

O HERALDO

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Aurangzeb's tomb has a complex history that can't be erased

The recent demand by right-wing organisations, notably the Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), to demolish the tomb of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in Khuldabad, Maharashtra, has the potential of becoming one of the biggest threats to communal harmony in Maharashtra in decades. The controversy, fuelled by the historical animosity towards Aurangzeb's reign, has found new political expression amid growing tensions within the State. While these demands may appeal to certain sections of the population, they threaten to disturb the delicate fabric of communal harmony and ignite unnecessary strife in a state already grappling with complex socio-political issues.

Aurangzeb's tomb, a historical site that has stood for over 300 years, is situated in Khuldabad, where other historical figures, including Maratha and Sufi leaders, are buried. It has remained a focal point of contentious debates, primarily due to the legacy of Aurangzeb, a ruler whose policies and actions have been heavily criticised, particularly for his harsh treatment of the Marathas and the destruction of several Hindu temples. For many, the emperor represents oppression, and his tomb becomes a symbol of a bygone era that they wish to erase from memory. The VHP and Bajrang Dal's demand to demolish the tomb is framed as a way of rectifying history—an act of reclaiming pride for the Maratha empire, which, they argue, was unjustly oppressed under Mughal rule.

The call for demolishing the tomb is not only a dangerous attempt to rewrite history but also a direct threat to the peace and stability of the state. History, in all its complexity, cannot be erased or altered at the whims of political or ideological forces. The tomb of Aurangzeb, like any other historical monument, is part of the shared heritage of the region. To call for its demolition is to disregard the multifaceted nature of history, which cannot be reduced to a mere symbol of division.

However, the call for demolishing the tomb is not only a dangerous attempt to rewrite history but also a direct threat to the peace and stability of the state. History, in all its complexity, cannot be erased or altered at the whims of political or ideological forces. The tomb of Aurangzeb, like any other historical monument, is part of the shared heritage of the region. To call for its demolition is to disregard the multifaceted nature of history, which cannot be reduced to a mere symbol of division.

What is most concerning is the broader political and social context within which this demand is gaining traction. The VHP and Bajrang Dal's calls for the destruction of the tomb are not isolated acts but part of a larger narrative that seeks to polarise communities along religious lines. The controversial destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992 has been invoked, with warning of a similar fate for Aurangzeb's tomb. Such rhetoric is alarmingly reminiscent of the events leading to the Babri Masjid demolition, which resulted in widespread communal violence and left scars that have yet to heal. The suggestion that similar actions be taken against a historical monument in the 21st century is not just reckless; it is a deliberate attempt to inflame religious tensions.

Furthermore, this demand comes at a time when the State is grappling with more pressing issues that deserve attention. Maharashtra, like much of India, faces numerous challenges, including rising unemployment, farmer distress, and the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather than addressing these real problems, the VHP and Bajrang Dal are attempting to shift the focus to historical grievances, creating a diversion that serves no purpose other than to stoke division.

The political ramifications of such calls are also far-reaching. Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and other BJP leaders have expressed support for the demand to demolish the tomb, citing the need to remove symbols of historical injustice. However, this stance ignores the fact that history, as painful as it may be, must be acknowledged and understood in its entirety. To erase the tomb of Aurangzeb would be to erase a part of Maharashtra's history, one that has shaped the state's current identity. As Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut aptly stated, Aurangzeb's tomb should be seen as a symbol of the Marathas' bravery, a reminder of their struggle against the Mughal Empire. History should not be rewritten to serve political ends, nor should it be distorted to further narrow ideologies.

What is at stake here is not just the fate of a single monument, but the future of Maharashtra's pluralistic society. If such demands are allowed to gain traction, they risk undermining the very idea of India as a land where different cultures, religions, and histories coexist. The tomb of Aurangzeb, like all historical monuments, must be preserved as part of our collective heritage. It is a site that, whether one agrees with the ruler's policies or not, provides a valuable lesson in the complexities of India's past. Demolishing it would be a shortsighted and destructive act that disregards the importance of understanding history in all its dimensions.

comment



SHIVANSHU K. SRIVASTAVA

A language grows through encouragement, education and pride—not by force. Any attempt to impose it aggressively only creates resentment. Similar linguistic assertions have been visible in other states



India has great linguistic and cultural diversity, with as many as 22 officially recognised languages under the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. This recognition is a testament to India's pluralistic ethos, where linguistic identities have coexisted for centuries. However, recent trends suggest that language is increasingly being used as a means to impose linguistic dominance rather than as a link to cultural unity across the country. As someone currently in Karnataka for a month, I have been attentively observing the hoardings and shop banners everywhere I go to understand the real ground situation and compare it with how it is depicted online on the social and news media. What I observed? Most shops in Bengaluru display names in Kannada and English, with Kannada being significantly larger, often as per government directives. Many shops and showrooms have signboards only in Kannada, while Hindi is barely visible. This is not a big issue as every state has the right to promote its language and preserve its culture.

However, the problem arises when linguistic pride turns into coercion, intimidation and hatred toward other languages. Karnataka has been witnessing troubling incidents where certain groups have resorted to vandalism and intimidation to enforce linguistic preferences. Some businesses have been pressured and signs in languages other than Kannada (especially Hindi) have been forcibly removed or defaced with black ink. This is an unhealthy trend. Bengaluru, the biggest IT hub of India, thrives because it accommodates people from all over India and the world. While it is understandable that Kannada should hold prominence in Karnataka, it is equally important

Linguistic pride should not mean linguistic imposition

that linguistic diversity is not viewed as a threat. A language grows through encouragement, education and pride—not by force. Any attempt to impose it aggressively only creates resentment. Similar linguistic assertions have been visible in other states.

On a national level, linguistic concerns have also surfaced in India's new criminal laws. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) have been named entirely in Hindi, a departure from the long-standing practice where central laws were titled in English, with Hindi and other translations made available separately. This was an unnecessary change. The previous terms—Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure and Indian Evidence Act—were neutral, widely understood, and had been in use for over a century. The term "Code" itself had no issue and was an internationally recognised legal term. Laws are meant for everyone residing in India, including non-citizens, many of whom do not speak Hindi. Changing the names to Hindi terms in the original English version serves no practical legal purpose and disrupts continuity. I had criticised this decision when the new laws were introduced, despite having Hindi as my own mother tongue. This is not at all about opposing Hindi but about questioning the logic behind such a change. The replacement of the term "Code" with "Sanhita" even under the provisions did not improve accessibility or understanding—it was merely a move to impose Hindi that was totally unnecessary. The imposition of language, especially at the national level will only segregate people rather than uniting them.

Recently, Tamil Nadu replaced the rupee symbol with a Tamil letter in its state budget logo. This change is a logical decision for a state-level emblem, as it reflects regional identity without affecting national communication or policy. However, in other parts of India, language policies have taken a more exclusionary turn. In Maharashtra, businesses have been mandated to use Marathi signage prominently, with fines imposed on those who fail to

comply. These patterns, while reflective of regional aspirations, sometimes risk becoming coercive rather than inclusive. Language-based conflicts often emerge when governments or political groups treat language as a tool of assertion rather than as a medium of connection. The hostility seen in Karnataka toward non-Kannada signboards is not an isolated case—it is part of a broader trend where language is being politicised. Instead of organically growing through education, culture, and social adoption, languages are being forced upon people through mandates, restrictions, and in some cases, violent enforcement. This is harmful to the very cause these groups claim to champion. Respect for a language cannot be dictated; it must be cultivated.

India has always functioned on linguistic coexistence, where different languages have played complementary roles rather than being pitted against one another. The 22 official languages, including Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Odia, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu, represent the linguistic richness of the country. English, despite being a colonial legacy, has served as a neutral link across states. Its role in governance, law and administration has helped maintain linguistic balance without giving undue preference to any single regional language.

While states have the right to promote their languages, this must not translate into exclusion of others. Likewise, while Hindi can be encouraged, it should not be imposed where it is not required. The balance between linguistic pride and linguistic inclusivity must be carefully maintained. A nation as diverse as India cannot afford to let language become a source of division. Governments and civil society must recognise that linguistic harmony is achieved not by mandates or restrictions, but by fostering an environment where every language is respected and valued. Policies should promote multilingualism in a way that encourages cultural expression without alienating non-speakers. Language should be a tool for connection, not a source of discord.

(The author is a writer, poet and advocate.)

people's edit

FAITH CAN MOVE A STUBBORN KNEE

SANDHYA VASUDEV

I have been an enthusiast of adventure camps and joy rides. Such rides involving surprise water showers and ghost walks at Universal Studios that I made with daughter Rukma and the Screaming California 360° giant wheel ride at Disneyland, that I did with daughter Prithvi, have been etched in my mind. I thought I had done it all, well, until the recent Ahobilam trip. I had cautiously enquired beforehand with the host if there would be any walking, as my knee had been stubborn of late, having borne my weight for almost six decades. He had replied that as the temples were in the jungle, the vehicle access was up to a point and that one needed to trek for at least six kilometres.

I started preparing for it that very day by walking some distance at my locality, never having walked beyond the walls of my house. The moment the knee started complaining, I would take a U-turn and be back on my sofa at home. A fortnight later, armed with pain oil and tablets from the kind doctor, I set out on this special pilgrimage with my better half and an open mind. The expedition turned out to be a mixture of trekking on wobbly stones, lying atop the flowing shallow stream in which I could fall at the slightest imbalance and climbing steep steps with the help of a sturdy stick. There were light showers from hilly streams at times, a lovely respite in the hot sun. Along the way, we encountered young devotees in traditional attire and I was amused to observe that one of them had a stock of glucose powder that went into his mouth at periodic intervals. After an amazing trek and climb of 600 steps, we had a breathtaking view of the jungle below and the unpretentious yet glorious temple of Lord Narasimha—an awesome avatar of Lord Vishnu—right in front of us. We were spellbound by the self-manifested deity on stone. The priest explained the history of the other consecrated idols as well. The guide beckoned to us as we had to cover a lot more. We descended the steep steps and I held the side railing for support, even as a few opted for the stretcher service.

Once we reached the base, the young guide cautioned that the next expedition involved a rough trek and a climb and descent of 250 equally steep steps to access another Narasimha temple! A direct route on ground level was not possible in the dense forest. Having observed my pace, he warned that there was no turning back once we embarked on the climb after crossing a swing bridge. The palm had turned red due to the friction with the stick and the arm had developed a dull ache with the pressure on the stick. I felt I couldn't do more but an inner voice said that I should do it. The better half was full of enthusiasm too. So chanting the Lord's name I pursued, sometimes squatting and sliding down the steps to help a hurt knee. Each time the prize was the glowing face of the deity, there being five in all, in the upper tract. There's more to the story, perhaps for next time!

Those were the days

Much grieved by the new academic calendar becoming effective April 1, 2025, the seniors of today who were the school going generation of yesteryears during the Portuguese regime and thereafter for some years till recently tend to reflect on the school academic year that was in place.

Our schools reopened in the middle of June, a pleasant month and a cool refreshing season, after the summer holidays for a duration of two months, April and May. The academic year ran into three terms, June-September, October-December, January and ended in the first week of April for summer holidays. Those were the days we enjoyed in the summer festivities, perhaps, our future generations will never see and indulge in to enjoy the simplicity of time.

Our education syllabus was well in place providing us qualitative educational background with which we have progressed well to become professionals in many fields of our choice so much so we have gained laurels to our Mother state, Goa, wherever we went in search of greener pastures. Today, wherever we are, we stand in dignity and honour to respect ourselves and are a prestigious people known as Goenkars. But for the new academic calendar coming into effect, April 1, 2025, the start of summer in Goa, it appears with the weather becoming so harsh and uncomfortable for everyone, the mind of our government along with the educational policy makers remains unclear.

Ayris Sequeira, Salvador do Mundo.

Need to care for the homeless

It is very distressing to see so many homeless forced to sleep on the streets and pavements. Undoubtedly, this is a global phenomenon even in so-called advanced countries. The authorities should consider setting up adequate night shelters to cater for these less fortunate destitute people. In fact, as part of the disaster management task there should have been such a contingency plan in place. Supporting these needy and marginalized people will boost their immunity and health thus protecting them against many ailments.

The focus of any Government should at all times be on care, concern and comfort of every citizen not forgetting the poorest of the poor. Through concrete measures there is need to usher much needed succour and solace to these unfortunate brothers and sisters who languish without a shelter in all weathers bracing even the extreme cold and incessant rain.

Nelson Mandela had so very rightly said "Freedom is meaningless if people cannot put food in their stomachs, if they can have no shelter, if illiteracy and disease continue to dog them".

Aires Rodrigues, London

Declare cancer as 'notifiable disease'

As India is a vast country with a

heterogeneous population, the fight against cancer requires proper analysis and extensive data to improve its treatment outcomes. Notifiable diseases, such as tuberculosis and cholera have shown us how standard treatment guidelines can be formulated and lead to significant improvement in the outcomes.

Similarly, if cancer is also made as a "notifiable disease", it will go a long way in offering proper and successful treatments of the various types of cancer. Incidentally, it was reported that cancer centres of a leading private hospital in Chennai, in collaboration with some oncology medical associations in Tamil Nadu, have launched a campaign, 'Unify to Notify', urging the Central government to declare cancer as a 'notifiable disease'.

More such campaigns must be held to ensure that every cancer case is accounted for, every patient receives the necessary support and no data point is overlooked in India's fight against cancer.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Know when to walk away

Helen Mirren once said, "Before you argue with someone, ask yourself, is that person even mentally mature enough to grasp the concept of a different perspective. Because if not, there's absolutely no point."

letterstotheeditor

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rise in temperatures that could ultimately break previous records. One of the vital precautions that humans need to take to beat the heat is to remain hydrated by drinking an adequate quantity of water. Hence drinking water while on the move is important. Of course one can carry water in the bottles or buy packaged drinking water at the shops.

But carrying water bottles can be cumbersome and not relying on packaged drinking water can reduce plastic pollution. There is when roadside drinking water dispensers can play a vital role. Such dispensers are seen in western countries but seldom seen in India. Goa could give the lead by installing such water dispensers. Roadside drinking water dispensers offer a convenient and accessible source of clean water for travelers, pedestrians and residents. They can also help reduce costs and encourage greater water consumption. These water dispensers eliminate the need to carry or store large quantities of water bottles. Water dispensers include built-in filtration systems that remove impurities and contaminants, making the water safer to drink. A proposal is reportedly on the cards to fit public toilets in Panaji city with filtered water dispensers as a pilot project. It would be in the fitness of things to have these water dispensers by the roadside instead of public toilets. The general public would be reluctant to go to a toilet to drink water.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Install drinking water dispensers by roadside

In March, Goa continues to see a