displacement in Colonial Period

Colonial administration may have been spared from actively destroying temples like some of the activities attributed to Mughals, but its actions regarding urban planning, land management, and legislation effectively reconfigured and relocated such sacred sites. In this sense, the colonial period brought about an indirect change to the religious environment, which is no less significant for being subtle.

However, the British repeatedly emphasized that they adopted a policy of non-intervention in religious matters, although their actions reveal the profound impact of their policies on religion despite it not being their initial intention. Thus, the question is not whether the British targeted temples; it is rather how they indirectly influenced religion through administrative, legislative, and spatial policy.

1) **Policy of "Non-Intervention" – Ideal vs. Reality:** The British government formally adopted a policy of non-interference in religious affairs, especially since the 1857 rebellion, which, according to historians such as David Johnson, was partly fuelled by religious factors. In this case, it was more a matter of maintaining political stability than preserving religion. In reality: they steered clear of religious conflict, they controlled land, space, and governance.

2) **Urban Planning & Spatial Control:** The other major effect that occurred as a result of this process took place in urban re-planning in particular areas like Delhi post-1857. This included: establishing open buffer zones around the forts, designating straight roads which could be surveyed easily, planning segregated urban settlements. All of this contributed to the destruction of several temples and other shrines that had become an integral part of the city's existing structure and were seen as barriers for **"improvement"** purposes.

3) **Policy of "Encroachment":** The third very important but often forgotten issue related to policy of **"encroachments"** by the British. Several shrines were considered encroachments—

i. Placed along roads

ii. Added on to houses

iii. Built in public places and therefore were demolished or moved from their original locations.

4) **Public Works Department (PWD) and "Improvement" Policies:** Following the creation of modern infrastructure by means of the Public Works Department, developments such as:

1) Road widening Drainage networks

2) Construction of railways, resulted in the destruction of shrines located on the roadside or in densely populated areas, and they were once again classified as **"encroachments."**

5) **Legal and Administrative Regulation of Religious Areas Legal:** The provisions concerning the administration of religious bodies also included:

a. Jurisdiction of courts in temple conflicts

b. Clarifications regarding property ownership

c. Legislation concerning trusts and endowments

Although this process facilitated systematic administration, it altered the structure of the temple system. Previously, temples operated based on custom; however, they were subsequently incorporated into the law.

6) **Selective Preservation versus Destruction:** Meanwhile, there was also a form of selective preservation by the British, who tended to preserve monuments of architectural or historical importance but left out or displaced **"living shrines."** The contrast is as follows:

1) Monuments (preserved)

2) Living shrines (overlooked or displaced). Such selectivity was clearly tied to the way in which colonial powers interpreted the past of Delhi.



Figure 5: Old Delhi and its destruction during British Indiahttps://www.reddit.com/

The response of the people of Delhi post 1857 was influenced by the general state of defeat and subjugation. The British authorities held significant power, and any form of opposition was not easy. Some of the responses were: a) Migration, since the people were displaced from their native places b) Adaptation, where communities learned to cope with urban living c) Minimal opposition, that was subdued that provides a comprehensive overview of the psychological and social consequences of the year 1857 on the citizens of Delhi. It is hard to analyse the reaction to the defilement of temples without considering the broader picture of colonial subjugation. The people were suffering on various fronts including politics, economy, and culture. Spiritual loss was just a part of the entire process.

This analysis of temple desecration in both Mughal and colonial India makes clear that the issue cannot be simplified and examined from just one point of view. While it seems obvious that temples were destroyed, a closer look at history reveals a more complicated story behind their destruction. First, we see that temples were not destroyed for one reason; neither can this practice be attributed to any period or era alone. In the Mughal period, we observe an interesting fact regarding temple desecration, namely that this was practiced on a selective basis. Mughal temples were considered symbols of power because apart from being centres of spiritual life, they also stood for economic and political importance. As a result, these buildings were frequently destroyed whenever it was convenient for the Mughals, such as when asserting themselves against a rival king. There were, however, certain instances in which the state did not harm temples; in other cases, temples were used for support and protection.

Even in the instance of Aurangzeb, who is considered to be the most controversial personality in this regard, the truth appears to be more complicated than one-sided. Even if certain temples were destroyed by the emperor, other temples existed in good stead and even got grants from him. This does not minimize the seriousness of desecration of temples, but it demonstrates that it was not a consistent policy of eradication of religion. It consisted of a number of factors, including the political motive, administrative necessity, and sometimes even religion. The period of colonial rule represents another story, which differs from that of Mughal rule in terms of desecration of temples. The British did not destroy temples or interfere in the religion of native people officially, but their actions after the revolt of 1857 influenced religions adversely.

Delhi, for instance, provides an exemplary case study in this regard. As part of their efforts to make the city better managed, secured, and developed, the British cleared large swathes of land, improved road networks, and rearranged urban space. In the process, many temples and shrines, especially the smaller ones that had less regional significance, were demolished. This act was justified by the British as necessary for administrative and developmental reasons and was never labelled as religious destruction. The distinction here is critical since while temple desecration was possible during the Mughal period, in the colonial context, it was much subtler and more administrative in nature, with the result being essentially the same. It is important to note here the way that these acts have been commemorated within the historical narrative. Unlike temple desecration in the Mughal era, acts by colonial powers that altered religious landscapes are seldom remembered or acknowledged. This is due to the fact that colonial actors were influential in historical narrative formation and framed their actions using neutral terms like **“improvement”** and **“planning.”** It is also due to the fact that these actions could not be easily integrated into the framework of religious conflict.

Such selectivity of memory led to the formation of a certain trend – there were kinds of temple destructions that were emphasized, whereas others were erased from memory. This resulted in history being selective in nature and even biased at times. Local communities also played a very important role in response to this phenomenon. The reaction on the part of the communities differed greatly depending on the time period in question; nevertheless, it is difficult to reconstruct it due to lack of written accounts. As such, history is not just a compilation of events but rather a selection of things people deems significant enough to be remembered. Now in the modern world, this problem of temple desecration is relevant to politics and society alike. Past events have become a tool in constructing modern identities for political gain. Nevertheless, history itself becomes distorted through selective narration of its content that excludes all of the complexities of the process.

In conclusion, what can be learnt from the above discussion is that temple desecration cannot simply be viewed as an act of hostility in religious terms. Instead, it should be looked at through the prism of political sovereignty,

administration, and sociocultural change. The eras of Mughal India and British India demonstrate that religious site destruction was one element among many others. Moreover, it must be remembered that the understanding of events has been essential in shaping today's understanding of Indian history. Historical writing and remembrance have a significant impact on how we view the past and our interactions with one another in the present day. Hence, a comprehensive but critical perspective is required. In sum, the process of temple desecration in India cannot be accounted for by a simplistic explanation. The process of temple desecration in India has been driven by a wide range of factors, including politics, power relations, space, and memory.

Chapter 2: Popular Perceptions and Distorted Histories — Media, Memory, and the Politics of the Past

An important question posed by this is – what makes up **"distorted history"** or **"perceived distortion"?** Is there any connection between **"historical facts"** and **"distorted history"**, and who is responsible for such distortions? The issue of desecration of temples under the rule of the Mughals especially that of Aurangzeb is one of those issues that has been part of current day disputes and controversies. These interpretations have not been static but rather changing through the years in terms of reinterpretation, reinvention and sometimes distortion according to the perspective of each era. This is important because through understanding distorted history we are able to reconstruct the past and place it in its proper context. In this case, the concept of distorted history can be defined as the process of interpreting, altering, distorting or revising historical events whether intentionally or unintentionally. One of the earliest examples of the distortion or reinterpretation of the Mughal's desecration of temples was carried out in the historiography of the colonial period. The destruction of temples in India, especially under the rule of the Mughals, has not been restricted to being an issue for historians or academics alone. Rather, it has evolved to become a matter of popular opinion, which has since then been reconstructed, reinterpreted, and disseminated through popular representations. In other words, this process can be seen as transforming the past from one of mere study to its performance and representation in popular culture. Popular opinion does not arise based on the facts of the past alone; it is influenced heavily by the media, cinema, politics, and collective imagination. Thus, this segment considers the construction and dissemination of the narrative of temple vandalism over time. Instead of merely asking what transpired in the past, this segment explores what has been recalled, retold, and represented.

Popular perceptions regarding the desecration of temples have been known to draw upon oversimplified versions of history that reconfigure factual information into an emotionally charged narrative. One such instance is that of Aurangzeb, whose reign is often interpreted as being synonymous with temple demolition and desecration for religious reasons. Such an interpretation ignores the selectivity of such acts and, in addition, ignores the presence of patronage and protection of temples during Aurangzeb's reign. Another popular perception is the one that sees temple desecration as a continuous and consistent civilizational conflict between the Hindus and the Muslims. The perception draws upon instances of temple demolition and seeks to generalize the same as a representative form of Mughal rule. The above-mentioned perceptions find popularity due to a variety of reasons including their emotional appeal to current day citizens, ease of communication, and relevance to current political situations. It needs to be understood, however, that popular perceptions of events of the past are not simply cases of misunderstanding of such events. Rather, such popular perceptions are structured versions of history. Popular perceptions find their genesis through repetition, cultural emphasis, and selective memory. Such perceptions are often drawn from potent symbols that include desecrated temples.

The colonial historiography, particularly that of authors like James Mill, H. M. Elliot, and John Dowson, had a profound influence on writing history in terms of divisions within societies. However, how did this come about? As explained by Bernard S. Cohn, with the emergence of the East India Company in India, the British administrators who included Colin Mackenzie, James Mill, and James Tod gained fluency in languages such as Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and Tamil. With this, they could translate the sacred writings as well as codes of law of both the Hindu and Muslim population of the Indian society to be able to rule more effectively. In the process of strengthening its authority, in the midst of regional powers, this knowledge was used as an instrument for ruling, which included categorizing Indian society in terms of categories such as religion and caste, evidenced by early census records in Bengal, among others.[35] Thus, the destruction of the temples in Indian society during

[35] Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

the Mughal era, particularly during the reign of Aurangzeb, was understood within a religious perspective leading to conflicts and discussions. The construction of these events into an image of the Mughals as **"iconoclasts"** and the colonialists as saviours of Hindu civilization allowed the latter to legitimate themselves as agents of civility and stability through history-writing. The colonial historiography of this kind made extensive use of partial interpretations of the Persian texts, singling out specific events while deliberately neglecting the wider political and historical context in which they occurred. In the post-colonial era, however, these stories did not end, but were rather reinvented and reinterpreted in the context of nationalist historiography. Nationalist historians like Jadunath Sarkar and Sita Ram Goel attempted to revise previous colonial histories, creating an over-simplification of the period where the entire rule of the Mughals was characterized as being hostile towards the pilgrimage centres run by the Hindus. In effect, this created an overly simplistic distinction between the two groups, depicting the former as the **"victims"** and the latter as the **"oppressors,"** without recognizing the intricacies of the administrative process during that era.

Another important aspect of distorted history is the selection of facts and events. In most cases, events such as the desecration of temples were often reconstructed based on certain preconceived notions or assumptions. While many historians have focused on examining temple destructions during the reign of Aurangzeb, there has been little attention to other important facets of his rule. Richard M. Eaton, for example, noted that the number of temple destructions in the pre-modern period was relatively small compared to the number of functioning temples.[36] Yet, within the popular narratives of Indian history, the few instances of temple destruction are often generalized and extrapolated to describe a reign. As a result, the distortion gives a false sense of the scale and intensity of temple destruction during the reigns of rulers like Aurangzeb. A significant aspect of historical distortions is also the misrepresentation of the motivations behind certain events. The desecration of temples is often perceived as an act motivated by religious hatred, disregarding the overall political situation at the time. As mentioned above, temple destructions usually took place when rulers had to assert their power, suppress rebellion, or engage in military campaigns.

From the act of temple desecration being seen as a politically motivated event to a popular icon depicting conflicts within religions, the contribution of media, historical writing, and films should not be overlooked. Not only have these media served as means to convey information about history, but they have also been involved in creating selective information on the subject, driven by sentiments and practicality, rather than by logical reasoning. Historians during colonial times have had a lot to do with this process of creation through writing. The historians have divided the Indian history into rigid terms such as **"Hindu," "Muslim,"** and **"British,"** which meant that the conflict between civilizations was embedded in the written records of history. Once developed, this framework of interpretation turned out to be very durable and influential, affecting textbooks, popular accounts, mass media, and even later academic discussions. After the end of colonialism, due to an increase in print and electronic media coverage, this type of storytelling became even more widespread. Newspaper articles, magazine stories, and televised debates usually presented historical events in a manner that was overly simplified to reflect only victimization and aggression. Instead of asking why something happened, journalists and commentators concentrated on describing what exactly happened. There is no doubt that films have served very well to sustain these images. Films and TV series are not only representations of history, but rather dramatizations of history. Consequently, the media becomes a tool through which history, the written word, and film form a constant feedback circle. Debates among historians often become simplified, misquoted, and spread around as part of public knowledge. Ultimately, this serves to create an image of certainty where there is no clear answer.

The next key question which needs addressing here is whether history is in fact influenced by such attitudes of the populace—and, if yes, how exactly. Indeed, for the historians these attitudes play an important role in the study of history; sometimes even define its parameters. As for possible effects of popular narratives on the discipline of history, they are quite serious and, at times, harmful. In the first place, when particular interpretations come to rule in society, they place definite restrictions on the investigation of the historian through ruling out other possibilities of approaching the problem, thus making the historian think as taught. Concerning temple desecration, in particular, the problem of neglecting other aspects of the rule of the Mughals—patronage,

[36] Richard M. Eaton, *Temple Desecration and Muslim States in Medieval India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).

political integration, cultural exchange, etc.—is quite apparent. One of the most important effects of such approach is decontextualization of the historical facts, their separation from political, sociological and temporal context and perception as universal laws. Thus, a historian fails to see the entire pattern of the process and its deeper roots. Political considerations which played a major role in temple desecration, as described by Richard M. Eaton, are often omitted. There is also a polarization in the interpretation of history. If any scholar tries to bring in shades of grey, he or she might be accused of being partisan or a revisionist. Harbans Mukhia rightly points out that this makes the task of a historian much harder because it is essential for historians to carefully evaluate historical evidence and be open to complexity.[37] Furthermore, people's perceptions may lead to a hierarchical classification of history where some historical events get too much attention and other events are ignored. This influences not only people's perceptions of the past but also the direction of historical research.

When such perceptions become entrenched in popular culture, they start influencing not just our understanding of the past but also our emotional and political engagement with it. In doing so, history ceases to be an inquiry into the truth and starts being perceived as a series of facts which confirm what one already believes or identifies with. Therefore, temple desecration will no longer be seen as an historical phenomenon but will instead serve as a potent symbol of shared memory and identity. People tend not to access the past in its primary and scholarly forms but rather through media such as film, TV shows, social media, and popular literature. Such means of communication provide people with clear narratives, which may be even more convincing than historical sources because of their coherent nature. In doing so, popular understandings of historical events can significantly differ from scholarly explanations of the same phenomena. At the same time, this phenomenon can contribute to the process of personalizing the historical narrative in order for people and communities to adopt particular versions of history and include them in their identity formation processes.

The way history is portrayed through media and cinema goes deeper than just telling stories because there are many factors at play in such cases. The choice of what event to portray, the focus, and the way it is depicted make the history of the past relevant to the current period in question. Cinemas, especially, rely on the emotions and images shown, thus being the best platform for changing public opinion. The historical movies use popular themes and symbols that are familiar to their audiences. For example, the desecration of temples is one of the most recognizable topics that people can relate to. However, all the movies and articles about the past events are influenced by the present context, which is defined politically and culturally. Thus, by being repeatedly shown, the history becomes an influential part of media content that is not entirely true or objective. Opinions and thoughts are often presented as facts, creating political symbols out of historical events. The broad dissemination of popular accounts poses an interesting problem for historians: does this practice undermine or enhance historical comprehension? In actuality, it is possible to observe both processes at once. While the oversimplification of events may cause an erosion of historical subtlety through an attempt to attribute many different factors to a single cause and thereby restrict the multiplicity of the past, it may also serve as a tool which makes people more emotionally involved in historical events thus providing history with greater relevance. In fact, temple destruction, for instance, might acquire special importance and become the key point of discussion. But this emotional involvement inevitably leads to distortion since it distracts from analytical approach.

The issue is most pronounced in historical reconstructions produced in the media on a grand scale, where history is depicted through very dramatic reconstructions involving elements of war, conflict, and confrontation. Visual representations tend to focus on instances of destruction, humiliation, and demonstrations of power by invoking religious icons or sites. While the scenes are often inspired by historical examples, their dramatization often leaves out the parts of history that are equally well-recorded but have not been chosen to be highlighted due to their more peaceful nature – for instance, negotiation, coexistence, and compromise. Moreover, repeated motifs within the narrative, like the depiction of rulers based on one dominant characteristic or the portrayal of groups as being static and homogenous, slowly but surely create a familiar interpretive framework. Viewers become conditioned to accept certain common patterns and their outcomes, reinforcing preconceived notions without stimulating thought and reflection. Through this process, the role played by the media and films extends beyond that of simple documentation. Instead, they determine not only what history looks like but also how it is to be

[37] Harbans Mukhia, *The Mughals of India* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 10–12.

interpreted. Ultimately, it becomes increasingly challenging to differentiate between fiction and informed interpretation. This does not imply any deliberate effort on the part of the media and films to spread such narratives, as they are simply driven by the needs of storytelling, where things have to be clear, meaningful, and coherent. Nonetheless, when such narratives are consistently absorbed by people without questioning their credibility, they end up becoming part of the popular imagination that inadvertently echoes the realities of today. Indeed, the media and films not only act as mirrors for societies; they also play an important role in constructing memories of the past.

Difference between popular perception and academic history is not only about differences; it is also characterized by confrontation and contestation. Popular views of the past, in particular of the most sensitive topics, such as destruction of temples during the rule of Aurangzeb, do not simply coexist next to the academic research, but actively confront and reevaluate historical studies in such a way that even the credibility of history is put into question. The main reason why popular perception confronts academic history stems from the ability of common sense to create certainty, where historians introduce ambiguity. For instance, Eaton and Satish Chandra have created an elaborate system of critical evaluation of sources and the awareness of the complexity of historical process. Conversely, popular perception tends to explain complex events using a straightforward and unambiguous language. Moreover, this simplified version tends to appeal to emotions and politics as well. Stories that focus on the defilement of temples as a religious issue tend to be more appealing than accounts that view the defilement of temples as a political or administrative issue. The former tends to be easily understood compared to the latter. This makes academic interpretations seem complicated and even suspicious.

Hence, academic history fails to gain the trust of many people as they see it as being detached from reality. Another important consideration is the emergence of democratized history. Before, historical knowledge was the preserve of elites and scholars. However, in today's world, there are many other ways through which one can shape historical knowledge, especially in terms of media and social media. Although democratization of history has positive implications, it also makes it very difficult for historical narratives to be taken seriously based on the validity of the evidence. Popular perception emerges as another form of authority. The problem is exacerbated by the selective nature of historical scholarship that is employed. Academic research may be selectively used and oversimplified in popular culture discourse. An example is the selective use of statements about the desecration of temples, without including any further elaboration offered by historians that might make it more complex. According to Harbans Mukhia, such a practice results in history being used as an instrument to meet present concerns rather than seeking to understand the past as a separate entity in itself.[38] Popular perception also affects the way in which historians pose their research questions. Historians have to respond to a set of oversimplified research questions posed from the perspective of popular culture. Yet another aspect to consider is the temporal divide between history and perception. The discipline of history itself changes over time as new evidence and interpretations come to light. On the other hand, popular perceptions tend to persist without change, maintaining long-held ideas regardless of the existence of contradicting information. Such a scenario makes it hard for newer interpretations to find acceptance among the masses. However, despite the existing problems, popular perception cannot be completely disconnected from history. Popular perception captures the emotional and cultural value of history and brings out the aspects of history that mean the most to society. The presence of recurring themes like temple destruction shows how relevant such issues continue to be. Thus, the central issue emerges in finding a balance between academic discipline and public discourse. Historians need to explain complex issues in simple terms, yet avoid misleading people while being careful not to offend anyone. This problem further leads to a more fundamental dilemma: the definition of historical truth – is it based on facts and interpretation, or is it an accepted belief?

This phenomenon is partly due to the way in which the incidents of temple desecration have been recorded in the historical texts written during the Mughal period. History, according to the Mughals, was not meant to be an unbiased or objective record; it consisted of narratives that had been constructed out of political and ideological motives. The Persian chronicles constituted a major source for recording the incidents of temple desecration. Among these, texts such as the Maasir-i-Alamgiri, which has been attributed to the reign of Aurangzeb, stand out as being mentioned time and again while referring to the issue of temple desecration. As a result, these

[38] Ibid, 124–126.

writings, which have been produced under courtly conditions, had as their main purpose the glorification of the emperor as a just, strong, and legitimate ruler. In light of this approach, actions like defiling a temple might be expressed in the religious and moral terminology, making them look like a reflection of piety or justice. It is significant from the perspective of knowing how early interpretations emerged since the application of religious terminology did not imply the exclusively religious nature of such actions. According to Truschke, the Mughal political language was characterized by religious terminologies used to legitimize authority.[39] Nevertheless, the use of such rhetoric had certain unforeseen implications. Through their portrayal of temple desecration as a religious act, the Mughal historians provided information that could be used to show religious hostility, even though this might not have been the actual motivation behind it.

Over time, such portrayals of events lost the context of their occurrence and thus could be reinterpreted by subsequent historians. One of the main aspects in the use of rhetoric by Mughal chroniclers is selectivity. All events were not given equal treatment in terms of detail and priority. Events related to temple desecration, which included desecration of significant temples, were portrayed in a way to highlight imperial power and domination. In addition, there were events related to temple patronage, coexistence, and tolerance that did not get adequate attention like other events. In addition, the connection between representation and perception is influenced by the target audience of these texts. Chronicles of Mughals were mainly intended for the ruling classes like court officials, scholars, and administrators rather than common people. Though they might not have had an immediate effect on the public perception at that time, their effect on history was significant since they served as source materials for later historical works. Later when colonial historians or even present-day historians studied the chronicles of Mughals, they did not analyse them with the political and rhetorical aspects in mind and took them as authentic records of past events. Symbolism was another aspect that was used to create Mughal representations. Events like destruction of temples, construction of mosques, and renaming of cities had greater significance than mere administrative acts. They served as symbols that demonstrated power and authority and thus gained prominence in historical texts and strengthened the association between Mughal empire and the destruction of Hindu temples. On the other hand, Mughal narratives did vary among themselves. Different authors used different perspectives on identical happenings—some stressing the need to justify actions in terms of religion, while others considered issues of politics and administration in connection with these actions. In other words, despite all similarities and commonalities, there was no monolithic Mughal narrative of the destruction of Hindu temples. The latter became possible when later scholars selectively chose certain parts of the Mughal narratives based on their understanding. Therefore, one should consider the influence of the Mughal narratives on the formation of public opinion not just as a reflection of the history of these happenings, but also as a result of specific ways this history was narrated. In other words, the Mughal narrative became an interpretative framework from which future understandings would be constructed by later generations. Of course, these writings alone do not form popular perception of the events at all; nevertheless, they form the base of this perception.

Although the Mughals set up some of the basic foundations, it was during the colonial era that temple desecrations were systematically rearranged and disseminated to be incorporated as a crucial part of Indian historical consciousness. The process of rewriting Indian history by British historiographers was more than a mere description of events of the past, but rather involved transforming Indian history into something that would fit colonial ideological aims. The British historians adopted a methodical approach to Indian history in that they divided it into several stages—Hindu, Muslim, and British—with the latter two serving to represent foreign invasions and dominance. In such a case, the Muslim period was described as an age of conquest and religious persecution and, thus, temple destruction played a crucial role in this discourse as it symbolized the enmity between Hindus and Muslims. This perspective was based on Mughal literature, namely Persian chronicles; however, there was a selective and isolated use of sources that took the religious persecutions out of the political context and turned them into indisputable facts without mentioning examples of collaboration and coexistence. Such interpretations were not simply academic. In highlighting division and strife in the past of India, colonial historians attempted to justify British hegemony as a force of unity and civilization. Consequently, the story of

[39] Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 70–73.

temple destruction became part of an ideological perspective wherein India is characterized as a society deeply divided and lacking the capability for self-rule.

One significant outcome of colonial historiography was its capacity to disseminate such perspectives outside the purview of the intellectual elite. Through books, reports, and rhetoric, colonial interpretations gained widespread circulation far beyond the reach of previous Mughal texts. Such developments represented a new phase wherein the understanding of temple destruction evolved from being purely academic to becoming popular knowledge. Temple destruction was no longer considered merely as separate events but rather as fundamental characteristics of an entire era. The wide-ranging and varied policies of the Mughals were obscured by a singular perspective on religious confrontation. Despite the conclusion of the colonial era, the above accounts have not ceased to exist. Instead, the colonial narratives have been reconstructed within newer political perspectives, notably through nationalist and communal ideologies. According to Harbans Mukhia, this demonstrates the long-lasting impacts of the colonial framework on modern history writing. The colonial historiographic approach has also influenced the way history is studied, placing higher value on some types of evidence over others.[40] For instance, written texts, particularly those from elite sources, were considered more credible compared to oral testimonies or physical artifacts. These biases have reinforced particular explanations for temple desecrations. Modern scholars like Richard M. Eaton and Satish Chandra have questioned these colonial narratives by restoring context, political motivations, and selectivity in the destruction of temples. Despite all of these contributions from academia, the colonial historiographical legacy still plays an important role. Its widespread use and inclusion in the education system have ensured its endurance in the minds of the general public. Media and cinematography have also contributed to this by using well-known motifs to create engaging films. Consequently, colonial times are a key period in the evolution of the notion of temple desecration as such, since during this time these events ceased to be sporadic occurrences and formed an image of conflict. The reinterpretation and formation of new ways of viewing history took place simultaneously during this time. In other words, it is impossible to discuss the development of popular notions about temple desecration without mentioning colonial historiography. By organizing, simplifying, and disseminating a specific interpretation of the past, colonialists decisively impacted our present-day perception of these events.

In relation to learning the process of making history, formal education remains one of the most vital sources from which people learn history. However, for many individuals, the understanding of history is learned through formal means of schooling and colleges rather than through scholarly researches and arguments. The importance of formal education in the learning process cannot be overemphasized since the books in such institutions have considerable weight, giving rise to perceptions that are often lasting. The teaching of history at educational institutions is done in a manner that makes history appear simplistic and structured. This is necessitated by the age of the students. Nonetheless, it also leads to the problem that complex events become simple to accommodate. An example of this situation occurs when cases of desecration of temples in the past occur. This involves simplification of a complex situation to such an extent that the contexts under which temple destruction takes place go unnoticed. An equally important factor here is the power of textbooks. Since students usually take for granted what is written in textbooks, there is some kind of credibility about such sources that cannot be found in others. Consequently, the information included in such sources becomes a part of the student's consciousness. After that, such knowledge becomes a basis on which the person approaches the study of other representations of history. Once he or she encounters any information related to history in movies, news, or even social networks, everything is seen from the perspective shaped by education. Facts matching with what one knows are accepted, and contradictory facts might be easily rejected. Moreover, it must be noted that even the textbooks are biased. Their production occurs under certain historical and intellectual influences and, therefore, what is put into or left out of them is based on particular ideas regarding the history of humanity. It becomes clear that education is not just the transmission of history knowledge, but an attempt to develop particular thinking about the past. Having an unbiased view from the very beginning can help a person develop a better view on things in the future, while having one’s perceptions limited to only a certain side of truth may not allow changing them afterwards.

Apart from texts and written history, another important means of comprehending the past lies in oral histories and local myths. These could be oral histories handed down by older people, local legends, beliefs associated

[40] Harbans Mukhia, *The Mughals of India* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 6–9.

with temples, and myths. Local myths have little to do with academic history as there is no documentation or proper methodology involved in forming myths and legends. Rather, oral histories and myths involve personal memories and beliefs and hence, carry a lot more emotional significance than academic history. In the context of temple defilement, most communities have their own myths regarding the defilement of temples, resistance against defilement, etc., which slowly become an integral part of community identity. One of the defining aspects of an oral tradition lies in its fluidity. Unlike a piece of writing that is static, stories told orally have the ability to change overtime. Every new generation is likely to give it new meanings by interpreting it differently or adding new elements to it. Although this makes it less reliable when it comes to accuracy in terms of being historical documentation, the very aspect of its fluidity and its relevance make it powerful as well.

Oral traditions continue to be trusted even more than academic writings, simply because they come alive in the context of communities. Besides, people feel a connection to them. While everybody does not read historical literature, everybody shares stories in conversation. However, an oral tradition does not exist independently. It is interconnected with many other kinds of representations including movies and media. This means that when a movie reiterates a story already known in the community, beliefs get reinforced. Nevertheless, it is important to approach oral traditions cautiously as well. First and foremost, they should be viewed more as an interpretation of how things were remembered by a community than a factual representation of how things actually happened. As such, these traditions provide clues as to how collective memory operates, rather than providing objective facts about the past. From this standpoint, oral traditions can be regarded as quite useful as they help to understand the emotional aspect of history. In other words, history is much more than just dates and events; it is also about memories and perception.

In the modern age, the role of social media in shaping peoples' perception of and understanding about history cannot be overlooked. Instagram and YouTube have changed the way information is made and delivered. As compared to books or elaborated writing, the information provided by social media is always short and easy to understand. While social media makes information easier for people to understand, it does so at the cost of omitting relevant details. Historical happenings that can be elaborate topics are presented through videos or other types of short messages that lack detail. One problem associated with social media is its repetitive nature. Repetition is one reason why people may regard something as being true. The repetition is what makes people believe information, despite it not being complete or accurate. Another very important aspect is the emotional resonance of information. Posts that manage to make people feel some way, whether it is angry or proud, happy or sad, tend to circulate faster. In this case, stories of conflict or destruction gain more popularity than any other type of story. Social media also offers the possibility for almost anyone to publish posts.

Though such democratization of publishing process gives many opportunities, at the same time, it raises the issue of verification, since not everything published is checked in advance. People are used to sharing opinions under the disguise of facts, so it can become very difficult to separate truth from opinion and subjective evaluation. What's more, social media often creates the phenomenon known as an echo chamber effect, according to which users communicate mostly with content that is familiar to them and confirms their ideas. Thus, in such environment, history will be perceived mainly due to rapid and frequent exposure to different pieces of information. However, there is no doubt that social media does not solely have negative aspects. Social media can become a useful tool for spreading awareness and increasing accessibility of information. But the problem is not about the nature of the medium; the problem is rather about how it is employed. On balance, social media has contributed greatly to the development of common public perceptions but has not made them more accurate.

However, while examining history, we usually focus on what is documented, depicted, and spoken about. It is crucial to acknowledge what is not depicted or documented. It also plays a crucial role in forming our understanding of the historical narrative. When examining the narratives of Mughal India, particularly the desecration of temples, some events stand out in multiple stories. Yet, other features such as patronage, collaboration, and coexistence have been omitted or given very little attention. It is essential to pay attention to the balance in historical narratives. When one particular aspect is continuously repeated, people believe that it describes the whole period. However, sometimes, even if the issue is not explicitly discussed, it could still be mentioned in passing. The lack of explanation is why it is hard for people to remember this particular event. The second reason is that people are inclined to remember things that are dramatic or emotional. While destructive

events are memorable, peaceful encounters appear less significant, despite being more frequent. As a result, people create a narrative of the past that is comprehensive but selective. In such a way, silence becomes an active factor affecting comprehension. Omissions may influence perception just as much as inclusions do. Therefore, to comprehend the historical process, one needs not only to focus on present facts but also to consider the following questions: What is omitted? Why is it omitted? How does it affect our comprehension? Such a perspective will help us achieve a more nuanced comprehension of history.

It should be noted that perception of the history does not stop within a certain generation; it continues to exist through the generations because of family upbringing, educational processes, and other social contacts. For this reason, if some interpretation has gained popularity, then it remains popular for a long period of time, despite the fact that further discoveries can offer another perception of the past. In this regard, one may conclude that the process of perception creation does not stop; it continues and is repeatedly renewed. Each new generation receives the same information and believes it in many cases. From my perspective, this is the main reason why some controversies related to the past keep existing for years and years. It is not all about knowing about past in history; it is about feeling attached to it. People tend to have an emotional connection to some past events and stories and even places. We can say that there is an emotional ownership of history in such cases. In other words, historical facts stop being neutral events. Instead, they are incorporated into individual and collective identity. For example, destruction of temples is not a historical event; it is something that people still feel connected to in the present tense. Emotional ownership makes debates on historical events more vivid. Since the people who talk are deeply engaged in the process due to their emotional bond to past events, it becomes hard to have objective talks about different opinions on history. However, emotional ownership explains why some events continue to be relevant through decades and centuries. The reason for that is that there are many people who remember them and keep arguing about the meaning of those events. I would like to say that emotional ownership of history can be both positive and negative.

Popular understanding tends to simplify the narrative of history and paint people who played crucial roles in shaping it as either heroes or villains. Although the former allows for greater clarity in understanding history, it strips it of its complexity. Historical figures did not possess exclusively good or evil characters. Their choices were made under certain conditions, and depending on them, they could have either good or adverse consequences. Nevertheless, popular versions of these events typically leave out these intricacies. In relation to the period of Mughal history, for example, kings such as Aurangzeb were depicted very one-dimensionally. They were either focused upon their cruelty or discussed without considering other elements of their reign. As a result, an image became frozen in time even in the light of new facts that emerged since the process of simplifying the narration does not allow for changes. People choose to perceive history that way due to personal preferences. Namely, hero–villain approach to it is easily understood, evokes emotions, and is memorable. Nevertheless, it also has certain drawbacks. From my perspective, history ought not be distilled into such simplistic terms. On the contrary, it needs to be regarded as an area of contradictions, whereby no person or incident can be pigeonholed.

A common mistake people make while studying history is the mistake called presentism. Presentism means analyzing history based on present-day moral and ethical standards. This practice can seem logical but actually results in misunderstanding of the historical period. The past was quite different from the present one. The notions of religion, politics, and culture were completely different then. An act that seems inappropriate nowadays can be considered to be quite appropriate and understandable back then. Judging events and actions based on modern standards alone makes us fail to understand the essence of those actions. This is especially true when it comes to cases of destruction of temples. People believe that all of them happened because of religious discrimination and intolerance of religion in general without taking into account political motives or reasons for rebellion. Nevertheless, it does not mean that there should be no criticism of the past at all. It just needs to be considered within its proper context. The impact of presentism extends to the way that historical characters are viewed as well. For instance, historical rulers tend to be classified according to modern-day standards as either good or bad, without considering that these rulers were products of their era. This leads to an oversimplification of history into morality lessons rather than a careful analysis of the past. To me, refraining from presentism is important since it makes it easier to understand the past. Presentism changes our perspective on history from a judgmental one to a more interpretive one.

The selective reading of historical sources is another factor that influences the perception of history. Usually, people do not read the whole text or go into detail with the sources. They rely on a selected extract, quotation or summary instead. Although this might seem as an easier way to understand things, this kind of approach usually results in a partial or distorted interpretation of historical information. Historical sources, particularly those belonging to the period of the Mughal rule, are very elaborate. They include details that give readers an insight into what had led to particular events and why they occurred. But, when one part of the source is taken from the rest and is considered in isolation, it automatically loses its context. Thus, its interpretation can vary greatly. The destruction of the temple may, for example, imply something much bigger than it really is, depending on the political climate of the time. The act of selective reading may not always be intentional. It takes place since most people prefer concise and easy-to-understand information. Deep analysis consumes time and energy, something that some individuals may not be ready to devote. Nonetheless, the result is the same—the history gets interpreted in bits and pieces and never as a coherent whole. The second problem is that selective reading tends to emphasize dramatic or remarkable events. Such episodes are more engaging and memorable. However, other important elements like administrative policies and daily interactions get ignored. The consequence is the distortion where some events appear more crucial than they really are. Moreover, selective reading is also closely related to mass media and social networking sites where information gets provided in compressed formats. Cited statements and passages travel across the web, sometimes without adequate elaborations, thus making it convenient for individuals to believe everything uncritically. I believe that selective reading yields what could be referred to as a **"partial truth."** It is neither inaccurate nor complete. Where the issue lies is in treating this truth as the total truth. To prevent this from happening, it is important to deal with the sources in an appropriate manner so as to understand their context.

There is no more subtle and powerful tool for shaping one's perceptions than language and terminologies. Words are never neutral as each of them implies its meaning, feelings and interpretations. Therefore, choosing certain terminology may greatly influence one's interpretation of the event. In fact, in case of mentioning events such as temple desecration, even terminology sets the stage in describing the event. For example, saying that some event is desecration means that this is the violation of religion and a great offense. On the other hand, in case one calls the event political action or assertion of power, a completely different perspective is offered. However, both phrases may be applied to the same event and produce completely different impression on the audience. Thus, it can be said that language not only describes history but also interprets it. Before starting the analysis of the event, terminologies make their impact and shape the mind of the reader. This issue becomes very relevant when one talks about the subject of Mughal temple desecration. One such element is the element of repetition. There are certain words that are used repeatedly in textbooks, in media, and in general discourse. With time, people start associating certain individuals, epochs, or incidents with specific words without questioning themselves about whether these words actually capture the entire complexity of the scenario. Language evokes certain emotions. Emotive words may provoke certain responses in people, including feelings like anger, sympathy, or pride. In most cases, the emotion evoked by the word carries more weightage than any hard historical facts and people end up remembering the emotion triggered in them, and not the details of the event itself. On the other hand, language is influenced by history. The language used in Mughal chronicles is different from the one used in colonial histories and present-day narratives. To me, it is important to consider language because it helps in understanding the formation of perception. Language helps one realize that history entails more than just facts; rather, it is the process through which facts are presented. Awareness of language makes one have a balanced perspective of the past.

However, the fact remains that these distorted accounts of the Mughals do have connections to actual historical facts. This is evident in the case where temples were demolished and this is confirmed from primary sources and records. The problem arises when there is selective choice, misrepresentation, and even misinterpretation of these records, which lead to present-day conflicts. Thus, what connects actual historical facts to distorted historical facts is how real incidents are selectively highlighted in order to create an account that seems to be based on real evidence. However, distorted historical facts are often not based on enough evidence, which makes it hard for historians to prove any assertions about these events. Nevertheless, scholars have attempted to counter these distorted historical claims by discussing the demolition of temples within the proper historical setting,

which reveals the political and strategic nature of this incident. It is important to understand these historical events through the right perspective, which involves analyzing sources within a wider framework.

The emphasis here has not only been to analyse what happened in the past, but also to see how these events were perceived and understood. Clearly, it is evident that the popular perception of history, especially with respect to issues like the desecration of temples, do not arise overnight or spontaneously. On the contrary, this view is arrived at gradually and systematically based upon a number of factors that shape and mould perceptions. One of the important points raised is the difference between the academic study of history and the popular perception. Whereas the historian is driven by evidence, context and multiple perspectives, this is not the case in popular views. Historians like Richard M. Eaton and Satish Chandra for instance, have established that the issue of desecration of temples should be seen in terms of political considerations and regional factors, rather than religious violence. The language and terminology used also play an important part in forming these views. The words applied to describe the events in question come with certain connotations that can shape one's perception of the event right from the very beginning. The frequent application of certain words allows us to memorize them and connect them with a certain view of the event without critically thinking about whether or not it is adequate. Hence, we have our preconceived ideas even before we start looking at the events critically. Moreover, it also needs to be stated that the selected reading of various sources helps shape our understanding of events. People tend to read and analyse excerpts, quotes, and other fragments of information, thus basing their understanding on incomplete knowledge that seems quite adequate but lacks proper context. Although these pieces of information are not necessarily false, they are partial and do help form certain biases due to repetition. Finally, another key point to consider here is the problem of presentism. Presentism is defined as judging the past with current standards, and, as a result, many mistakes occur. Popular perceptions make the complexity of reality simpler by establishing hero versus villain categories for historical actors. People see historical individuals and occurrences in simple images without complexities.

However, real people and happenings are products of many factors that render them complex. This ties in with another related aspect of history, that of emotional ownership. Most times, when an individual talks about history, he does not view it as an alien occurrence that happened long ago but as something belonging to him or to his community. This makes individuals emotionally invested in interpreting history, leading to fierce disagreements and debates between historians. It, however, makes it clear why some historical events remain important after such a long time. When viewed within the context of the contemporary times, perception is informed by knowledge that is fragmented. The individual receives bits of history from many sources, including textbooks, social media, and news media, among others. All these bits are usually disjointed, yet individuals make strong opinions out of such fragmented information. Such tendencies are encouraged by social media and repetition as well. Repeated notions tend to become more and more familiar. It is in the nature of things that people are likely to believe something that is familiar. With the passage of time, the stories that keep being retold start seeming more truthful even if there is no concrete evidence backing them. Silence and absence are another crucial element. Notions that are left out of certain stories can play as important a part as those that are included in them. Cooperation, patronage, or coexistence may get ignored if emphasis is not placed on them.

In doing so, there arises a sense of imbalance and some events come to seem as more important and influential as they really were. It is also important to note the significance of education, oral history, and media. This takes us to another important concept: continuity. Once an interpretation becomes widely accepted, it continues to exist even when challenged by new evidence. Moreover, it can be further perpetuated as part of teaching and social interactions. Therefore, it appears that perceiving is also creating and perpetuating a phenomenon. On a wider scale, the debate under consideration touches upon the contrast between an event and its narrative representation. While what really happened cannot always be known for sure, the narrative itself is usually influenced by linguistic considerations, selectivity, emotionality, and repetition. The narrative, then, can serve as a foundation of the public perception of a historical event, although such perceptions are not entirely negative because they reflect people’s interest in history and their need to use it to interpret the present. However, history should never be simplified to fit the modern narrative as stated by many historians including Harbans Mukhia. To conclude, this chapter shows that the way history is perceived by people is the result of an ongoing and dynamic process influenced by elements such as language, education, memory, media, and repetition. After their

creation, such perceptions prove to be extremely influential and persistent. Nevertheless, having an insight into the processes of creation allows one to question them.

CONCLUSION

The study conducted on the subject of temple desecration in India examined the matter from three distinct angles: First, what constitutes temple desecration in the Mughal era? Second, how did temples get changed in terms of their character under the colonial regime, especially those in Delhi since 1857? Third, the influence of popular perceptions about these processes in shaping contemporary understanding of these matters was investigated. In sum, these results reveal that temple desecration in Indian history is not only a historical process but an issue related to memory, identity, politics, and interpretation.

Temple desecration in Indian history is a matter that can neither be discussed within the same frame, nor viewed from the angle of religious hostility or political tactic alone. There were other reasons behind temple desecration in the country throughout history. For example, sometimes the temples were targeted for being symbols of political power. In other situations, wars and changes in cities' structures played a role. Also, sometimes the temples received patronage from ruling entities. These facts prove that temple desecration is a complex topic that was distorted by simplification in modern times.

Findings on Mughal Period-

The first observation is associated with the period of Mughal rule. According to the results, although there were some episodes during which Mughals were destroying Hindu temples, it could not be regarded as the common practice for all rulers. It depended on the situation, geographic location, and personal opinions.

In this case, as examples can serve those episodes when Mughal leaders pursued practical purposes concerning temples. Thus, on the one hand, there were many cases when temples kept working regularly; on the other hand, some financial assistance could be given to them as well. That means that only by considering the destructive nature of Mughals regarding temples will be incorrect.

At the same time, according to the findings, there were cases when temples were really demolished by Mughals. Temples in the pre-modern period not only worked as places of worship but also were places where economic activities took place and land ownership could be considered. Thus, the temples were legitimate objects to fight about, and the destruction of a rival's temple was a kind of victory.

It is essential to note the importance of this result since this research changes the perspective of the topic's discussion from the religious one to the political one. Even though temples are inherently spiritual objects, they have always been an inseparable part of power relations at the given moment. In turn, it can be claimed that the demolition of temples bears the political meaning along with the religious one.

Aurangzeb's rule can now be viewed as a peculiar case within this framework since it is obvious that numerous temples were demolished during that period, especially in regions characterized by instability. However, one should also acknowledge that not all of them were destroyed but survived, receiving at least certain attention. It can be said that Aurangzeb was a relatively conservative ruler but not a demolisher of all temples.

To sum up, the results of this research disprove both extremist views concerning the discussed topic. First of all, it is possible to claim that the destruction of temples did take place; however, it was neither inevitable nor universal.

Findings on Regional Patterns-

In the course of the research, it was found out that a major number of cases of desecration of temples during the Mughal era took place in North India. Nonetheless, it does not mean that the Muslim kings displayed more aggression against the North Indian population. Rather, it suggests that North India formed the hub of the Mughal Empire.

In the southern part of India, there was another trend of temple destruction, as the region was peripheral for the Mughals. It is pertinent to mention here that the results have significant implications for future studies, as they highlight the correlation between temple desecration and state dominance in a specific area.

Findings on Colonial Period-

Another body of evidence that is considered important deals with the colonial era, namely the history of Delhi after 1857. From the analysis it can be concluded that the colonial interventions in the realm of the sacred differ from the Mughal ones in methodology, terminology and reasons for the interventions.

While the Mughals identified themselves with the devastation of religious structures, the colonialists denied having anything against religion, stating that the intervention policy was based on the principle of non-interference in the religious life of Indians. Nevertheless, it becomes obvious that the role of the colonial administration in shaping sacred areas cannot be underestimated. In view of the revolt of 1857 in Delhi, demolition, road construction, military occupation and clearance became an unavoidable outcome of colonialism. Religious sites close to the Red Fort were destroyed or built anew. The result was a creation of new sacred sites and demolition of others.

Among other findings of the research, one of the most evident ones can be stated as follows – the colonial destruction of sacred spaces usually involved bureaucratic and technical terms, such as **“improvement”**, **“security”**, **“sanitation”**, **“clearance”**, and **“removal of encroachments.”** As a result, it became hard to see the religious nature of such processes and understand what was really going on in the religious environment.

Hence, while the destruction of Mughal religious spaces included such obvious symbolic acts, the interventions in colonial times were often part of bureaucratic processes. However, the effects of such processes remain no less important since the result of these interventions was the removal of sacred spaces from the area where they once existed. In addition to it, another finding of this study is the tendency of colonial administration to preserve only the monuments rather than living religious spaces. It means that those architectural buildings that were considered important in terms of history or architectural value were usually saved, while others were usually neglected or destroyed.

Findings on Economic and Legal Impact-

One other important observation made is that desecration of temples should not be considered only in the form of physical destruction. There could also be cases whereby such desecration was carried out through laws, revenues, and property. Temple and shrine desecration was done when such institutions were brought under the ambit of new laws and revenue measures. Such institutions had been dependent on customs and traditions, lands and grants, and community welfare. When some of these aspects were disrupted, there was desecration in the true sense. The definition of desecration was thus broadened beyond the obvious.

Findings on Popular Perception-

Among the most important observations that have been made through this research has to be the way in which the popular notion of this issue has been interpreted. From the analysis that was conducted in the course of the research, it is clear that popular conceptions of temple desecration have more to do with contemporary interpretation rather than history, politics, education, and even personal experience.

The common conception in the popular discourse today is one in which the temple desecration under the rule of the Mughals is viewed in terms of a great struggle between civilizations. This means that individual cases of desecration are interpreted as part of a pattern of oppression throughout time and without regard for the political context. On the other hand, when it comes to colonially motivated disturbances within sacred spaces, the reaction of many people tends to be indifferent and even celebratory due to modernization.

Selective memory could have been facilitated through some characteristics of historiography. The colonial historians emphasized the conflicts within the pre-colonial era, yet portrayed the British reign as a sensible and

orderly epoch. In addition, the later political forces took advantage of the episodes of the Mughal Empire due to their religious character. Contemporary media practices have added up to this selective remembrance. Films, television series, and social networking sites tend to focus more on narratives than explanations. Hence, monarchs come out as mere symbols while historical processes are forgotten. It is, therefore, fair to say that popular memory is not only a reflection of history; it is also a re-evaluation process influenced by present concerns.

Findings on Local vs. National Memory

Another pertinent aspect in relation to this issue is that several occurrences of temple defilements have also taken place before, and these originally started as an occurrence in the locality itself. The debate at the national level concerning the defilement of temples, which happens to be a contemporary issue, originally also started as an occurrence in the locality itself. However, gradually, such occurrences have become significant due to changes in the print media as well as politics and identity formation. Thus, from the above analysis, it becomes clear that history as well as its interpretation has contributed to the occurrence of the defilement of temples at the national level.

Findings on Political Use in the Present-

The other point made is the importance of the profanation of temples in the current political context. History is employed to craft narratives of persecution, victory, revenge, or cultural survival. What must be noted, however, is the fact that this is done through reductionism. Political conflict, economic exploitation, land control, warfare, or urban development becomes a matter of religious hostility alone. It would not be implied here that the past sufferings must be ignored. Rather, this is an entreaty for critical scrutiny before any recourse to history.

Comparative Findings-

When comparing the two eras, there is an identification of similarities and differences.

Differences:

1) The Mughal Era had desecration that was selective and tied to sovereignty or war.
2) Colonial activities were usually indirect and related to administration and city planning.
3) Mughal instances are always recorded in emotional or ethical terms.
4) Colonial disruptions were always considered in technical language or ignored altogether.

Similarities:

1) Sacred spaces were always influenced by power in the two eras.
2) Communities would adapt, reconstruct, or preserve memory in response in the two eras.
3) Power language would justify actions in the two eras.

Overall Findings-

Overall, this thesis concludes that desecration of temples within the context of Indian history is a complicated process. This process involves various activities, including temple destruction, display of power through temples, administrative shifts, weakening of power, selective remembrances, and reinterpretation in later years. An important aspect of the issue brought out by the research conducted here includes the role of the debate on temple desecration in the current period. The tendency of using desecration of temples for creating narratives based on blame and emotion rather than an analysis of why these events happened and how the local community

responded to these issues is one such case. One thing to remember is that the process of temple desecration was an active one for the local community.

Final Conclusion-

Consequently, the findings of this study clearly indicate that desecration of temples in the Indian subcontinent in the past cannot be attributed to a sole reason. The idea of temple desecration was neither a product of religious bigotry nor political animosity, but rather an amalgamation of a variety of reasons that influenced when and how this phenomenon took place. As such, the politics of power, administration, geography, economy, and cultural traditions have been found to have their influences on desecration and preservation of these sacred sites.

Indeed, the findings of the present study effectively refute many binary assumptions that have for decades prevailed both within and outside academia. Firstly, it can no longer be claimed that temple desecration was never practiced or its effects were irrelevant. On the other hand, it would be inaccurate to assume that this phenomenon took place on a regular basis due to religious hostilities alone. This evidence is better explained by the existence of a continuum of temple practices: Some were actually destroyed, while others remained untouched; some may have been moved due to changes in city life or politics; some were undermined as a result of socio-economic and legal changes; and still others were reconstructed by their respective local communities.

Such a multidimensional approach becomes extremely important when talking about the Mughal period. In this respect, the research shows that the destruction of temples done by Mughals was quite selective, and such actions were performed based on specific conditions.

Being places of worship, temples become a means for political struggle as they are connected with wealth, power, land, and social cohesion. As an institution, temples have the potential to become the target of attacks during wars, either in order to conquer other territories or to display the sovereignty of those rulers. In such cases, the temples acquire political importance as a symbol of power of those opposing kings or rebels.

It goes without saying that there are cases of tolerance or even sponsorship by Mughals. The presence of temples despite their desecration in different parts of India is proof enough of such co-existence. On the contrary, colonialism adopts a completely different strategy when it comes to temple desecration compared to the strategies utilized in other periods.

In other eras, temple desecration referred to the destruction of religious shrines. However, during colonialism, temple desecration would involve the urbanization process. For example, temple desecration in Delhi following 1857 entailed the renovation process that would result in changes in the religious environment in that region. Temples are often moved around during the process to improve their security and sanitations, amongst other reasons.

It is important to note that these differences play a vital role in determining how temple desecration took place during colonialism. Undeniably, it is clear that temple desecration involved the desecration and destruction of religious shrines; however, unlike other eras, it required different techniques. This process depended on the use of bureaucracies to achieve the objective.

The term used here was technical, which makes it unforgettable. One additional feature of considerable importance that emerges very strongly from the analysis is the role of economic and legal structures in shaping the future of temples and religious institutions. The desecration here goes beyond mere destruction of the building itself and extends to undermining the institutional structure and function. There were new legal and revenue laws under the colonial administration, which temples had to operate within. In some cases, the changing conditions undermined the temple without causing any destruction.

A broader definition of desecration becomes essential for a complete understanding of the historical events taking place. This perspective allows us to understand how power could be exercised against the sanctity of a place without doing anything tangible to destroy it.

Through this approach, we can broaden our focus from acts of destruction to include many other influences that could shape the future of temples. No less important, too, is the analysis undertaken by the authors of popular perception and collective memory. Indeed, what stands out above all else is the fact that in the contemporary view of the subject under study, memory tends to be constructed rather than reflective of the actual conditions of temple desecration in the Mughal period. Today, when analyzing the history of temple desecration, people tend to perceive individual events as part of a grander story of civilizational conflict between Hindus and Muslims. In doing so, one tends to forget about the complexities of the phenomenon, its regional nature and political background, as well as examples of patronage that occurred during this time.

However, memories of disruptions to sacred places in the colonial era often have a different quality. Much of what occurred during the period is viewed as part of modernization, city-building, and reform efforts instead of being seen as a type of cultural or religious loss.

The reasons for this are not coincidental but are due to the impact of colonial historiography, which tended to depict the period under the British as one of reason and progress while highlighting conflicts in previous eras. Additionally, the selective use of history within political and social narratives contributes to this trend. The impact of media and public discourse on the topic further reinforces these trends.

Simplification tends to make an explanation more palatable than detailed examination. The entertainment media and discussion through film and television programs and even social media sites prefer dramatic and clear presentations over complexity in explanations of the past.

The study results on the question of whether it was a local or national memory are another example that demonstrates this process. There were numerous cases of temple desecration that could be initially classified as local events because they happened to specific groups of people and were memorized by them. Without the existence of advanced technologies for information transfer, these events would have remained local.

But gradually, these incidents were included in broader discourse via mechanisms like print, politics, and identities. This process of memory transformation shows the dynamic characteristic of history because what is remembered, how it is remembered, and why it is remembered can differ depending on changing circumstances. The process of temple desecration was turned into a national problem not just due to these events but also the way they were organized and used afterwards.

In the current context, the significance of temple desecration is also evident politically. Historical events are frequently deployed in order to forge narratives about belonging or otherness and conflict between groups or peoples. Feelings of grievance or pride, continuity, or disruption can all be created through such narratives. However, one common issue is the lack of nuance involved in such constructions, whereby complex events that may involve a number of variables become singularly explained.

This does not imply that history should remain unconnected with its relevance to current issues. Interactions between history and modern society are inevitable, and history can play a crucial part in forming a people's identity through collective memory. Yet the current study stresses the importance of approaching history critically and in-depth. The most important lesson that could be taken away from this work is related to resilience. Far from being passive recipients of historical events, sacred sites proved resilient, as can be seen in the rebuilding of temples, moving of shrines, adaptation of ritual performances and maintenance of practices in the face of persecution.

It means that the history of temple demolition may be viewed as the history of transformation. The way people manage to cope with transformations, adapt to new circumstances and keep traditions is discussed in this context as well. It becomes evident that the victims of violence also become participants of political life in a sense.

In conclusion, it may be said that it becomes obvious once again that analysis of history from various perspectives with an adequate level of objectivity is vitally important. In terms of our investigation, we deal with an intersection of three major spheres – religion, politics, and memory.

The results obtained during our work demonstrate the complexity of historical truth. Many factors influence its creation and make its interpretation possible from various perspectives. Admitting complexity of the issue does not necessarily mean ignoring it or making our understanding distorted. On the contrary, it may help us obtain greater insight in the historical processes.

Therefore, one should understand the role of scholarship as not an effort to confirm the current discourse and/or provide an ultimate perspective, but, on the contrary, as a way to open up space for criticism and questioning, highlighting the intricate nature of the evidence provided.

Summarizing this research into temple desecration, it needs to be stated that this issue sheds light on many aspects regarding the very nature of society – the mechanisms of power, the adaptation to changes, the role of memory in the perception of past events.

History is by no means a set of absolute truths or an immutable and static concept – rather, history is an interpretation, which necessitates constant reinterpretation and revision. In other words, studying history implies not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also should entail taking some responsibilities, namely approaching history carefully, acknowledging its complicatedness, and not simplifying it. In this way, we would avoid making history a source of conflicts.

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