

MUSLIM RULE IN INDIA

Facts versus Fiction

by M H Faruqi

The noted Indian scholar and historian, Dr Bishambhar Nath Pande, ranked among the very few Indians and fewer still Hindu historians who tried

to be little careful when dealing with the Muslim rule in India that lasted for almost 1000 years. Dr Pande passed away on 1 June 1998 and Impact

International of London (July 1998) wrote the following obituary [at the end of the article], which we think sheds some light into some of the myths

on Indian history, such as on **Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb**, created by foreign powers with the clear objective of divide and rule:

The Muslim rule in India lasted for almost 1000 years. How come then, asked the British historian *Sir Henry Elliot*, that Hindus 'had not left any

account which could enable us to gauge the traumatic impact the Muslim conquest and rule had on them'? Since there was none, Elliot went on to

produce his own eight-volume History of India from its own historians (1867). His history claimed Hindus were slain for disputing with

'Muhammedans', generally prohibited from worshipping and taking out religious processions, their idols were mutilated, their temples destroyed,

they were forced into conversions and marriages, and were killed and massacred by drunk Muslim tyrants.

Thus Sir Henry, and scores of other

Empire scholars, went on to produce a synthetic Hindu versus Muslim history of India, and their lies became history.

However, the noted Indian scholar and historian, Dr Bishambhar Nath Pande, who passed away in New Delhi on 1 June, ranked among the very

few Indians and fewer still Hindu historians who tried to be a little careful when dealing with such history. He knew that this history was 'originally

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compiled by European writers' whose main objective was to produce a history that would serve their policy of divide and rule.

Lord Curzon (Governor General of India 1895-99 and Viceroy 1899-1904, d.1925) was told by the Secretary of State for India, *George Francis*

Hamilton, that they 'should so plan the educational text books that the differences between community and community are further strengthened'.

Another Viceroy, *Lord Dufferin* (1884-88), was advised by the Secretary of State in London that the 'division of religious feelings is greatly to our

advantage', and that he expected 'some good as a result of your committee of inquiry on Indian education and on teaching material'.

'We have maintained our power in India by playing-off one part against the other,' the Secretary of State for India reminded yet another Viceroy,

Lord Elgin (1862-63), 'and we must continue to do so. Do all you can, therefore, to prevent all having a common feeling.'

In his famous *Khuda Bakhsh Annual Lecture* (1985) Dr Pande said: 'Thus under a definite policy the Indian history books text-books were so

falsified and distorted as to give an impression that the medieval [i.e. Muslim] period of Indian history was full of atrocities committed by Muslim

rulers on their Hindu subjects and the Hindus had to suffer terrible indignities under Muslim rule. And there were no common factors [between

Hindus and Muslims] in social, political and economic life.' Therefore, Dr Pande was extra careful. Whenever he came across a 'fact' that looked

odd to him, he would try to check and verify rather than adopt it uncritically.

He came across a history text-book taught in the Anglo-Bengali College, Allahabad which claimed that 'three thousand Brahmins had committed

suicide as **Tipu** wanted to convert them forcibly into the fold of Islam'. The author was a very famous scholar, *Dr Har Prashad Shastri*, head of

the department of Sanskrit at Calcutta University. (**Tipu Sultan** (1750-99), who ruled over the South Indian state of Mysore (1782-99), is one of

the most heroic figures in Indian history. He died on the battlefield, fighting the British.) Was it true?

Dr Pande wrote immediately to the author and asked him for the source on which he had based this episode in his text-book. After

several reminders, Dr Shastri replied that he had taken this information from the *Mysore Gazetteer*. So Dr Pande requested the Mysore University

vice chancellor, Sir Brijendra Nath Seal, to verify for him Dr Shastri's statement from the *Gazetteer*. Sir Brijendra referred his letter to *Prof Srikantia*

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who was then working on a new edition of the Gazetteer. Srikantia wrote to say that the Gazetteer mentioned no such incident and, as a historian

himself, he was certain that nothing like this had taken place. *Prof Srikantia added that both the prime minister and the commander-in-chief of*

Tipu Sultan were themselves Brahmins. He also enclosed a list of 136 Hindu temples which used to receive annual grants from the Sultan's treasury.

It transpired that Shastri had lifted this story from *Colonel Miles' History of Mysore* which Miles claimed he had taken from a Persian manuscript

in the personal library of Queen Victoria. When Dr Pande checked further, he found that no such manuscript existed in Queen Victoria's library.

Yet Dr Shastri's book was being used as a high school history text-book in seven Indian states, Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh,

Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. So he sent his entire correspondence about the book to the vice chancellor of Calcutta University, *Sir Ashutosh*

Chaudhary. Sir Ashutosh promptly ordered Shastri's book out of the course. Yet years later, in 1972, Dr Pande was surprised to discover the

same suicide story was still being taught as 'history' in junior high schools in Uttar Pradesh. The lie had found currency as a fact of history.

The **Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb** (born 1618, reigned 1658-1707) is the most reviled of all Muslim rulers in India. He was supposed to be a

great destroyer of temples and oppressor of Hindus, and a 'fundamentalist' too! As chairman of the Allahabad Municipality (1948-53), Dr Pande

had to deal with *a land dispute between two temple priests*. One of them had filed in evidence some *farmans* (royal orders) to prove that

Aurangzeb had, besides cash, gifted the land in question for the maintenance of his temple. Might they not be fake, Dr Pande thought, in view

of Aurangzeb's fanatically anti-Hindu image?

He showed them to his friend, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, a distinguished lawyer as well a great scholar of Arabic and Persian.

He was also a Brahmin. Sapru examined the documents and declared they were genuine farmans issued by Aurangzeb.

For Dr Pande this was a 'new image of Aurangzeb'; so he wrote to the chief priests of the various important temples, all over the country,

requesting photocopies of any farman issued by Aurangzeb that they may have in their possession. The response was overwhelming; he

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got farmans from several principal Hindu and Jain temples, even from Sikh Gurudwaras in northern India. These farmans, issued between

1659 and 1685, related to grant of jagir (large parcel of agricultural lands) to support regular maintenance of these places of worship.

Dr Pande's research showed that Aurangzeb was as solicitous of the rights and welfare of his non-Muslim subjects as he was of his Muslim

subjects. Hindu plaintiffs received full justice against their Muslim respondents and, if guilty, Muslims were given punishment as necessary.

One of the greatest charges against Aurangzeb is of the demolition of **Vishwanath temple** in Banaras (Varanasi). That was a fact, but Dr Pande

unravelling the reason for it. 'While Aurangzeb was passing near Varanasi on his way to Bengal, the Hindu Rajas in his retinue requested that if

the halt was made for a day, their Rani may go to Varanasi, have a dip in the Ganges and pay their homage to Lord Vishwanath. Aurangzeb

readily agreed.

'Army pickets were posted on the five mile route to Varanasi. The Rani made journey on the palkis [palanquins]. They took their dip in the

Ganges and went to the Vishwanath temple to pay their homage. After offering puja [worship] all the Rani returned except one, the Maharani

of Kutch. A thorough search was made of the temple precincts but the Rani was to be found nowhere.

'When Aurangzeb came to know of this,

he was very much enraged. He sent his senior officers to search for the Rani. Ultimately they found that statue of Ganesh

[the elephant-headed god which was fixed in the wall was a moveable one. When the statue was moved, they saw a flight

of stairs that led to the basement. *To their horror they found the missing Rani dishonoured and crying deprived of all her ornaments. The*

basement was just beneath Lord Vishwanath's seat.' The Rajas demanded salutary action, and 'Aurangzeb ordered that as the sacred precincts

have been despoiled, Lord Vishwanath may be moved to some other place, the temple be razed to the ground and the Mahant [head priest]

be arrested and punished'. (B N Pande, Islam and Indian Culture, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna, 1987)

Dr Pande believed in the innate goodness of human nature. Despite all that senseless hate and periodical outbreak of anti-Muslim violence

after independence, he remained an optimist. When one of the worst riots took place in 1979 in

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Ahmadabad, in which more than 2,000

Muslims were killed and 6,000 houses burnt, Dr Pande travelled there to see whether there was 'any humanity still alive'.

Yes, it was in one locality, Mewabhai Chahal, where he found that all the houses had been burnt down. Did they all belong to Muslims? No.

Only 35 belonged to Muslims; some 125 belonged to Hindus, he was told. So, it meant, the arsonists came in two different waves; one

destroying the Muslim houses and the other the Hindu houses? No, it was only one wave, said Kalyan Singh. That one, there, he pointed out

to smoke billowing from what used to be his house and his tyre-shop. He was a Hindu and he had lost property and business worth 200,000

rupees.

The miscreants had asked him to point out the Muslim houses so they could spare the Hindu houses. Kalyan Singh refused, and watched as

the mob set fire to all the houses - including his own. How could I betray my Muslim neighbours? he asked Dr Pande rhetorically.

Dr Pande also went to the Muslim students hostel. One-third of its residents were Hindus. "Come out all you Hindu students," yelled a

murderous mob gathered outside the hostel. No, we won't, shouted back the Hindu students and locked the gate from inside. In the event,

the entire hostel was evacuated by the army and then left to the mob to loot and burn. The Hindu students were told they could take with them

their books and research papers. Dr Pande met a young DSc scholar, named Desai, who had left behind his more than three years' labour,

a ready-for-typing dissertation, to be burnt by the arsonists. Desai said he couldn't think of saving his thesis while some of his Muslim friends

were in similar position with their theses. A noble soul! Dr Pande who had been looking for humanity found it there as well.

The inhumanity did not lie in the Indian nature, but the nature had fallen victim to the evil heritage of colonial history. Few realised how 1000

years of their history had been stolen from them. Many tended to buy the fake and doctored version handed down to them as part of their

colonial heritage. Some even saw a little political advantage in this trade. Dr Pande heard a leading *Hindu Mahasabha* politician and

religious leader, Mahant Digvijaynath, telling an election meeting that it is written in the Qur'an that killing a Hindu was an act of goodness

(thawab). Dr Pande called upon the Mahant (High Priest) and told him that he had read the Qur'an a few times but didn't find such a

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statement in it, and he had, therefore, brought with him several English, Urdu and Hindi translations of the Qur'an; so would he kindly point

to him where exactly did the statement occur in the Qur'an?

Isn't it written there? said the Mahant. I haven't found it; if you have, please tell me, replied Dr Pande. Then what does it say? It speaks about

love and brotherhood, about the oneness of mankind. What's jihad then? What is jizyah? How then India got partitioned? The Mahant went on

asking, and Dr Pande kept on explaining, hoping the Mahant would correct himself. However, the Mahant's ideas were fixed, in prejudice

and in ignorance.

Dr Pande himself had been a senior member of the ruling Congress party which he had joined at a very young age. He was a disciple of

Gandhi, a friend of Nehru; he had taken part in each and every non-cooperation movement against the British and gone to jail eight times.

The Congress was supposed to be an all-Indian nationalist platform and yet Dr Pande's party was hardly free from the bias and ignorance of

a cleverly deconstructed history. The rise of militant Hindutva tendency is only recent, but before it all became overt, the Congress itself was

doing the same, albeit a little covertly. All the horrific anti-Muslim carnage took place during more than four decades of Congress rule. The

doors of the *Babari Mosque* were opened for Hindu worship during the tenure of Nehru's grandson, Rajiv Gandhi. The Mosque itself was

pulled down during the regime of another Congress Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao.

Dr Pande was, however, just one individual. That made his work all the more important, not just from the Muslim but from the point of view

of the entire country. **Bishambhar Nath Pande** born on 23 December 1906 in the Madhya Pradesh of Umreth;

member UP Legislative Assembly (1952-53); member UP Legislative Council (1972-74); twice member of the upper house, Rajya Sabha (1976 and 1982); Governor of Orissa state (1983-88);

recipient of the highest national award Padma Shri (1976); author of several books, including *The Spirit of India* and *The Concise History of*

Congress; died in New Delhi, 1 June 1998.

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