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How to Build a Villain: Aurangzeb, Temple Destruction, and His Modern Reputation



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Abstract

This paper is a study of the spatial relationship between temples destroyed in the reign of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (1618-1707) and other significant spatial characteristics of the Mughal Empire in his time, including its southern border and the geographic distribution of religious groups. It also places these relationships in the context of the contemporary political narrative as well the current one. Using an ArcGIS project built to explore the spatial relationship, this paper tests the hypothesis that temple destruction under Aurangzeb was religiously motivated, and concludes that this hypothesis ought to be rejected. Work from other scholars in the field illustrates why this hypothesis is none the less deeply ingrained in India's modern political landscape, and how that came to pass.

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