

# 'Attempts on to destroy Indian history – but history's not mythology or theology'

Historian **Irfan Habib** is Professor Emeritus, Aligarh Muslim University. Speaking with **Eram Agha**, Habib discussed hotly debated Indian history, revamping Nehru Museum and renaming Aurangzeb Road, Syria, Libya, America – and meat bans:

## ■ There's a proposal to revamp Nehru Memorial Museum & Library – how do you analyse this?

Well, from what's happened in the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), filled now with RSS men unknown to professional historians, a similar 'revamp' of the Nehru Museum & Library would be quite in line. The effort to run down Gandhi and Nehru is an old one in RSS. From statements made, it seems the idea is to make the institution a propaganda centre for RSS heroes – who, during our freedom struggle, kept on the good side of the British while pouring venom on the national movement's leaders.

## ■ But critics say Indian history must accommodate diversity and hence, updating ICHR, etc., is required.

No institution is perfect but ICHR has done much to publish sources of Indian history, like volumes on the national movement from 1937-47. RSS and Hindu Mahasabha were of little consequence then. RSS is naturally unhappy with this.

One must understand that behind the illiteracies now uttered in respect of history, the desire is not to improve anything

but to destroy what has been achieved.

## ■ Renaming Aurangzeb Road after late President Kalam is debated. What's your position?

Renaming places to remove Muslim names is one of RSS's programmes. Earlier, there were proposals to rename Allahabad and Lucknow. Maharashtra government is said to be considering renaming Aurangabad.

The effort is partly to saffronise even geographical nomenclature – the use of Kalam's name is a mere tactical ploy.

## ■ Is quoting Mughal Emperor Akbar's meat ban an attempt to justify modern bans?

Today, India is a secular country – there should be some limitations set on religious sentiments.

## ■ Why does history provoke so many conflicts?

History provokes no conflict. It simply records what happens. It must be distinguished from mythology as well as theology. Accurate history serves the nation in the same manner as accurate memory serves the individual.

It is not the purpose of

history to glorify either Vedic times or early Islam – a false reading of history often justifies barbarous acts.

The Islamic State claims to be a continuation of the pious Caliphate of Islam, but under that Caliphate, Christians were tolerated and Palmyra remained untouched – yet, invoking that same Caliphate, Islamic State is massacring Christians and destroying Syria's antiquities.

## ■ What's your view of Western military intervention in Syria?

Well, the present migrant crisis was created when USA and European Union decided to bomb Libya, a prosperous country, and intervene in Syria, which had a modern, secular government.

Even today, US and its allies are arming Syrian rebels and rejecting peace settlements there while in Libya, they've let loose marauders of every hue.

Europe is now reaping the harvest of its own leaders' deeds.

I cannot see how these streams can be stopped unless USA and EU give up 'plans to overthrow Syria's government and agree to a UN mandate for Libya.

**Q&A**

