

How reliable is Indian History?

Finding reliability through sources

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January 18, 2026

In my quest for finding reliable Indian History; I show how constructed or exaggerated version of Aurangzeb, often selectively curated, moral compression and political retelling of 50 year reign is reduced to single symbol of religious tyranny, from primary sources of Indian history, has been occupying memories of Indians.

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1 Introduction

When Aurangzeb died in 1707, contemporary Persian chroniclers and court historians portrayed him in laudatory terms. Even dissenting voices of the time did not paint him in the deeply negative, almost in demonic, tones found in modern nationalist discourse. In conclusion, I argue, We need to share reliable sources of Indian History.¹⁻³

In this, I raise fundamental questions:

1. Why was there no such demonization of Aurangzeb during or immediately after his reign?¹⁻³
2. How did a monarch who ruled India when it was a global economic powerhouse, contributing nearly 24% of world GDP, come as terrorizing in textbooks causing fear, political speeches, and his name removed from Indian street-names?⁴

To address these questions, I examine historical accounts, writings of contemporary chroniclers, and interpretations advanced by modern historians.

Reliability here means triangulation, where court chronicles, administrative records, traveler accounts, and memoirs converge, confidence rises, where they diverge, we treat claims as contested rather than as moral certainties.

2 1. What role did Aurangzeb play in Indian History?

Aurangzeb^{5 6} holds a pivoted place in Indian History (1658–1707). In his time, India was the economic-superpower, contributing 24-25% of the Global GDP⁴. His empire surpassed Qing China, as largest economy and manufacturing super power. This wealth attracted European Merchants to India.

Aurangzeb's military was one of the strongest armies in the world. He extended Mughal Empire to greatest territorial extent. He had tremendous stamina spending 25 years fighting in Deccan. Aurangzeb spent most of his reign on military campaigns, personally directing

operations in the Deccan for over two decades. He refused to give up and choose to fight, the hardest region of India for military conquest, Deccan.

Once territories were acquired, he implemented social and political institutional governance as patronized the book, *Fatawa-e-Alamgiri* (1672).⁷

Even after he died, Aurangzeb in 1707, did not have highly negative image, nothing as grievous to the point of changing names of historically important roads and cities in India.

So, I began wondering? Why? How come some strands of his life occupied Indian memory, while other strands focusing on piety, discipline, statecraft became secondary?

First question, How do come to know about the life of Aurangzeb?

Aurangzeb was born on November 3, 1618, in Dahod, Gujarat. Aurangzeb died on March 3, 1707 in Ahmednagar at age 88.²

3 2. Official Court Sources

The first major account of his life, Aurangzeb comes to us from Muhammad Kazim's *Ālamgīrnāmah* (1668–1669).¹ This work began compiling, when Aurangzeb was alive. After Aurangzeb died, We have an account of his life in Persian, *Maasir-i 'Alamgiri* written by Saqi Musta'id Khan was completed in 1710. So the official documents, give high accounts of praising him.²

4 3. Ground Level Source

Bhimsen Saxena, a Hindu soldier. He provides us, a firsthand account of Mughal campaigns in the Deccan. He was a news-writer attached to Aurangzeb's Deccan campaigns.

In year 1707, he wrote a memoir *Tārīkh-i Dilkashā* (History that Warms the Heart). His account is politically ambivalent towards Aurangzeb, he expresses both loyalty and anger, when contrasting with Shah Jahan. Bhimsen complaints in his account about land-lords being corrupt, exploiting peasants. He critiques the state in terms of administering. He does not frame the conflict as a religious war between Hindus and Muslims.^{8,9}

So I asked, What changed, how did he become Villain? Did we discover any newer documents, sources? Unfortunately, that wasn't the case. An Indian Historian Jadunath Sarkar came to mind on Aurangzeb. He was prolific, mainly gathering as much evidence through primary, secondary sources. Jadunath Sarkar lived during 1870 – 1958. Aurangzeb died in 1707? I wondered, How did he know about Aurangzeb in 1707?

These were questions on the back of my mind. Considering, the question of reliable Indian History.

5 4. Accounts after his death (1700-1750)

After Aurangzeb died, Mughals still were in charge, it was not until 1757 - 1765; British came to power in Bengal. Khafi Khan's *Muntakhab al-Lubab*'s, is a Persian language book about the history of India, completed around 1732, in this work, he asks, What went wrong during Mughal Rule? As he is explaining to Mughal elites, who are living as consequence of Aurangzeb's policies. In this the context is set towards Mughal decline. This account is was a critique of policy, not a condemnation of Islam or even Hindu vs Muslim.³

6 5. Italian Niccolao Manucci's accounts

Niccolao Manucci was a Venetian Writer, (1638 – 1717). He arrived as a 17 year old in 1656 to Surat. He wrote accounts of Mughal Empire. He worked for Dara Shikoh, both as artilleryman and Physician. After Dara's execution, He worked for Raja Jai Singh. He then left to work for Portuguese Goa, and then went back to work for Shah Alam in 1678. Manucci worked for East India Company and Mughal administration in Arcot. Manucci dissuaded Europeans to come to India for a career.¹⁰

He published His four-volume *Storia do Mogor* (1653–1708), written in Italian-Portuguese mix, detailing court scandals, harem customs, succession wars, folk beliefs (e.g cobra omens), and daily life, claiming firsthand accuracy. He died in Chennai.¹⁰

His writings are stylized as moral framing and court scandal style. In Manucci's account is where you find a mix of observations colored by his Venetian adventurer's biases, personal experiences, and occasional exaggerations rather than pure inversion or wholesale negation.¹⁰

7 6. The English Administrators and Historians (1770s–1870s)

Henry Miers Elliot (1808 – 20 December 1853) was a British Civil Servant. He published his famous work, "Indian History told its own Historians, The Muhammadan period." in 1867–1877. This work translated Arabic & Persian Muslim chroniclers, aiming to show Muslim rulers' violence to show how British rule was civilizing. His work became a foundational, though controversial, source for understanding Muslim India, criticized for selective translations, bias, and downplaying cultural aspects. In the Preface of Henry Miers Elliot & John Dawson's book goes in details about how British administration provided more roads, and their administration was far better than early Mughal rule. He expressed hope that it will make our native subjects more sensible of the immense advantages accruing to them under the mildness and equity of our rule.¹¹

The preface states, the crimes, vices, and occasional virtues of Musulman despotism.¹¹

Alexander Dow (1736-1779) was a Scottish infantry officer in the employ of the East India Company. At the publication of this work, The English East India Company had gained Bengal by 1761. Alexander Dow's History of Hindostan 1772, Dissertation on the Origin and Nature of Despotism in Hindostan and an Enquiry into the State of Bengal; with a Plan for Restoring that Kingdom to its former Prosperity. In this work, Aurangzeb is painted negatively. Dow's depiction was influential in shaping the British colonial-era understanding of the Mughal Empire and its decline. He portrays Aurangzeb as a religious bigot whose rigid adherence to Islamic law (Sharia), reversal of tolerant policies, and reimposition of the jizya tax on non-Muslims created unrest and conflict within the empire.¹²

It is in Indian History told its own Historians, where, the The Muhammadan period turns violent, and that Indians are grateful for the British Rule. The British Rule is on the Civilizing mission to rescue India from Tyrannical, Muhammadan period.¹¹

 Note

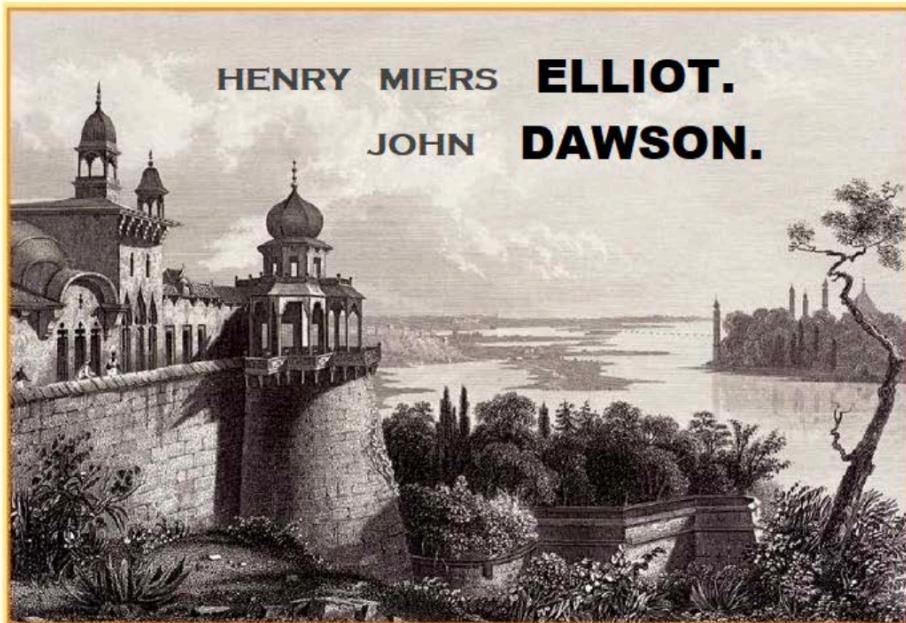
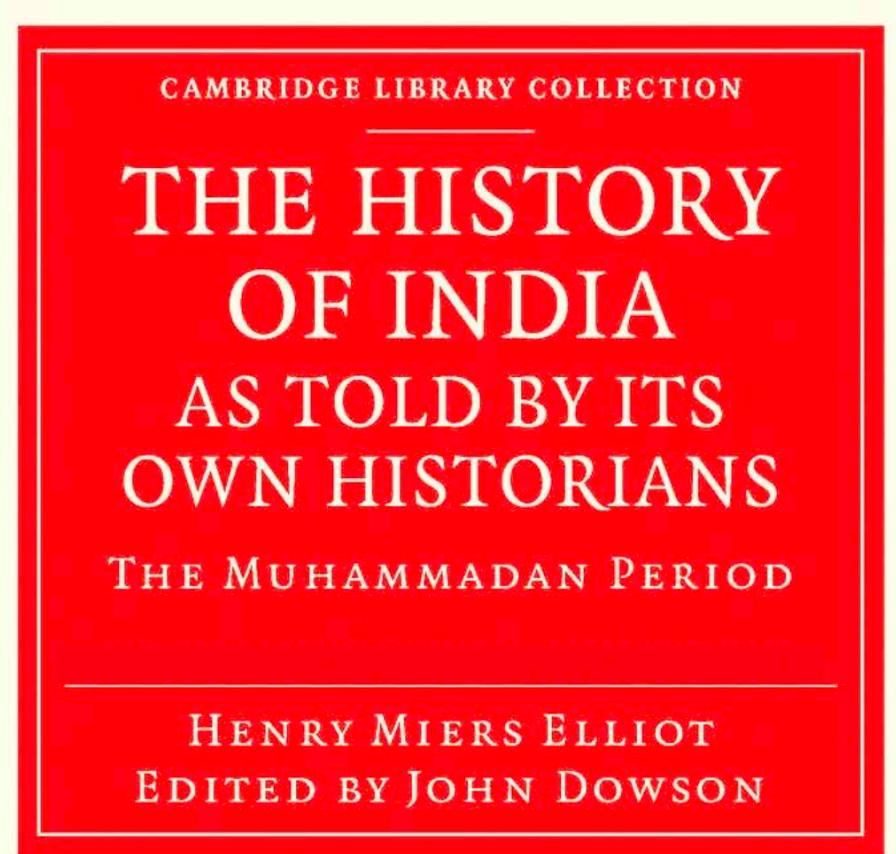


Figure 1: Bias of Jadunath in his works

Sir Henry Miers Elliot and posthumously edited/completed by John Dowson, offering crucial insights into Muslim rule in India while reflecting Elliot's colonial perspective on British rule's superiority. The preface is extremely revealing: it explicitly announces a desire to show the "crimes, vices, and occasional virtues of Musulman despotism."¹¹

Does this ring a bell?

Nationalist Indian Historians accounts from 1880-1940s such as Dhadhabhai Naroaji, R.C Dutt's account, We find similar beliefs - How?^{13,14}

In this time, the tables are turned, It is the British who become villains. And it comes in the form of how, "British stole the wealth from Indians"^{13,14}

I encourage and ask every Indian, But what about reliable Indian History? Do we find similar accounts?

We find how the same Musulman despotism turns into British despotism. And now, What we find, Hindutva rule has turned to earlier eras as vile, wicked.

The Hindutva rule is simple, Congress was wicked, British were vile, that all Indians were slave for 1000 years, until we are here to rescue you.

8 7. Jadunath Sarkar (1870 — 1958)

Jadunath Sarkar was a prolific, Indian Historian. He was known for extensive, archival-based work on the Mughal Empire. The issue with Jadunath Sarkar's method is that, he inserted themes that did not match correctly with Ma²āsir-i Ālamgīrī translation. For example, Ma²āsir-i Ālamgīrī was complied in 1710 by Musta'id Khan, a Court official. It only has high praise, yet Jadunath Sarkar uses the same source and creates the image of religious bigotry. In other words, Sarkar's paratext (titles, headings, thematic packaging) can become an interpretive machine that manufactures a more uniformly negative Aurangzeb. Due to this reason, Sarkar's work is not completely reliable.^{2,15}

Note

Jadunath Sarkar's Aurangzeb: Where he inserts and portays biased projections¹⁵ Sarkar's paratext titles, headings, thematic packaging clearly violates his own objective standards. As a reader, I wonder, Why is it called Hindu reaction? And Why call it Invasion? It simply could be Raja Jai Singh's reaction and War between Aurangzeb and Rajputs for territory.

In the outline, He has concluded, Law sanctifies plunder and massacre of unbelievers, The Muslim State is a theocracy, hence toleration impossible. These are not a work of Historical Scholarship.



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HISTORY OF AURANGZIB

Mainly based on Persian Sources.

JADUNATH SARKAR, M.A.,

Professor, Patna College.

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Figure 2: Bias of Jadunath in his works

As I go through this work, I wonder how a Historian who has spent his career and life's effort on this?

Sarkar's method privileges textual paratexts over administrative correspondence, generating a moralizing reading absent in Persian originals. For example, He says Mathura Hindus, creates moralizing themes. In this Chapter there's Sikhs as well, Sikhs do not consider themselves as Hindus. It is clearly, wrong in its factual inaccuracies, selective causation, and derogatory framing of Sikh evolution as a "degeneration" that provoked Mughal conflict.^{16,17}

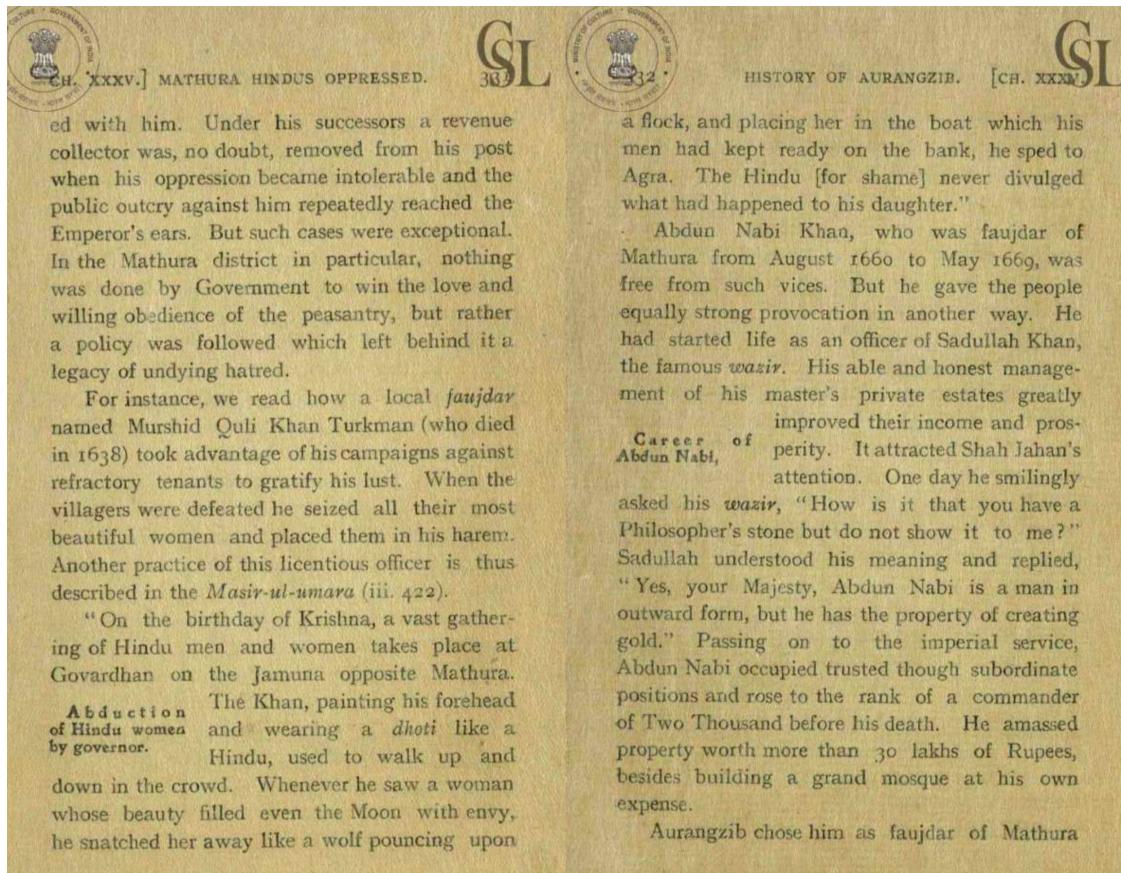


Figure 3: Bias of Jadunath in his works

In this Chapter, we notice the methodological flaws of Jadunath's historiography, it substitutes political analysis with geographical description, reduces legitimate state practices to criminality through loaded language "robbers," "blackmail," "servile" and projects modern religious binaries onto a seventeenth-century power struggle.

By asserting, without documentary evidence, that Aurangzeb pursued a plan of forcible conversion of the Hindus, the author converts a complex succession crisis and imperial

assertion of authority into a teleological narrative of communal conquest. He rests his argument rests heavily on colonial gazetteers and romanticized sources like James Tod, while treating partisan Mughal chronicles uncritically and ignoring administrative records and treaty practices.

As a result, imperial expansion is naturalized as strategic necessity, Rajput sovereignty is delegitimized, and historical causation is displaced by ideology—producing not critical history, but a colonial moral fable structured around geography, religion, and presumed civilizational conflict.

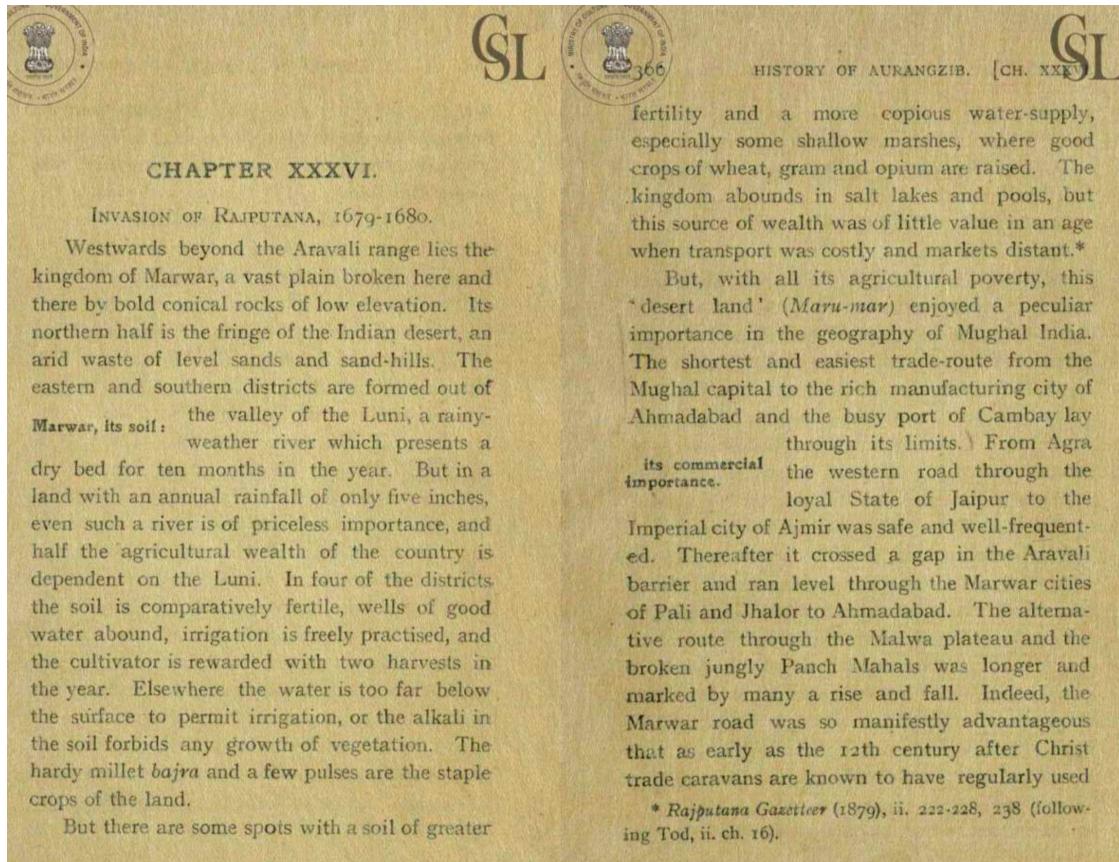


Figure 4: Bias of Jadunath in his works

In the years 1600-1700, there was no Democracy. Sarkar is writing in 1900s, where Democracy existed, moreover in this chapter. He has picked up the British writers and has absolute claims such as toleration is impossible. These statement is false, In Mughal Empire, Jesuits even visited, there were Hindus who practiced their religion. “toleration is impossible” would mean, none existed and everyone stopped practicing their own faith.



HISTORY OF AURANGZIB.

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Figure 5: Bias of Jadunath in his works

Jadunath's bias in inserting his paratext, thematic injections. He starts the chapter saying, Such open attacks on Hinduism by all the forces of Government naturally produced great discontent among the persecuted sect. Some frantic attempts were made on the Emperor's life, but they were childish and ended in failure.

In this as a reader, I wonder, Why is it called Hindu reaction? It clearly is not Hindu reaction.

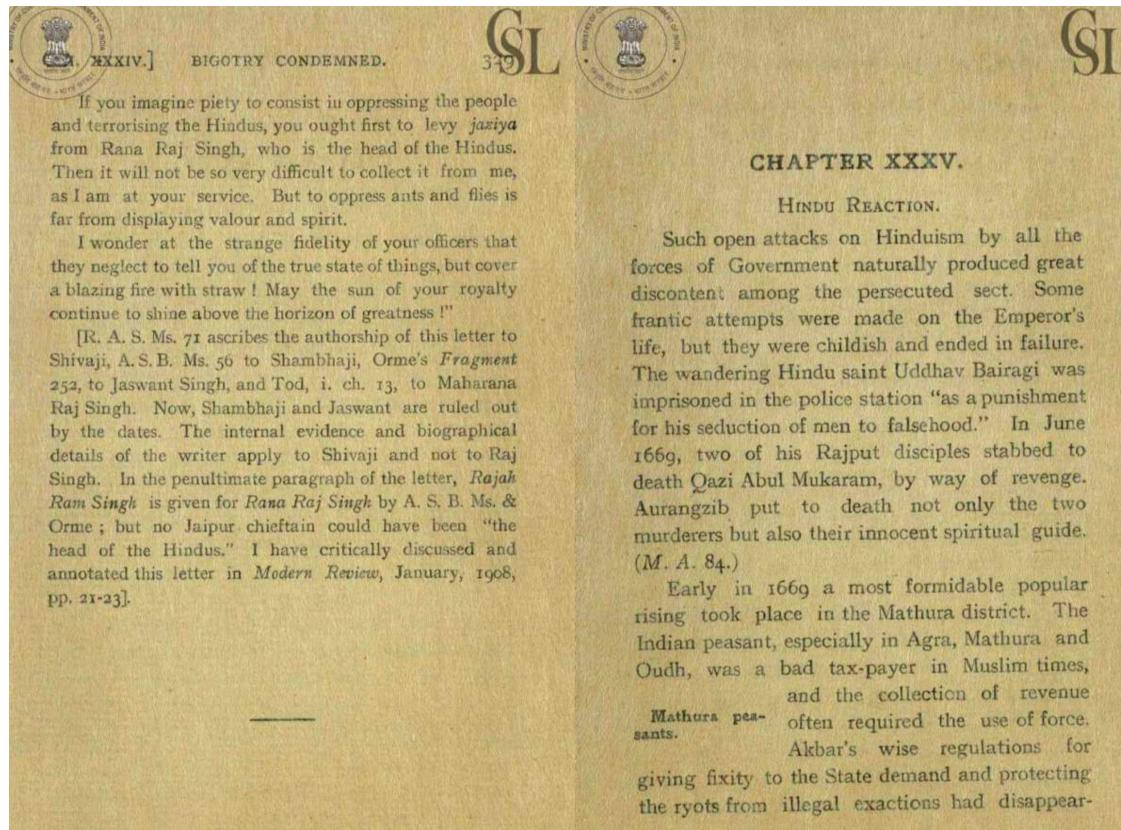


Figure 6: Bias of Jadunath in his works

9 7. Popular Issues and sources for Aurangazeb's Life:

Aurangazeb lives in the memory of Indian Politicians vividly. He is primarily used in discourse for portraying how evil a King could become? Moreover, he's been frequently used in context of Islam and many use him to portay evilness of Mughal Empire.

Fraticide:

During the years 1657-1659, Shah Jahan was ill. Aurangazeb executed both Dara and Murad. The Maasir-i-Alamgiri portays this as part of successsion crisis and necessary step for stability. Modern Indians use this as a way to portay fratricidal savagery proof and barbaric behavior to rule India.²

Execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur:

Guru Tegh Bahadur was a Sikh Guru. The accounts of Sikh speak of him being executed due to religious reasons. Sikh traditions emphasize defense of Hindu faith, while Mughal records frame it as sedition suppression, Today, it's leveraged in anti-Mughal rhetoric to stoke communal tensions.^{16,17}

Jizya Tax Reimposition:

Reinstating jizya in 1679 on non-Muslims—termed a “hand of humility” tax—sparked Delhi riots and is politicized as economic subjugation of Hindus, reversing Akbar’s tolerance and symbolizing Islamic supremacy. Though exemptions existed and enforcement varied, BJP figures invoke it alongside modern tax critiques to portray enduring “oppression legacies,” ignoring fiscal wartime context.^{18,19}

Temple Destructions:

Orders destroying key temples like Kashi Vishwanath (1669) and Keshavdev, recorded in Maasir-i-Alamgiri, are central to claims of systematic iconoclasm, politicized in Gyanvapi and Mathura disputes as Mughal erasure of Hindu heritage. While often tied to rebellions and numbering dozens amid thousands intact, politicians use inflated counts to justify current demolitions, blending history with Hindutva agenda.^{2,20,21}

10 8. The English Historian who fictionalized Hindu-Muslim divide

This English historian, specifically set to the audience to this memory. Akbar’s rule was syncretism and Aurangazeb’s rule was tyrant and bigoted.

This historian is James Mill, father of John Stuart Mill, considered the most Influential English speaking philosopher of the nineteenth century. James Mill published six volume work of History of India by 1820. This work brought James Mill to fame. I want to add that until this point in Indian History. The early British scholars, administrators revered Indians. As

british administration all looked at India as an exotic place. A lot of them took Indian women as wives, took Bibis, thus we have Anglo-Indians.²²

However, the policies shifted radically after James Mill's Indian History from 1830s.²²

From 1860s-1950s, the Indian Nationalists writers such as Jadunath Sarkar, RC Majumdar pick this up and throughout their works, present Aurangzeb in same negative light?^{15,23}

11 9. Political Theory of Kings

In Persian-Islamic worldview, the King was Padshah (imperial sovereign) He was above nobles, regional factions, regional elites. The King was described as zillullah (Shadow of God on Earth) This meant, the King's authority is the earthly instrument of order and justice. The King was not divine, yet any rebellion was not just viewed as political disobedience, but threat to his empire's social-order.

Mughal Political thought followed Nasir al-Din Tusi's Akhlaq-i Nasiri tradition, in which the ideal ruler was framed as one who secured the wellbeing of diverse religious groups, not Muslims alone. The Mughal emperor was imagined as the manager of plural society. The King's Sovereignty was tested through force, protection, and expansion. His duty was to defend roads, suppress rebels, secure revenue flows, and punish disorder.^{24,25}

This is an important context to remember when understanding life of Aurangzeb. He lived in a time, when democracy did not exist, which meant, not all Indians, had equal rights. We have modern institutions in India such as Judicial system, Civil Servants, Modern Schools, Colleges. We have taken these for granted as Indians.

Temples, Mosques played a central role for administering. Especially it occupied as symbolic political power of the kings. The power of King did not have any checks or balances, the only check was another King or Empire could take away his entire kingdom, not only that, take away imperial treasury, pillage. In the midst of all these, interpreting life of Aurangzeb is important to view through this context.

Aurangzeb didn't stop governing a plural empire, he tried to stabilize imperial sovereignty under extreme stress as he was expanding, by narrowing the empire's legitimacy bargain, leaning harder on Islamic legal symbolism like jizya and juristic authority, and treating independent mass religious leadership, like Sikh Gurus, as potential political rebellion.^{18,19}

12 10. Conclusion

In my quest for finding reliable Indian History, I turned to Aurangzeb (1618–1707). He is the most politically contested ruler in India's early modern past. To the Hindu Nationalist, He is the most Vile King of India. To the less religious Indians, He was a great king, who

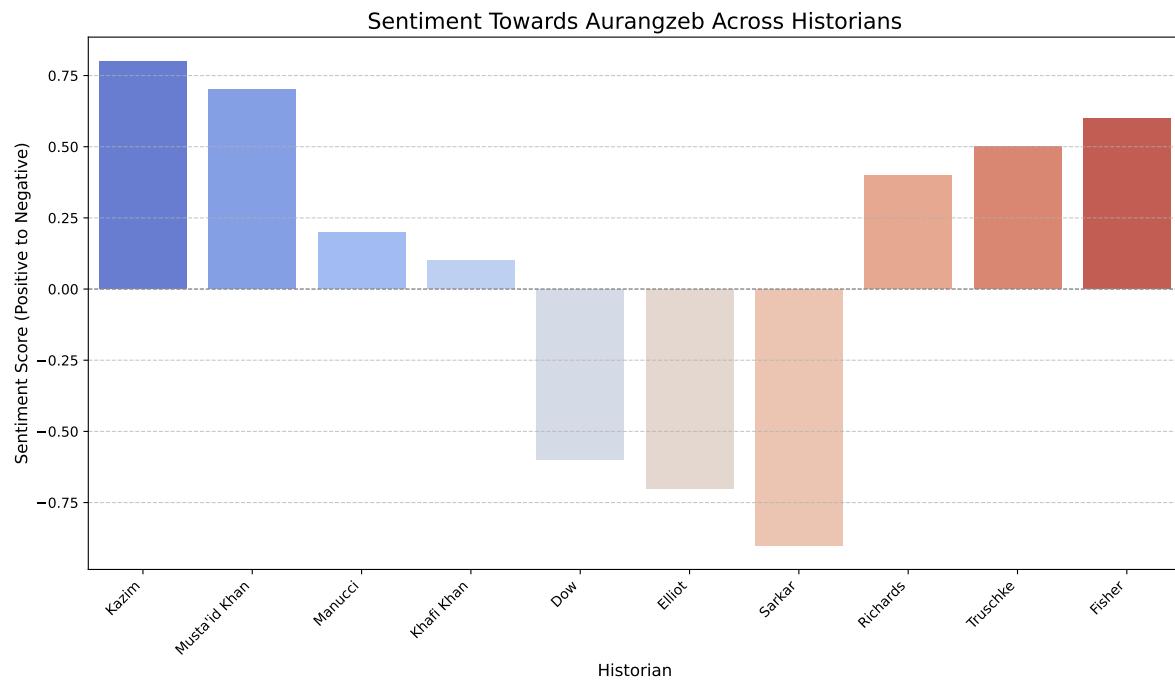
expanded India's territory. To Pakistanis, He was a great king who ruled according to Islamic faith. Decolonizing the Decolonizing Hindutva writers, therefore, requires not replacing one grand narrative with another, but calibrating degrees of belief in accordance with the density of contemporaneous source agreement.^{5,6,26}

13 11. Computational Visualizations:

```
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
import seaborn as sns
import pandas as pd

data = {
    'Historian': ['Kazim', 'Musta\u0111 Khan', 'Manucci', 'Khafi Khan', 'Dow', 'Elliot', 'Sarki'],
    'Sentiment': [0.8, 0.7, 0.2, 0.1, -0.6, -0.7, -0.9, 0.4, 0.5, 0.6],
    'Period': ['Contemporary', 'Contemporary', 'Traveler (1700s)', 'Post-Aurangzeb', 'Colonial'],
}
df = pd.DataFrame(data)

plt.figure(figsize=(12, 7))
sns.barplot(x='Historian', y='Sentiment', data=df, palette='coolwarm', hue='Historian', legend=False)
plt.axhline(0, color='grey', linestyle='--', linewidth=0.8)
plt.title('Sentiment Towards Aurangzeb Across Historians', fontsize=16)
plt.xlabel('Historian', fontsize=12)
plt.ylabel('Sentiment Score (Positive to Negative)', fontsize=12)
plt.xticks(rotation=45, ha='right')
plt.grid(axis='y', linestyle='--', alpha=0.7)
plt.tight_layout()
plt.show()
```



14 12. The Missing Data: A Historiographical Chart

1618-1658	1653-1708	1656-1669
<p>Birth of Aurangzeb (October 1618)</p> <p>Early court chronicles begin documenting his career</p> <p>Ishwar Das - ¹⁹ Futuhat-i-Alamgiri (military campaigns)</p>	<p>Niccolao Manucci - Storia do Mogor (court observations)</p> <p>Italian physician's detailed accounts of imperial court</p>	<p>Francois Bernier - Travels in Mughal Empire (1670)</p> <p>French physician and philosopher's influential account</p>

1707	1707-1712	1712-1719
Death of Aurangzeb (March 1707)	War of Succession - Bahadur Shah I	Muhammad Shah's reign
Succession wars between brothers begin	Court chronicles document succession conflicts	Factory records document trade disruptions
Immediate fragmentation of authority	Regional powers assert independence	EIC consultation books record company responses
	20	

1757-1765	1784	1792-1817
Battle of Plassey to Diwani	Asiatic Society of Bengal founded	Sir William Jones's translations
EIC records document political transition	Manuscript collection begins	Persian chronicles made accessible
Factory correspondence preserved	Journal of Asiatic Society launches	Orientalist scholarship framework

1900-1910	1912-1920	1920-1930
Early nationalist scholarship emerges	Jadunath Sarkar's early works	Expansion of Indian historical scholarship
Challenge to colonial historiography begins	Studies in Mughal India (1919)	R.C. Majumdar's publications begin
University history departments expand	The Mughal Administration (1920)	University departments mature
	Persian source methodology refined	

1950-1960	1957	1960-1970
Post-independence scholarship establishes	Satish Chandra - Parties and Politics at Mughal Court	Social and economic history approaches
Satish Chandra's early publications	Institutional analysis framework	Irfan Habib - Agrarian System of Mughal India (1963)
University history departments expand	Political structure methodology	C.U. Wills's economic history articles
		Social structure analysis

2000-2010	2010-2015	2016-2017
Digital archives transform research	Revisionist scholarship gains momentum	Audrey Truschke's major works
Manuscript digitization begins	Digital South Asia Library launches	Aurangzeb
Online databases expand access	JISC digitization projects complete	The Man and The Myth (2017)
New methodologies emerge	Persian manuscript access improves	Challenges established narratives
		Sparks public debate

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