**[Fading pulse of democracy](https://www.dawn.com/news/1692405/fading-pulse-of-democracy)**

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IF Hindutva is a vehicle for fascism, which it is, it must be a bit more than a mere communal ogre. Its other core objectives include women’s subjugation through patriarchy. It has an economic worldview with robust global support, including a fear of egalitarian politics and an alignment with neoliberalism. It seeks to free Brahminical hierarchy from the clutches of Ambdekar’s progressive constitution.

Hindutva thrives on prairie fires it sets — on hijab here, beef-eating there, Hindi versus Urdu, Babar here, Aurangzeb there. Let’s pause on Aurangzeb.

“Exalted son, I was much pleased with the ‘dali’ of mangoes sent by you to the old father. You have requested me to suggest names for the unknown mangoes. When you yourself are very clever, why do you give trouble to your old father? However, I have named them ‘Sudha-ras’ and Rasna-vilas’.” Think of Hindutva’s toxic Hindi-for-Hindus, Urdu-for-Muslims thesis.

The letter from Emperor Aurangzeb (1658-1707) to his son comes from a clutch of missives translated by J.H. Bilimoria from Ruka’at-i-Alamgiri. There is another collection of letters: Dastur-al-Amal Agahi. A ‘learned servant’ of Raja Aya Mal collected these under the raja’s orders from various sources after the emperor’s death.

There is an eye-raising advice to another son in one of the letters. Be watchful of the goings on in Gujarat. No, the advice has nothing to do with any Hindu-Muslim communal upsurge in Aurangzeb’s Gujarat.

On the contrary, the reference is to Maratha forces raiding the traders of Surat, looting Hindu and Muslim businessmen alike. The raiders used the booty in Shivaji’s fabled battles with Aurangzeb’s armies. The emperor dispatched his best generals to protect the merchants of Surat, regardless of their religious profiles, but the Marathas usually outfoxed them. Aurangzeb’s generals who led the campaign against Shivaji were often Hindu Rajput.

Hindutva’s key targets are the erstwhile outcastes, ancient targets from centuries before Aurangzeb’s forbears were born.

A great administrator and an unmitigated religious zealot, Aurangzeb was a bundle of contradictions. He forbade the public recitation of poetry but never ceased to quote verses from classic Persian poets in letters to his sons and others. He ordered the demolition of the temple in Mathura, which was built in the reign of his grandfather Jehangir. He destroyed a temple in Banaras, and these may not have been the only ones. It’s also well known that the puritan Aurangzeb had more Hindu generals and nobles in his camp than did his religiously eclectic elder brother Dara Shikoh.

So what do we do about Aurangzeb? How do we un-ring the bell of history? Should we disband the Anglican Church because it was founded by Henry VIII to commit adultery, nay, murder and adultery? Take Aurangzeb’s revenge on Indian Muslims 400 years after his miserable death? Yes, and no. Muslims too provide the traction Hindutva needs, and they have enough leaders in their fold to fall into the trap.

Hindutva’s key targets are the erstwhile outcastes, ancient targets from centuries before Aurangzeb’s forbears were born. A Dalit groom could be in trouble in modern India — even if the headlines are mostly about [defending or opposing hijab](https://www.dawn.com/news/1680268/hindu-hardliners-seek-wider-ban-on-hijab-in-class-after-indian-court-verdict), or the violent hypocrisy around [beef-eating](https://www.dawn.com/news/1176364) etc — if the groom as much as rides a horse to his wedding, deemed an upper caste privilege. Hindutva is about destroying the Nehruvian vision that has protected Muslims, Christians, Dalits, Sikhs, anyone from his long-feared majoritarian putsch now underway.

But Muslim leaders have gained from the polarisation. They sold priceless waqf land in Mumbai for a lark to a billionaire to build a gaudy skyscraper, but they couldn’t negotiate a peaceful settlement over a few square yards to save thousands of lives, and the country from Hindutva. A settlement would have taken the wind out of their adversary’s sails. But it would have also left a few Muslim lawyers with no brief to flaunt.

There’s no debating with Hindutva citing science or reason or modernity. Aurangzeb was not alone, friends say to Hindutva votaries with hope. ‘Hindu rulers demolished Hindu temples too.’ The answer is terse: ‘So what!’ Hindutva’s ranks are under orders to be muscular. So they click pictures of lynching hopelessly vulnerable folk. That the police provide cover helps.

**Read:** [*How to dismantle Hindutva?*](https://www.dawn.com/news/1644980)

The Quixotic lot will take on the ‘marauding Muslims’. On their part, Muslims plead pathetically that they stayed back with Nehru and they loved their country as much as he did. ‘Are you doing us a favour?’ Hindutva votaries are known to nip the enthusiasm in the bud. Indians lived in harmony, goes the liberal chorus. Hindus and Muslims celebrated each other’s festivals. Muslim shepherds discovered the Amarnath shrine in Kashmir. There are Hindu motifs in Muslim customs. The two share music and visit many shrines together. ‘So let’s stop it,’ commands the Hindutva ideologue imperviously. ‘Sickular’ is the word he uses for secular.

A [court](https://www.dawn.com/news/1690237) has handed sensitive documents of the survey of a mosque it ordered in Varanasi to Hindu petitioners, telling them not to make them public. We live in hope. If Hindutva leaders have made up their minds about an ancient deity being present in a mosque, suspend reason. Every court case, each TV debate shifts the focus from the wider canvas of Hindutva’s truer objectives. Can a law stall fascism? Let’s change the subject.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee quoted Ali Sardar Jafri’s poem in Lahore to kindle a short-lived hope for India-Pakistan amity, and thereby of relative harmony at home. “You come with the fragrance of the gardens of Lahore. We come with the light of a magical dawn in Banaras. Only to discover there’s no enemy to fight.”

Neither the desired amity nor the coveted harmony is nigh.

Jafri had more realistically described the endgame for Indian democracy, with its political pulse steadily fading away, with or without Aurangzeb as the ruse. “Kaam ab koi na aaega bas ik dil ke siva/ Raaste band hain sab kucha-i-qatil ke siva.” (Heed your heart that still beats as a friend/ All exits are closed except to a treacherous end.)

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