Indian Secular Historiography: “A Judicious Selection of Historical Truths”

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MHPG848 An Introduction to Modern Historiography

With the emergence of modern nationalisms on the Indian subcontinent during the first half of the 20th century, a need arose for histories to support these new political movements. Alternatively, it could be argued that these new nationalisms sprang from particular interpretations of Indian history. As in politics, so in historiography, the Congress Party and its brand of secular nationalism quickly began to assert its dominance. Starting with Gandhi's commitment to “Hindu-Muslim Unity”, evolving into Nehru's “Secularism”, and then in the post-colonial decades maturing and ossifying into an Establishment Secularism concerned with preserving India's “communal harmony”, secular historiography has exercised a hegemony over India's politics and its academy. It is at the core of India's nationhood. This secular interpretation of Indian history was transmitted to the West by India's Leftist Anglophone historians, most notably Romila Thapar at Jawaharlal Nehru University. It was received rather uncritically, and so India has become a perennial “Mosaic of Cultures” in western textbooks and television documentaries. Secular historiography is based upon certain fundamentals- the refusal to equate India with Hinduism, and in many cases the denial that there even is any such thing as “Hinduism”, the proposition that Islamic conquerors and Islam itself “assimilated” into Indian culture, the subsequent creation of a “composite culture”, the general refusal to engage with religion, either as a theology or an identity capable of driving history, ignoring facts and figures which do not fit the secular narrative, and de-construc ting when that is not possible. As such, India's secular historians do not illuminate much of India's history, or help us to understand contemporary society. They require us to suspend our disbelief in order to absorb difficult accounts of historical causation, such as the British being the agents behind the partition of India. This secular historiography is a political construction designed to support India's secular state. It is both politically necessary, and a flight of fantasy. Given the decades which have passed since the painful division of India, a more mature Indian historiography may be possible which engages with religion, rather than de-constructs it, explores the reality of Hindu-Muslim
conflict down through the centuries, and so brings us to a more sophisticated understanding of the history which made us what we are today.

The Congress Party's concern with ensuring “Hindu-Muslim Unity” in its struggle against British rule required a history of Hindu-Muslim amity. It would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to launch a nationalist anti-colonial agitation, including Hindus and Muslims, based upon a common understanding of centuries of conflict between the two communities prior to British rule. Thus, with this ideal of unity in mind, the great leaders of the Congress began to look back on India’s past and attempted to resolve the deep historical divisions which stared them in the face and provided the greatest impediment to the realisation of their objective. The initial designation “Hindu-Muslim Unity” denoted two distinct religious communities coming together for a particular political purpose— the end of British rule in India. Mohandas Gandhi always referred to it as such, and always understood it in this way. His was not so much an idea of “secularism”, but of ecumenicalism and mutual goodwill overcoming acknowledged historic discord between the two religious communities. From his earliest days as a barrister in South Africa he understood the divisions— he noted wryly how the Indian Muslim merchants there wanted to be known as “Arabs”. Upon returning to India and looking for a way to bring the Muslims into the Congress fold, unable to reach them through his own Hindu political idiom, he supported the Khilafat movement—a movement to restore the Caliph, the titular head of world Islam, who had been dislodged with the dismembering of the Ottoman Empire after World War One, a cause which had struck a chord among India's Muslims. It was a strange bargain— Indian Muslims would support the Congress' anti-colonial struggle in India in exchange for Congress support for the restoration of the Caliph in far off Turkey. Jawaharlal Nehru had a different, more modern idea of secularism. It was not that two religious communities would co-operate for a mutually beneficial political purpose, but that religion was relatively unimportant, and that Hindus and Muslims shared a common historical inheritance, a common culture, they were one people, both Indians. This would become one of the foundational ideas of the Indian state. It would provide the framework, or perhaps, the straight jacket within which India's secular establishment historians would work in the decades after Independence. The effort

2 Ibid, pp. 190-1.
to create a secular history was laid down in the recommendations of the Committee on School Textbooks of the Government of India, which in 1969 stated without self-consciousness that “This would, obviously, involve a creative and purposeful reinterpretation of history and a judicious selection of historical truths.” This secular, inclusive history was disseminated in politics through the dominance of the Congress Party, in the academy by Marxist scholars at Jawaharlal Nehru University and Aligarh Muslim University, and in popular culture through the state broadcaster Doordarshan and Hindi cinema (Bollywood). A social milieu developed in which secularism became synonymous with reasonableness, right thinking and common decency. Importantly, it was to stand in complete contradistinction to Pakistan’s exclusive, religious, Islamic nationalism. It was, in a sense, to not take “no” for an answer and keep the argument going. From the 1980s it also had to turn to argue with an emergent Hindu nationalism within India, a force it had tried vehemently to exclude and suppress since 1947. India's secular historiography, thus, sprang from a political ideal, not the other way around.

The building block of secular historiography is the idea that India cannot be equated with Hinduism, Hindu civilisation or culture, or Hindu people. Without this foundation, the upper floors are difficult to construct. If India were to be equated with Hinduism, it would necessarily be exclusive of India's religious minorities, the largest of which is the Muslim community. There is some confusion however. Both Gandhi and Nehru spoke of the ancient roots of India’s nationalism. Gandhi wrote, in Hind Swaraj, of an idea of India which had been developed by the Indians of yore, which took shape in their development of places of religious pilgrimage in all four corners of the country. Likewise, in The Discovery of India Nehru repeatedly spoke of the idea of an Indian nationhood which was quite consciously developed in the great ancient religious epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. By any conception these ancient pilgrimage points, and religious epics, however, could only be described as Hindu. So from this point one has to make quite a tortuous effort separate out the Indian from the Hindu. Nehru attempted to do so by arguing that in antiquity the Indian could be equated with the Hindu, but not so in modern times when Hinduism evolved into

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6 Nehru, The Discovery of India, p.107.
something more narrow and exclusive. Yet he, and one of his acolytes, Romila Thapar, also argued that the word “Hinduism” does not denote anything in particular because Hinduism is so broad and amorphous. So on the one hand, it evolved too narrowly to be equated with India, yet it is too broad to be the basis of a meaningful identity. Romila Thapar, with the greater academic sophistication of the post-colonial era, employing the Marxist interpretive framework, argues that Hinduism is largely “imagined”, that it does not possess any coherence or unity because it does not exhibit the dogmas and institutional organisation associated with religions. The question then arises, that if, at a later point India was so adept at assimilating foreign influences, most importantly Islamic conquerors and their religion, what were these foreigners assimilating to? They had to be assimilating into something-Indian civilisation, the content of which was inescapably Hindu. This category confusion flummoxed Michael Wood in The Story of India, his popular BBC television documentary series. He had read Nehru and Thapar closely, and so referred to “Hindu religions”, always trying in his narration to show how the multiplicity of Hindu belief militated against any attempt at unity, and that it could not be equated with India. Yet he, like his tutors, quite casually reverted to “Indian” to describe Hindu rituals, ruins, customs and texts. The reason for the difficulty is that the distinction between Indian and Hindu is born of modern political necessity. It is not organic in history. In India's secular historiography, India cannot be equated with Hinduism, yet, curiously, it cannot be separated from it. In its modern form it is both too narrow to be equated with India, and too broad to have a coherence and unity and so be a legitimate identity. Having tried to establish that India is not Hindu, secular historians attempt to demonstrate how Islamic conquerors of India and their religion seamlessly assimilated into an enduring Indian culture, creating another exquisite impression upon an ancient palimpsest. In Hind Swaraj, Gandhi talked of how the Muslim conquerors had “merged” into India as a result of its “faculty of assimilation”. He recognised that there had been an initial period of conflict, but then each side realised that it could not prevail and so began a process of co-

7 Ibid., p.75.
8 Ibid.
10 Ibid., p.211.
12 Ibid.
13 Gandhi, Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule, Chapter 10.
It was on this issue that Nehru turned most poetic. He was not a doctrinaire Marxist, he could perhaps be better described as an International Socialist. Yet he was weary of religion and its associated identities as drivers of history and preferred an economic and class-based interpretation. He asserted that there were in fact no “Islamic invasions”, that iconic Muslim conquerors such as Mahmud of Ghazni were more interested in loot, using religion as a mask for avarice. He argued that an age or historical phenomenon could not be designated simply according to the religion of the ruling class, ignoring what was going on underneath. He then went on to describe the ways in which Muslim rulers, after getting their initial iconoclastic energy out of their system, settled down to become Indian rulers, married Hindu women, forgot their distant homelands, entered into terms of co-operation with the locals, and patronised new forms of art and culture. He also wrote evocatively about a new cultural synthesis, of how Hindus and Muslims evolved a common culture, had common concerns, spoke the same languages, listened to the same music, ate the same food, and were oppressed by the same landlords. For Nehru, India, during the centuries of rule by Muslim conquerors, “continued to be an independent country”. It is a lovely picture of religious harmony. Michael Wood described the period as “a civilisational wonderland”. It is all rather heart warming, and so appears in western texts such as Worlds Together, Worlds Apart as “India as a Cultural Mosaic”. The authors write that “The Turks spilled into India...” and “...the Turks co-operated. Before long they thought of themselves as Indians, who, however, retained their Islamic beliefs and steppe ways.” and “...the local Hindu population...assimilated these intruders as they had done earlier peoples”. Crucial to all this, is the notion that Indians who converted to Islam during this period underwent very little change- the change of religion did not signify much, because so much of Islam and Islamic culture had assimilated to India. Romila Thapar asserts that in most cases conversions happened as a group, usually an entire local Hindu caste converting to Islam,
and so they retained many of their Hindu habits and customs even after conversion.\textsuperscript{23} However, this thesis is based on the all too loose use of the word “assimilate”. Because of the secular imperative and the Marxist orientation of this interpretation which privileges economic structures and class and devalues religion and culture, the word “assimilate” is used without sufficient care. A better word would be “accommodate”. At best, Hindus and Muslims had learnt that it was necessary to accommodate one another, according to the political and military conditions of the day, in order to survive, yet, neither culturally, nor religiously had they ever assimilated or synthesised a common culture larger than their religious identities. This harks back to the distinction between Gandhi’s “Hindu-Muslim Unity” and Nehru’s “Secularism”. To gain a deeper understanding of the religious fissures which would divide India, and so disprove this theory of assimilation, one needs to look to the alternative historiographical schools, to the religious nationalisms which arose on either flank of the Congress Party during the late colonial period.

An intrinsic weakness of secular historiography is its unwillingness to engage with religion, as theology or identity, as a substantial driver of Indian history. Because of this exclusion, the only place to find a raw, un-deconstructed narrative of religious motivation is in the historiographies of Muslim and Hindu nationalism. They, of course, thrive on it. The politics of these religious nationalisms sprang from an idea of history, and not the other way around. The concept of historical assimilation between Hindu and Muslim is a construct of the Congress’ secular nationalism. It is not shared by either the Muslim nationalists or Hindu nationalists, who cherish an idea of two religious forces at war across the subcontinent for almost a millennium prior to the brief Pax Britannica. For Muslim nationalist historians it is a story of unfinished conquest and the creation of Pakistan. For Hindu nationalists, one of valorous resistance to Muslim invaders bent upon destroying Hindu civilisation. Both agree on much, perhaps only disagreeing on where to draw the border. And the current border between India and Pakistan is one which secular historians have difficulty explaining. The only recourse is to blame the British—after all why would two nations, mutually hostile, sworn enemies, emerge out of “a civilisational wonderland”? In The Story of India, Michael Wood interviewed a Hindu priest at the much destroyed and much rebuilt Hindu temple of Somnath in Gujarat in western India, who told him that “besides looting the temple of its

gold and treasure, he (Mahmud) had the idea of destroying Hindu culture by destroying the
temple”. Wood proceeded to move back to his account of how “the coming of Islam
inspired the next great phase of Indian history”. Later, he too would blame the British for
the division of India, and create some unintended comedy when wondering “Can India and
Pakistan ever be friends?”

The secular narrative blocks out religious voices, and religious sources, because they are
thought to validate the idea of Pakistan, Muslim separatism, and Hindu nationalism, which
are all considered a threat to the secular Indian state. In *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*
Vinayak Savarkar, the founding ideologue of the modern Hindu nationalist movement,
narrated India’s history as a series of bloody battles in which Hindus fought for survival, most
importantly against the barbarism of Muslim invaders. Interestingly, he discussed some of
the non-martial means which Hindu civilisation used in its long struggle against Muslim
conquerors, notably social boycott, ideas of ritual pollution, the ban on inter marriage, inter
dining, the consequences of loss of caste, and the ban on re-conversion. It is material
which Hindus and Muslims are quite aware of today as part of their cultural memory, yet is
taboo in secular histories. Likewise, far from acting on cues from the British rulers, Muslim
separatism had deep roots in Indian soil and was bound up in the very nature of Islam. In
*Tinderbox*, the Indian journalist MJ Akbar traces the roots of this separatism, as the roots of
the Pakistani state, to the “theory of distance” propagated by Shah Waliullah in the mid 18th
century. It was a time when the Mughal empire had began to crumble under pressure from
insurgent Hindu forces, yet before British rule had begun to take shape. He was concerned
that this situation would lend itself to Muslims regressing into Hindu and so un-Islamic
practices, and therefore advocated that Muslims literally keep their distance from Hindus
such that they should not be able to see the lights burning in Hindu homes. The
educational reformer Sir Syed Ahmad, in the 1870s, urged Muslims to stay away from the
Congress, still in its infancy, hardly having had time to take shape. He feared it would be a
body dominated by over educated, effeminate Hindu Bengalis, and urged Muslims to remain

24 Wood, “The Meeting of Two Oceans.”
25 Ibid.
28 Ibid., pp. 133-145.
30 Ibid., p.51.
loyal to the British, who as Christians were “people of the book”, always identifying with the Muslim invaders when reminding his audience “we have ruled this country for seven centuries”. Sir Muhammad Iqbal, less a politician and more a poet and philosopher expounded his idea of Islam as a political and ethical ideal. In his conviction, the theology and history of Islam meant it could never be a private faith, but was an ideal of society, that there were no “Indian Muslims” because to be a Muslim was to be above territory, and to be committed to a set of ideals and beliefs. The separation of religion from politics was, according to him “simply unthinkable for a Muslim”. In 1940, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, earlier the “Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity”, in his call for the establishment of Pakistan mocked the idea that Hindus and Muslims were one people. When looking upon history, he said, in a telling phrase “Very often the hero of one is a foe of the other”. In the mid 1990s in Beyond Belief, VS Naipaul travelled among the peoples of non-Arab Islamic societies to attempt to understand the relationship between native cultures and the imperial religion. When in Pakistan he encountered the uneasy relationship between the new Islamic identity and the old Hindu ancestry. In his conversations he learnt that Muslims often just made up a Middle Eastern or Central Asian ancestor from whom they claimed descent, establishing a separation from their Hindu origins and a link with the Islamic centre. Partition, he wrote, was to the Muslims of India like a gift from God, the division of India filled with pleasure, the verve encapsulated in the slogan of the day “Baantke rahega Hindustan, Banke rahega Pakistan” (Having been divided India will remain so, having been made Pakistan will remain so). Thus, far from being inconsequential, when listening to Muslim voices, it becomes apparent that conversion to Islam has been amongst the most profound phenomena in Indian history. It created a new people. In fact any exploration of religious sources illuminates a picture of the Hindu and the Muslim as the quintessential mutual “Other”. The political constraints on India’s secular historians mean that it is territory

32 Ibid.
33 Sir Muhammad Iqbal, Islam as an Ethical and Political Ideal, (Lahore: Orientalia, 1955), paragraph 6a.
34 Sir Muhammad Iqbal, Presidential Address to the Muslim League, Allahabad 1930, (Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1977), paragraph 2b.
35 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
39 Ibid., p. 249.
they have to leave unexplored, or else resort to doctrinaire Marxist interpretation. This religious historiography is illiberal, regressive, and impolite. But so is India’s history, and in it lies greater truth than secular histories are allowed to reveal.

In an effort to keep the secular narrative together, India’s secular historians have to ignore vast swathes of Indian history, and when that proves impossible, attempt to re-interpret, usually through Marxist analysis, religious identities and patterns of religious violence. The phenomena which are ignored are usually those which relate to Hindu resistance to Muslim rule. Those which are de-constructed are instances of Muslim iconoclasm, particularly the pillaging and destruction of Hindu temples and other instances of oppression and persecution of Hindus. Three major periods are glossed over in secular histories- the rise of the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar in the south of India after the early incursions by Muslims invaders in the North, the emergence of the Marathas led by the Hindu warrior Shivaji, who from their obscure base in western India became the most powerful Indian political and military force prior to British rule, and the emergence of the Sikhs in the North, who overthrew Muslim rule in the Punjab and established a huge Sikh kingdom stretching from the Afghanistan frontier to Kashmir, the Punjab and down toward Delhi, the last Indian kingdom to be annexed by the British. These are huge phenomena in the history of India, and whether one sees them as existing in a continuum of Hindu resistance to Muslim rule or not, they are worthy of scholarly attention. They are studied by foreign scholars and Indians alike, but usually quite tentatively and apart from a larger Indian narrative, which of course diminishes and isolates them. In most secular histories, Indian and foreign, they are given cursory mention or none at all. The history of the Sikhs is never narrated for what it was- the transformation of an obscure Hindu reformist sect into a distinct martial religious force due to intolerance and violent persecution by Muslim rulers. *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart*, makes no mention of Sikh-Muslim conflict, and instead frames the development of Sikhism, in a fleeting reference, as having been “inspired by Islamic ideals”.40 Likewise, the history of the Marathas and Shivaji is usually written out of secular histories, as the Maratha warrior was hardly a gentle assimilationist, but a Hindu revivalist, who fought in explicitly religious terms against the Mughal empire. The south Indian empire of Vijayanagar had specifically dharmic goals, that is the restoration of Hindu civilisation after the initial waves of Islamic

invasions. Mention of it in secular histories is usually of its impressive architecture, the ruins of which stand at Hampi in modern Karnataka, rather than its role in the preservation of Hindu civilisation.

When it is not possible to ignore, secular historians are content to de-construct. This is particularly so in cases of Muslim iconoclasm, the most common of which were the destruction of Hindu temples and the building of mosques on their ruins, and the imposition of jiziba, or a tax on the non-believers. Both are generally given an economic or political interpretation to explain away a historic pattern of religious bigotry and violence. Again one has to read the Hindu and Muslim nationalist historians and their engagement with the religious sources to understand these phenomena. Sita Ram Goel, a polemicist of the Hindu Right, in his *The Story of Islamic Imperialism in India* quoted copiously from the Muslim sources, mainly Court histories which celebrate the destruction of Hindu temples, the massacre of Hindus, and their general oppression under Muslim rule. These sources, contemporaneous accounts of events, frame their narrative in explicitly Islamic terms, as the triumph of Islam over the Hindu infidel. Yet modern Marxists would give a political gloss-the Court chroniclers were mistaken “that temples and icons being symbols not only of religion, but also of the culture of politics. It is in this context that we have to examine the destruction of various icons and temples by various Muslim invaders...” Such a habit of exclusion, and de-construction helps smoothen the secular narrative, yet leaves vast swathes of Indian history out. It tends to lead to ahistorical explanations for contemporary conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India, and between India and Pakistan. Such conflict is “destroying the secular fabric of the nation” rather than just the continuation of a long and hoary historical religious enmity. It may be possible to imagine an Indian historiography which neither ignores, nor de-constructs, listens to religious voices, can discern accommodation from assimilation, is neither Hindu phobic, nor fearful of Islam, and can move towards a more mature and comprehensive history of India.

Secular historiography continues to exercise hegemony both within India and abroad, yet there are newer, smaller plants managing to sprout up under the shade of the mighty banyan tree. As members of the *ancien régime* secular historians resumed their posts in the

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41 Sita Ram Goel, *The Story of Islamic Imperialism in India* (Delhi: Voice of India, 1982), chapter 4.
42 Ibid.
43 Thapar, *Communalism and the Historical Legacy*, p. 12.
Establishment with the return to power of the Congress Party after the 2004 elections. They promptly set about “detoxifying” school textbooks which had taken a Hindu nationalist tinge under the BJP led government at the turn of the century. Normalcy was restored. However, the absolute zenith of secular historiography may have passed due to the surer footing of the Indian state many decades after Independence, as well as the turn toward post-modernism in the international academy. The pressing need to write national histories which conformed with the secular ideals of the new Indian state has subsided somewhat as younger generations of Indians have come to take much of India's national culture for granted. The disdain of post-modernism for grand narratives, particularly narratives of nationalism, has meant that younger scholars have started to look away from the modern nation state and into the smaller nooks and crannies of Indian history for their areas of research. Yet even amidst these changing intellectual imperatives, the secular school continues to exert great influence. Perhaps the most prevalent of its ideas in contemporary historiography is that “Hinduism” is a modern construction of the 19th century. Romila Thapar's 1989 lecture *Imagined Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity* has been extremely influential in this regard, appealing both to post-modern sensibilities in the international academy and the needs of Indian secular scholars in a wide range of disciplines in their battles with Hindu nationalist forces in India. It forms the basis of much of political scientist Jyotirmaya Sharma's recent work such as *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*. Some historians from within the broader secular liberal intellectual fold have however, started to push the boundaries of orthodoxy and explore religious identities and the reality of religious conflict in Indian history. Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of the Mahatma and a historian at the University of Illinois, has consistently sought to investigate the role of religion in the making of the modern Indian cultural fabric. Perhaps, inheriting his grandfather’s sensibility, he has been less concerned with synthesis and assimilation and more interested in understanding

44 Thapar, “Imagined Communities.”
the nature of Hindu and Muslim identities and the tumultuous relationship between the two communities in titles such as *Understanding the Muslim Mind* and *Revenge and Reconciliation: Understanding South Asian History*. Ayesha Jalal, a Pakistani historian based in the United States has also focused on religious identity, examining the development of Muslim identity on the subcontinent and its relationship with the Pakistani state. She and her husband, Indian historian Sugata Bose have produced *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* which refracts from the modern nation state as the primary level of analysis. This is an important new direction, for the history of India needs to work forward from the ancient period, rather than backward from 1947. The partition of India needs to be seen as a civilisational rupture, rather than a political one, and a failure of an idealistic, modern attempt to forge an Indian civic nationalism out of older, primal religious identities. Part of the aversion to including explorations of religious identity and religious conflict within the secular narrative is the fear that such accounts would be incendiary and only inflame religious tensions in contemporary society. However, excluding religious voices from the mainstream of Indian historiography has meant that the only place to find them is in the literature of religious nationalisms, in the often rabid prose of Sita Ram Goel or the outlandish accounts in Pakistani school textbooks. Bringing these voices under the purview of academic examination would also bring them into the realm of sober, considered discourse.

The most insightful and revealing historiography of India does however, take place largely outside of the academy, amongst writers and journalists, rather than India's professional historians. Romila Thapar has acknowledged that most Indian students write their history exams according to what they perceive as their marker's expectations of secular orthodoxy, and then forget it all and learn their “real history” at home, amongst their family, at their places of worship and community. It has been more than six decades since the bloodshed which accompanied the Partition of India and the birth of two ideologically opposed states. Unfortunately, tempers have not cooled, passions have not subsided and the two states exist as opposite sides in a running, rather expensive and violent argument about history. In India

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it would be difficult to conceive of the presentation of Indian history in all its violence and conflict to mixed classrooms of Hindu and Muslim children, and expect them to share a common nationhood, let alone lunch. And so the political imperative for India’s fantastic secular historiography remains. Any equivalence between India and Hinduism is thought to only encourage Hindu nationalists and so threaten Hindu-Muslim co-existence and the secular state. An exploration of the record of Islamic conquerors and the mind of Indian Muslim converts would only cast aspersions on the loyalty of India’s Muslim minority, and validate Pakistan’s “two nation theory”. India’s secular politics will continue to require a secular history. In that sense a more mature Indian historiography would require a break with India’s politics. This would seem difficult in India’s Marxist dominated Anglophone academy, which evokes the air of a Soviet satellite state, rather than the world’s largest liberal democracy. It would have to be written in some as yet unknown politics free intellectual space- a space we would like to imagine the academy should be. But one can speculate about what it would look like. It would not fetish the separation of Indian and Hindu civilisation. It would recognise a coherence in Hindu thought and practice over millennia, not as a religion in the western sense but as a civilisation, society and spiritual culture, one distinguished by its survival instinct. It would not fear an examination of Islam and its theology, the actions of Muslim conquerors and the culture of Indian Muslim converts, and comparison with Islamic conquests in other regions. It would view the creation of Pakistan as a natural consequence of the Islamic invasions of India and not as a miasma. Perhaps most importantly it would recognise the importance of religious identities as drivers of Indian history. It would not confuse an earnest modern political ideal of a secular Indian state with the reality of India's bloody history. And even more ambitiously it would see India and Pakistan not as ideological states in need of historical construction, as two sides of a historical argument, but as choices about how we navigate modernity.

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