

REVIEW ESSAY

Becoming Modern and Secular: A Review Essay on Recent Work on Islam and South Asia

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Abstract

Discussed: *Defending Muhammad in Modernity*. By SherAli Tareen. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020. Pp. 506. \$125.00 (cloth); \$35.00 (paper); \$27.99 (digital). ISBN: 9780268106706.

Governance of Islam in Pakistan: An Institutional Study of the Council of Islamic Ideology. By Sarah Holz. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022. Pp. 240. \$70.00 (paper). ISBN: 9781789761665.

Hurt Sentiments: Secularism and Belonging in South Asia. By Neeti Nair. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023. Pp. 352. \$45.00 (cloth); \$45.00 (digital). ISBN: 9780674238275.

The Muslims of South Asia are more than five hundred million people, distributed between Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, and there are more Muslims in South Asia than in any other region in the world. After Indonesia, which is the largest Muslim country in the world, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are the second, third, and fourth largest Muslim countries, respectively. Although the prevalent approach in the study of Islam is to consider its so-called Arab character as central, the Muslims in pre-Partition India constituted the largest body of Muslims in the world, and the vast political and intellectual influence exerted by South Asian Muslims on the wider Muslim world is often neglected. Many of the most important political, intellectual, and spiritual developments within Islam have had their origins, or have flourished, in South Asia, and Muslims from the region have played important roles in the global history of Islam, including during the colonial period, in resistance to colonial rule, and in intellectual responses to and dialogue with Western thought. Pakistan was specifically created to provide a homeland for South Asia's Muslim population and its trials and tribulations over the past seventy-five years have been carefully watched by Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Muslims constitute India's largest minority, with an often uneasy—to say the least—relationship to the majority. In the context of the three books under discussion, I explore issues, such as secularism, modernity, and religion, and their impacts on the conception of the nation-state that was promoted during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as an expression of political modernity.

Keywords: secularism; modernity; Pakistan; India; Bangladesh; Islam; Hinduism

Introduction

After the Great Mutiny, or Sepoy Revolt, of 1857–1858, and although the great majority of the insurgents were non-Muslims, the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar (1775–1862), was put on trial by the British and charged with being behind an international Muslim conspiracy stretching from Istanbul to Mecca, and from Iran to the walls of the Red Fort in



Delhi. The mutiny was crushed, the emperor was sent into exile in Burma, where he passed away in 1862, and India became *de jure* under British rule.¹

Between 1857 and 1947, the subcontinent went through great transformations, and some of the most important outcomes of the Sepoy Mutiny were the end of Islam's political preponderance in the region, the end of the Mughal dynasty, which had established itself in India in 1526, and the replacement of Muslim political power with the British. To consider the importance of this event one should have in mind the fact that not long ago, comparisons were being made to contemporary events and situations.² It should also be noted that what is now eastern Afghanistan was in those days part of the Mughal Empire, and that in 1893 a British Commission, led by Sir Henry Mortimer Durand (1850–1924), unilaterally determined the border between Afghanistan and British India, along the Khyber Pass. The two thousand-four-hundred-kilometer-long border, known as the Durand Line, ran exactly along the line that marks the Afghan-Pakistan boundary today. Although the opposing zones of influence were by this time a political fact, the Durand line confirmed that existing political separation. It dissected many Pashtun tribes, seriously undermining their potential for unity and prospects for an independent territory of Pashtunistan (or place of Pashtuns), which could have possibly been consolidated between the Indus River and Hindu Kush. At the same time, it sowed the seeds of an enduring border dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan which emerged upon the creation of the latter as a majority Muslim state out of the Hindu-dominated India in 1947.³

For the occasion of the sesquicentennial of India's Great Rebellion of 1857–1858, and the sixtieth anniversary of Partition and Independence, in 2007–2008, scholarship on new aspects of the war and retrospectives on the conflict's often acrimonious historiography were spawned,⁴ and many Muslims still consider that the British, in 1947, should have given back to them the rule of India.⁵

The period between the revolt and Partition was very rich in reformist thinking, originating an intense debate which crossed the geographical borders of India and anticipated many contemporary issues: women's place in society, the role of religion in politics, and the end of the Caliphate. At the same time, the world at large went through massive events, which influenced India and the Islamic world, almost entirely under imperial and colonial European rule. Throughout this period, Muslims in India witnessed the burgeoning of a public sphere as members of its elite attempted to use newspapers, journals, and tracts to inform public opinion, discuss the contemporary condition of the Muslims, and usher in social and religious reforms.⁶

The Argumentative Indians

In *The Argumentative Indian*,⁷ Amartya Sen discusses India's history and identity, focusing on the traditions of public debate and intellectual pluralism with a long argumentative tradition.

¹ For a detailed account on the origins, causes, and consequences of the revolt, see William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

² For example, Salahuddin Malik, *1857: War of Independence or a Clash of Civilizations? British Public Reactions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³ For further details, Amin Saikal, "Afghanistan and Pakistan: The Question of Pashtun Nationalism?," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2010): 5–17.

⁴ Clare Anderson, *Indian Uprising of 1857–8: Prisons, Prisoners and Rebellion* (London: Anthem Press, 2007); Biswamoy Pati, ed., *The 1857 Rebellion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵ Aryn Baker, "Beyond Faith," *Time*, August 13, 2007, 22–29 (Asia and South Pacific editions).

⁶ Iqbal Singh Sevea, "Islam, State and Modernity: Muslim Political Discourse in Late 19th and Early 20th Century India," IDSS Working Paper Series, no. 115, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore, 2006.

⁷ Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity* (New York: Picador, 2006).

SherAli Tareen's *Defending Muhammad in Modernity* is an illustration of this tradition, presenting the Barelvi-Deobandi polemic, a polemic between two normative orientations or reform movements with beginnings in colonial South Asia. Almost two hundred years separate the beginnings of this polemic from the present. Its presence, however, continues to be felt in the religious sensibilities of postcolonial South Asian Muslims in profound ways, both in the region and in diaspora communities around the world.

In his narrative, Tareen particularly underscores issues of law, political theology, normativity, and ritual practices. Tareen's discussion essentially addresses two iterations of the Barelvi-Deobandi debate. The first debate took place during the early nineteenth century between Fazl-Haqq Khayarabadi (1796–1861) and Shah Muhammad Isma'il (1779–1831), a debate which revolved around three main themes, including prophetic intercession (*shafa'at*), the capacity of God to lie (*imkan-i-kizb*), and the creation of another prophet after the last Prophet Muhammad (*imkan-i-inzir*). The second iteration of this Deobandi/Barelvi debate took place between two renowned scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Ashraf Ali Thanvi (1863–1943) and Ahmad Raza Khan Barelvi (1856–1921). This argument focused on the Prophet's knowledge of the unseen, or the hidden realm, and ritual practices. Most of the discussions in this case concerned the limits of the Prophet's *Sunna* (traditions and practices) and what constitutes exceeding/transgressing those limits. These extensions on the *Sunna* resulted in innovations (*bid'a*), which were seen as a kind of rivalry to God's sovereign legislation.

One of the key ideas surrounding ritual practice is the celebration of the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid* or *milad*), which remains an evocative issue today. *Mawlid*, rising in his honor, and offering him salutations are all considered inappropriate innovations by the Deobandis. They believe that the Prophet cannot make appearances at multiple celebrations at the same time, and that it would be equivalent to giving him some divine status. Furthermore, this is an ability that they ascribed to Satan and the angels but not to the Prophet. The Barelvis, on the other hand, wanted these practices to continue, and just be improved upon. In short, the second iteration of the discussion between the Deobandi and Barelvi schools of thought provides the substantive bases for many modern-day *fatwas*.

Tareen's book was awarded the American Institute of Pakistan Studies 2020 Book Prize and was selected as a finalist for the 2021 American Academy of Religion Book Award. Its publication was also an opportunity to convene virtual talks, symposia, fora, and several reviews to which I direct the reader for a detailed and thorough discussion.⁸ In *Defending Muhammad in Modernity*, Tareen intends to challenge the commonplace tendency to view such moments of intra-Muslim contest through the prism of problematic yet powerful liberal secular binaries like legal/mystical, moderate/extremist, and reformist/traditionalist.⁹ Tareen argues that the Barelvi-Deobandi polemic was instead animated by what he calls, in the title of part one, "competing political theologies."

⁸ "Book Symposium on *Defending Muhammad in Modernity*," *Contending Modernities*, March 9, 2021, <https://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/series/book-symposium-on-defending-muhammad-in-modernity/>; "A Forum on SherAli Tareen's *Defending Muhammad in Modernity*," *Marginalia Review of Books*, August 19, 2022, <https://www.marginaliareviewofbooks.com/post/a-forum-on-sherali-tareen-s-defending-muhammad-in-modernity/>; SherAli Tareen, "The Politics of Prophetic Love in South Asia," *Canopy Forum*, March 8, 2022, <https://canopyforum.org/2022/03/08/the-politics-of-prophetic-love-in-south-asia-sherali-tareen/>; S. Akbar Zaidi, "Review of Tareen, SherAli K. *Defending Muhammad in Modernity*," *H-Asia, H-Net Reviews*, April 2021, <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=56091>.

⁹ For decades, scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Taha Abdurrahman, Henry Corbin (1903–1978), and others, have been drawing people's attention to the nonsensical nature of these dichotomies.

Despite the book's many virtues, I find this assertion puzzling. First, regarding the use of political theology as an analytical frame, the debate between the Barelvis and the Deobandis was more akin to the theological debates between the Jansenists and the Jesuits in France in the seventeenth century, or the discussions around Pure Land Buddhism, particularly other power (*tarikhi*) versus self-power (*jiriki*), than it was about, say, the debates between Hussain Ahmad Madani (1879–1957) and Shabbir Ahmad Usmani (1886–1949)—both Deobandi—against and in favor of, respectively, the creation of Pakistan,¹⁰ or the debates between Ghulam Ahmad Parvez (1903–1985) and Sayyid Abul A'la al-Mawdudi (1903–1979) regarding the nature of Pakistan as an Islamic state. In other words, to describe the debate between the Barelvis and Deobandis as both political and theological is to stretch the definition of political too far.

Second, Tareen's reliance on the thought of Carl Schmitt (1888–1985) is not fully convincing. In a book that challenges binaries, it is sometimes irritating that Tareen employs the binary term *Islam/Euro-America* (for example, throughout the introduction), a binary that is difficult to discern when the United States or European countries sell arms, football teams, or museums to countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and other Muslim-majority countries, or when the European Union outsources its policies on refugees to countries such as Morocco or Tunisia, countries that are very eager to comply with what is asked by the European Union. Politically, economically, and socially, Islam and Euro-America have become profoundly intertwined in the modern, globalized world.

And third, why use Schmitt and not Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938)? In 1930, while addressing the All-India Muslim League, Iqbal explained that Islam was animated by an ethical ideal that saw man not as a creature rooted in earth, defined by this or that portion of land, but as a spiritual being understood in terms of what Iqbal called a social mechanism to capture the individual's inherently social location and having rights and duties as a living factor in that mechanism. In the center of Iqbal's vision on Islam was the concept of *Tawhid* (Oneness), applied not only to God's own nature but also in God's relationship with the world.¹¹ Because God is not only creator, sustainer, and judge of the universe, God's will or law also governs all aspects of its creation and should be realized in all areas of life. This belief was the base for Iqbal's vision of the community as a religiopolitical state and for the supremacy of Islamic law in Muslim society. Basing himself on the prophetic tradition that says that the “whole of this earth is a mosque,” and in the role of Muhammad as a leader of the state in Medina, Iqbal concluded that “all that is secular is, therefore, sacred in the roots of its being,” without separation of the spiritual and the temporal.¹²

Carl Schmitt, a Catholic author, lived and wrote in the aftermath of Protestant Prussia's military campaign for German unification against the Habsburg dynasty, during the creation of German national culture with its skepticism of the Catholic Church, and at a time when the term state came to be accepted as the master noun of political discourse. The political hegemony of the state had the effect that a number of other concepts and assumptions bearing on the analysis of sovereignty had to be reorganized or, in some cases, given up. One concept that underwent a consequential process of redefinition was that of political allegiance. A subject, or *subditus*, had traditionally sworn allegiance to his sovereign as a liege lord. But with the acceptance of the idea that sovereignty was lodged not with rulers but with the state, this was replaced by the familiar view that citizens owed their loyalty to

¹⁰ For further details, see Carimo Mohamed, “Religion as Nation: The Muslims of India and the Debates on *qaum*, *millat*, and *umma* in the 1930s,” *Social Sciences* 10, no. 6 (2021): 286–93.

¹¹ Muhammad Iqbal, “Sir Muhammad Iqbal's 1930 Presidential Address to the 25th Session of the All-India Muslim League. Allahabad, 29 December,” in *Speeches, Writings, and Statements of Iqbal*, ed. Latif Ahmed Sherwani, 2nd rev. ed. (1944; rpt. Lahore: Iqbal Academy, 1977), 3–26.

¹² Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, ed. M. Saeed Sheikh (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013 [1934]), 123.

the state itself.¹³ Schmitt drew on authors who had the insight of the *religious* nature of the State. These include Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809–1865) and, particularly, Mikhail Aleksandrovitch Bakunin (1814–1876), who, in 1871, used the expression “political theology” in a derisive way and for whom the state is the younger brother of the Church, and patriotism, that virtue and cult of the state, is only a reflection of the cult of the divine.¹⁴

Early political pluralists such as Arthur Fisher Bentley (1870–1957), Ernest Barker (1874–1960), Harold Joseph Laski (1893–1950), and Mary Parker Follett (1868–1933) also understood the theological inflections of state sovereignty and were united against absolutist unity on both philosophical and political grounds. While often basing their philosophical justification for pluralist concerns on William James (1842–1910), their target was the overriding concern of political theorists with the singular sovereignty and unity of the state, which led Laski to say, with irony, that “[w]hat the Absolute is to metaphysics, that is the State to political theory.”¹⁵

Besides the Bareilvi and the Deobandi, another reform movement was the one proposed by Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898), founding figure of the Aligarh movement. After the events of 1857–1858, Ahmad Khan concluded that the Muslims of India had to accommodate the British and use modern education to advance themselves. This line of thought influenced, among others, Chiragh ‘Ali (1844–1895), who defended that, in Islam, the state was separated from the church, and Muhammad Iqbal, who would, in turn, have some influence on Abu’l ‘Ala Mawdudi, who was fiercely anti-British and a staunch supporter of an Islamic state.¹⁶

The tradition of Indian argumentation would continue after the creation of Pakistan, on both sides of the border—and after 1971 in Bangladesh too—an argumentation which would be sometimes political, sometimes theological, like the debates between the Bareilvi and the Deobandi, and in some other situations those debates would be political *and* theological.

Defining an Islamic State

Political institutions and practices that evolved in the West were considered by Western intellectuals and statespersons as the sole models of political modernity, models that had to be adopted by the rest of the world. Particularly important was the model of the modern nation-state. The expansion in print media and education led to the rise of a new group of Muslim intellectuals who claimed authority not only to interpret Islam but also to act as spokespersons for the community, who sought to exercise *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) in order to provide solutions to contemporary problems, and who were active not only in acquiring new sociopolitical ideas from the West, but also in reinterpreting their own traditions in the light of these new ideas.

Islam meant, and means, different things to different intellectuals, who draw from varying sources within and without the Islamic tradition in developing their sociopolitical thought. While Chiragh ‘Ali refused to accept the *Sunna* and *Hadith* (statements or actions of the Prophet Muhammad) as authentic sources of Islam, asserting that all sorts of political

¹³ Quentin Skinner, “From the State of Princes to the Person of the State,” in *Visions of Politics*, volume 2, *Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 368–413.

¹⁴ Mikhail Bakunin, “The Political Theology of Mazzini and the International,” accessed May 7, 2024, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/mikhail-bakunin-the-political-theology-of-mazzini-and-the-international>; Mikhail Bakunin, “To the Comrades of the International Workingmen’s Association of Locle and Chaux-De-Fonds” (letter), May 7, 2024, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/bakunin/works/1869/program-letters.htm>.

¹⁵ Harold Laski, *Studies in the Problem of Sovereignty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), 6.

¹⁶ For a brief introduction to Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his work, see *The Cambridge Companion to Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, ed. Yasmin Saikia and M. Raisur Rahman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

systems could and have been defended by an appeal to traditions, Muhammad Iqbal and Mawdudi had different opinions. However, the three agreed that the Qur'an was the only authentic source to which Muslims could look back to formulate any sociopolitical interpretation. Their reactions to political realities, especially the acceptance or rejection of Western socio-political institutions and concepts, often depended upon or reflected their interpretation of Islam. Chiragh 'Ali, Muhammad Iqbal, Mawdudi, and others, were intrinsically attached to Islam and they looked to Muslim history, theology, sources, and symbols to help them face the challenges of modernity. However, they did attribute varying meanings to Islam, and each believed that their interpretation was a return to the true authentic Islam.

Chiragh 'Ali, while dismissing claims that Islam presented its followers with a binding political and social structure revealed in the Qur'an and the *Sunna*, set about to prove, firstly, that the *Sunna* was not a reliable source on which to base an interpretation of Islam, and, secondly, he asserted that the Qur'an, accepted as the sole reliable source for an analysis of Islam, stipulated no sociopolitical structure. His dismissal of the *Sunna* and *Hadith* as authentic sources of Islam implied that there was no basis for Muslim Common Law, and that the true development of Muslim societies lay in the development of a secular state legal system, with a separation of church and state, religion and politics at a time when the modern State, in this case the nation-state and secularism as its ideology, was becoming the political norm, hand in hand with the idea, naive it must be said, that politics were fully embodied in the state, while religion was fully embodied in the church, which is also a political organization and an institution characteristic of only a part of humankind.

For Muhammad Iqbal and Mawdudi, however, Islam was not just a relationship with God, but also a comprehensive and complete system, covering all aspects of human life, with no separation of religion and politics, in the case of Iqbal, or with a fusion of religion and politics in the case of Mawdudi. These reconstructions of Islam as a system were attempts to establish an Islamic ideal, a vision of life set against the West and its ideological and political domination. Because in Islam there is no such thing as a church, Iqbal considered that church and state were not two sides of the same thing; rather, because Islam was an unanalyzable singular reality, patent in the law, church and state were organically related. For Mawdudi Islam had been, since the time of the Prophet Muhammad, a fusion of religion and politics. Confronted by colonialism and the disempowerment of both the Muslims and the East in general, both thinkers looked to Islam to provide a solution to contemporary problems, a construction that emerged out of the interaction with colonialism and Western ideologies.

On March 23, 1956, nearly nine years after independence (August 14, 1947), Pakistan gave itself a new constitution proclaiming itself an "Islamic Republic."¹⁷ While today, other Islamic Republics exist—for example, Iran, Afghanistan, and Mauritania—Pakistan was the first to adopt this title and the first to engage with the meaning of being an Islamic Republic. In the study of Pakistan, the constitutional and legal challenges in determining the relationship between state and religion is a major research focus. The definition and regulation of this relationship has implications for citizenship, judgments in legal cases, minorities, and women's issues. Constitutional provisions and laws and ordinances such as the Muslim Family Law Ordinance (1961) and the Hudood Ordinances (1979) are often considered the indicators of this struggle.¹⁸ Such discussions are framed by the

¹⁷ PAKISTAN CONST. (1956); see also PAKISTAN CONST. (1973).

¹⁸ Muslim Family Law Ordinance, Ordinance 8 of 1961, PAKISTANI CODE, <https://pakistancode.gov.pk/english/UY2FqaJw1-apaUY2Fqa-apaUY2Npa5po-sg-jjjjjjjjjjjjjj>; Lucy Carroll, "The Muslim Family Laws Ordinance, 1961: Provisions and Procedures—A Reference Paper for Current Research," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 13, no. 1 (1979): 117–43. The Hudood Ordinances include three laws: The Prohibition (Enforcement of Hadd) Order, President's Order No. 4 of 1979; The Offence of Zina (Enforcement of Hudood) Ordinance, Ordinance No. 7 of 1979; The Offence of

Islamization-of-Pakistan narrative, often understood as the state's intentional promotion of orthodoxy and a particular interpretation of Islam to legitimize, justify, and cement its authority using Islam. With the state as the decision maker on one side, citizens are on the other side, either protesting policies because they are too restrictive or protesting the state for not being Islamic enough. In this scenario, the state becomes a black box, a monolithic actor, and the complex relationships within and between state institutions, their contestations, and discussions remain in the shadow. However, they are brought to light by Sarah Holz in *Governance of Islam in Pakistan: An Institutional Study of the Council of Islamic Ideology*.

Holz analyzes and provides a systematic account of the ways that interactions between multiple public and private bodies direct the regulation and standardization of Islam in one of the largest Muslim-majority states in the world. Her analysis centers on the institutional development of the Council of Islamic Ideology, a constitutional body tasked with issuing advice to the executive and legislature about the compatibility of laws with Islamic principles. Based on archival material that has been subject to little scholarly attention, and interviews with council members and staff of other state bodies, Holz proposes governance as an analytical framework to study the negotiation of religious expression, practice, and discourse. Holz tries to provide an understanding of the role and function of the Council of Islamic Ideology in Pakistan and a broader understanding of the state's religious institutions.

The genesis of Holz's book can be found in her dissertation for the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies (Freie Universität Berlin), in which she examined three constitutional bodies that participate in the negotiation and coordination of an understanding of Islam at the official state level. These are, first, the foundation, institutionalization, and the current role of the Council for Islamic Ideology, founded in 1962; second, the Federal Shariat Court, established in 1980; and third, the Islamic Research Institute, established in 1960. Analyzing these three constitutional bodies allows a foregrounding of the power structures involved in the governance of religion in Pakistan in terms of regulation, institutionalization, and bureaucratization. Instead of examining the interpretation of Islam as such—that is, content and meaning of *injunctions of Islam, principles of Qur'an and Sunna*, and other terms often used to refer to a distinct set of values and ethics, Holz focused on analyzing the structures and performances of the institutions involved in the governance of Islam. The project thus addresses questions such as: How are the various interpretations of Islam in Pakistan administered and operated on a bureaucratic level? And what are the factors influencing this type of governance?

In the case of the role the Council of Islamic Ideology in Pakistan, religious institutions of the state are often overlooked and labeled as rubberstamps, ineffective, and auxiliary by political scientists, while scholars from fields like Islamic studies mostly scrutinize theology alone, not the institutions, and even when these institutions are studied, they are looked at in isolation. Holz investigates the network of these institutions and maps them out, discussing the historical debates about the need for Islamic institutions in the constituent assembly and outside of it. She also investigates the council's composition over time, its constitutionally prescribed task, and how it is practiced and compares the two. The council reflects the current patterns of rule and governance in the country. It does not operate alone in an isolated religious sphere, and it is rather embedded in the pattern of rules, that is, feudalism, classism, authoritarianism, colonialism, capitalism, and so on. By studying the council, analyzing its members and the issues that the council takes up, one can see how the governance and rule patterns change over time.

Qazf (Enforcement of Hadd) Ordinance, Ordinance No. 8 of 1979, <https://pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/hudood.html>. See also Charles H. Kennedy, "Islamization in Pakistan: Implementation of the Hudood Ordinances," *Asian Survey* 28, no. 3 (1988): 307–16.

An analysis of debates within the council, between the council and other state institutions, and vis-à-vis the public foregrounds the areas of governance where revision and criticism are or are not possible and where silences exist. The administration and regulation of these new and old sites of contestation and criticism is what the state is interested in to expand its influence, but also to prevent non-state actors from developing counternarratives. The visible impact of the council is questionable. Hardly any of its recommendations and draft laws are considered by parliament. However, the council has become part of the state's effort at "world-making" to create an "authentic" Pakistani culture that is "Islamic" (10–15).

But, as said above, *Islamic* means different things to different people, and Holz does a very good job by disclosing the multiplicity of meanings when talking about the *Islamic* character of Pakistan, a country that continues to struggle to define that identity. On the other side of the border, the struggle has been different, but it also involves Islam, which has become a synonym of *foreigner* and *enemy* even when it is more than obvious that it is part of the indigenous character of India.

Hurting the Sentiments of Others

At the time of the India-Pakistan partition in 1947, it was widely expected that India would be secular, home to members of different religious traditions and communities—notwithstanding that the ceremony of India's independence was saturated with religious rituals—whereas Pakistan would be a homeland for Muslims and, according to Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), a place where people would be free to go to their places of worship, no matter their religion, caste, or creed—the state had nothing to do with it. Jinnah did not demand that Pakistan be an Islamic state. Insofar as Jinnah is considered the architect of Pakistan, one must study the politics of Jinnah, as Neeti Nair has done in her book *Hurt Sentiments: Secularism and Belonging in South Asia*.

What strikes me the most in Nair's narration of the 1956 draft Constitution debates in Pakistan on what entailed an Islamic state is how the sentiments on naming Pakistan held by Mian Abdul Bari of the Muslim League and the like were drawing from the history of naming Hindustan and Bharat. Such historical analogies furthered the argument that Islam should be the grounding principle for East Pakistan and West Pakistan. By contrast, for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1920–1975) and Basanta Kumar Das (1898–1984), the true sentiments of Jinnah were that authentic Islamic understandings of Qur'an and *Sunna* should not make distinctions between Muslims and non-Muslims (169, 196).

Seventy-five years later, India is on the precipice of declaring itself a Hindu state, and Pakistan has drawn ever narrower interpretations of what it means to be an Islamic republic. Bangladesh, the former eastern wing of Pakistan, has swung between professing secularism and Islam. In her brilliant book, Nair assesses landmark debates since partition—debates over the constitutional status of religious minorities and the meanings of secularism and Islam that have evolved to meet the demands of populist electoral majorities. She crosses political and territorial boundaries to bring together cases of censorship in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, each involving claims of "hurt sentiments" on the part of individuals and religious communities (4). Such cases, while debated in the subcontinent's courts and parliaments, are increasingly decided on its streets in acts of vigilantism. *Hurt Sentiments* offers historical context to illuminate how claims of hurt religious sentiments have been weaponized by majorities. Disputes over hate speech and censorship, Nair argues, have materially influenced questions of minority representation and belonging that partition was supposed to have resolved. Nair explores the trend toward legal protection for the religious sentiments of majorities in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, offering historical context for contemporary persecution and rising religious fundamentalism, and highlights how

growing political solicitation of religious sentiments has fueled a secular resistance. She also explores secularism in the region and its vicissitudes, drawing on archival material and oral histories in the way few people have attempted before. She delves into the now-dominant victimhood narrative among the proponents of (proto-fascist) Hindutva politics. In the process, she builds on the studies of her predecessors and even questions certain stereotypes that some of them have lapped up.

Nair previously authored *Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India*,¹⁹ and following that work, she intended to write a book that tracked the history of certain sections of the Indian Penal Code (295A and 153A) in India and post-Partition Pakistan and Bangladesh. Eventually, *Hurt Sentiments* emerged from a growing archive that included such varied sources as the Constituent Assembly Debates of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh; issues of the *Organiser* and *Mainstream*, two Indian publications; papers from the Gandhi murder trial and the Sahmat archive; and a selection of banned literature, case law, and oral histories. Nair was inspired to work on a book-length project because of the huge amount of interest that was generated by an article she wrote in 2013, in which she examined the enormous support for a law that would protect the founders of religions, and “the religious feelings of any class” of British subjects, from insults or even attempts to insult their religion.²⁰ It was a very broadly worded law, passed in late colonial India in 1927, that remained a part of the post-independence penal codes of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Nair’s article was discussed among legal scholars in both India and Pakistan because this law was being used especially frequently in India to censor the writings even of academics. In Pakistan, there was renewed interest in another incarnation of this law, 295A of the Pakistan Penal Code, commonly referred to as the “blasphemy law,” in the wake of the 2011 assassination of Punjab’s governor Salman Taseer (1944–2011), who was opposed by his assassin for having recommended the amendment of this law.²¹

The first modern controversies over insults to Muḥammad are likely to have been the Bombay riots of 1851 and 1874. Occurring between Muslims and Parsis rather than Hindus, one involved an unflattering image and the other a prurient account of Muḥammad in Gujarati newspapers published by Parsi proprietors. As became the case with subsequent protests over alleged insults to the Prophet, these provocations were neither part of any pre-existing and polemical debate between religious groups nor of the Christian missionary activity that also entailed engaging Muslims in theological argument. They were addressed instead to a generic public constituting a market for information and entertainment. These insults, then, were so offensive in part because they surfaced as news and rumor with no direct address or even purpose, asking neither for the acquiescence nor opposition of Muslims themselves. Because they seemed to lack theological purpose and meaning, it is not surprising that conspiracies were manufactured to explain them. Those representing the new capitalist class among Indians, Parsis, and other readers of Bombay’s Gujarati press were targeted for attack by Muslims. The latter did not themselves speak Gujarati and belonged to laboring, artisanal, and service classes, and were also sometimes joined in their rioting and looting by low-caste Hindus.

¹⁹ Neeti Nair, *Changing Homelands: Hindu Politics and the Partition of India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

²⁰ Neeti Nair, “Beyond the ‘Communal’ 1920s: The Problem of Intention, Legislative Pragmatism, and the Making of Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 50, no 3 (2013): 317–40.

²¹ Brutal Assassination of Salman Taseer Is Call to Abolish Pakistan’s Blasphemy Laws, Amnesty International, accessed April 21, 2024, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/updates/brutal-assassination-of-salman-taseer-is-call-to-abolish-pakistans-blasphemy-laws/>; Aayesha Rafiq, “Section 295-C of Pakistan Penal Code: Controversy and Criticism,” *Academic Research International* 6, no. 3 (2015): 384–90.

These details have continued to define Muslim offense not only in contemporary India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, but also more globally, for example, in the Salman Rushdie affair of 1989. In almost every instance of protest, the theological vocabulary of blasphemy has explicitly been taken from Christianity and deployed mostly in European languages for non-Muslim audiences. In languages like Urdu, the chief terms used are secular ones, including the “hurt sentiments” mentioned in the Indian Penal Code, and other words like *insult* and *impudence*.²² Theological notions only make an appearance when Muslims think in Christian terms. This was the case during the protests over *The Satanic Verses*, where Muslims asked for their sanctities to be included within Britain’s blasphemy law, which until then had been reserved for Anglicans alone. The British law was eventually abolished in 2008 to avoid including non-Christian religions.²³

Nair speaks to the embattled state of secularism and minorities in South Asia over the last few years, keeping in view the legacies of colonialism and partition. Crossing national boundaries, it offers an insightful history of how majoritarian politics has mobilized the idea of hurt sentiments to marginalize minority communities and redefine state ideologies in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. My only bone of contention is Nair’s benevolent idea, as discussed in the epilogue, of *secularism* as mutual respect and living together with difference. Greater recognition must be given to the way Western concepts (religion, politics, secular, and temporal) reflect specific historical developments, and cannot be applied as a set of universal categories or natural domains. Secularism did not invent or create the idea that everyone can live together and that differences must be respected. As the suffix indicates, secularism is an ideology, in this case the ideology of the modern (nation-) state, who took to itself the task of uniformizing and homogenizing the political body, using violence if necessary.²⁴

Conclusion

Historical evidence shows that religion has been far more entwined with state formation than has been assumed. In Europe, organized religion thrived with the expansion of the modern state, using its fruits and apparatuses, including those governing fiscal regulation and violence, to augment its own powers. States in turn used religious institutions and appropriated church lands and property to augment their powers and revenue. The fusion of the Reformation and nationalism thus supported the expansion of state capacity and reach.²⁵

²² The Indian Penal Code, <https://ltdashboard.legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A1860-45.pdf>; C. S. Adcock, “Violence, Passion, and the Law: A Brief History of Section 295A and Its Antecedents,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 84, no. 2 (2016): 337–51.

²³ Heather Marshall, “‘We Don’t Have Blasphemy Laws in England’: What Does This Mean for RE?,” *Journal of Religious Education*, no. 72 (2024): 109–28.

²⁴ For an example of a flawed description and conception of secularism, see Rajeev Bhargava, “Political Secularism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006): 636–55. In addition, the author praises the Indian model of Secularism, completely detached from what was really happening in India, a reality that only got worse with time. For a more accurate analysis of secularism, see Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

²⁵ For more on this, see Michael Mann, “State and Society, 1130–1815: An Analysis of English State Finances,” in *Political Power and Social Theory*, ed. Maurice Zeitlin (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1979): 1:165–208; Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 35–89; Wolfram Fischer and Peter Lundgreen, “The Recruitment and Training of Administrative and Technical Personnel,” in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975): 456–561; Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Islamic Leviathan: Islam and the Making of State Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Philip S. Gorski, “The Protestant Ethic Revisited: Disciplinary Revolution and State Formation in Holland and Prussia,” *American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 2 (1993): 265–316; Robert Wuthnow,

Religions do have a shape and influence coming from the past, although adaptations vary with time and circumstance. Hence, it is important to give more attention to religion and its relations with politics. But one should not reduce religion and politics to narrow categories, as if politics were fully embodied in the state—which is seen as *secular, rational, scientific, and public*—while religion is fully embodied in the church (which is also a political organization). Nor should the relations between religion and politics be reduced to the institutional relations between church and state as if with the separation of church and state, religion and politics had been separated. The concept of the state is quite modern and entered the lexicon of the social sciences in the nineteenth century to understand the dramatic changes in early modern Europe from the seventeenth century onward. The reason why the state became central to some thinkers was because of the configuration of the early twentieth-century sociopolitical formations under which the state as an institution had acquired an unprecedented role in expanding its realm of action and the scope of its penetration.

In 1885, Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin (1842–1921) complained about the omnipresence and omnipotence of the state, a complaint that, for me, is the *actual* meaning of secularism:

Today the State takes upon itself to meddle in all the areas of our lives. From the cradle to the grave, it hugs us in its arms. Sometimes as the central government, sometimes as the provincial or cantonal government, and sometimes even as the communal or municipal government, it follows our every step, it appears at every turning of the road, it taxes, harasses and restrains us.

It legislates on all our actions. It accumulates mountains of laws and ordinances among which even the shrewdest of lawyers can no longer find his way. Every day it devises new cogwheels to be fitted into the worn-out old engine, and it ends up having created a machine so complicated, so misbegotten and so obstructive that it repels even those who attempt to keep it going.

The State creates an army of employees like light-fingered spiders, who know the world only through the murky windows of their offices or through their documents written in absurd jargons; it is a black band with only one religion, that of money, only one care, that of attaching oneself to any party, black, purple, or white, so long as it guarantees a maximum of appointments with a minimum of work.²⁶

In other words, secularism is the ideology that defends the state's superior knowledge of what to do and how to do it, no matter its legitimacy, an ideology which can be defended, paradoxically, by Liberals and Democrats, against individuals or communities.

For Carl Schmitt, the expression “liberal democracy” was a contradiction in terms: you could not be a liberal and, *at the same time*, a democrat.²⁷ Two of the most cherished values of liberal democracies are freedom of expression *and* tolerance (with laws punishing hate speech, which must be defined by someone), as if both could be compatible. But one of the

Communities of Discourse: Ideology and Social Structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

²⁶ Pëtr Kropotkin, *Words of a Rebel*, trans. George Woodcock (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1992), 25.

²⁷ Unless, of course, you are part of the elite, in which case, you are free among equals. For Schmitt's critique of liberal democracy, see generally Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, trans. Ellen Kennedy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985). For discussions of Schmitt's critique, see Richard Bellamy and Peter Baehr, “Carl Schmitt and the Contradictions of Liberal Democracy,” *European Journal of Political Research* 23, no. 2 (1993) 163–85; Chantal Mouffe, “Carl Schmitt and the Paradox of Liberal Democracy,” *Canadian Journal of Law & Jurisprudence* 10, no. 1 (1997): 21–33. For a more recent critique, see Wanling Xiong, “Protecting Democracy from Liberalism: Defending Carl Schmitt's Critiques of Liberal Democracy” (master's thesis, University of Leiden, 2019), <https://studenttheses.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item%3A2607914/view>.

main characteristics of political modernity is the fact that the content is irrelevant if you can project an image of sophistication, using all the rhetorical devices available.

In 2005, during the Danish cartoons controversy, one of the arguments used in Denmark, in addition to the old, hackneyed terms—*modern, rational, scientific, tolerant*, Western values, the legacy of the Enlightenment—was the secular nature of Denmark, notwithstanding the fact that the country has a state religion—Evangelical Lutheran—and until 2017 had laws against blasphemy. In an ironic turn of events, Denmark reintroduced them in part because of growing anti-Muslim bigotry and increased Qur'an burnings.²⁸

Other examples of *secular* countries with state religion are Finland and the United Kingdom. Not long ago, Sweden and Norway, too, had state religions, a fact that did not get in the way of both being considered *secular*. In the United States, although there is the famous wall between church and state, Christianity, be it Protestant or Catholic, plays an extremely important role in politics, setting the moral boundaries and concerns within which political discussion unfolds, and hence can be considered the premiere political institution in some sense, and in some circles the Catholics continue to be seen as so-called agents of the Vatican.

During the French Third Republic (1870–1940), which was fiercely anticlerical, the Crémieux Decree granted French citizenship to most of the Jewish population in French Algeria, signed by the Government of National Defense and named after the French Jewish lawyer and minister of justice Adolphe Crémieux (1796–1880). The decree automatically made the native Algerian Jews French citizens, while excluding Muslim Arabs and Berbers, who remained under the second-class indigenous status outlined in the Code de l'Indigénat. Muslim Algerians could, on paper, apply individually for French citizenship, but this required that they formally renounce Islam and its laws. The anticlericalism in France culminated in 1905 with the separation of state and church, but even after this, the French state insisted on its role as the sole protector of Catholic missions in China, the other contender for that role being the Vatican.²⁹ Nowadays, while parroting that one of its values is *laïcité*, France wants to regulate Islam, targeting particularly, of course, women and their fashion choices.³⁰

Influenced by the French Third Republic, the Spanish Second Republic (1931–1936/9), and the Portuguese First Republic (1910–1926/33) pursued an anticlerical policy, which was reversed during the Franco and Salazar periods. After the democratic transitions and revolutions, in the mid-1970s, both countries managed to reach an accommodation with the Catholic Church, but there continues to be a special relationship, and every time the pope visits either country, the separation between the church and the state is blurred.

The Turkish Republic and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938) were also influenced by the French model of *laïcité*. Islamic polities had traditionally left each non-Muslim community to administer its own law to its own members through its own specialists as long as the community maintained certain limits on public religious practices and offered up financial

²⁸ See “Denmark Adopts Law Banning Quran Burnings,” *Le Monde*, December 7, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/europe/article/2023/12/07/denmark-adopts-law-banning-quran-burnings_6322184_143.html; Jaroslav Lukiv, “Denmark Passes Law to Ban Quran Burnings,” *BBC News*, December 7, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67651580>.

²⁹ H. M. Cole, “Origins of the French Protectorate Over Catholic Missions in China,” *American Journal of International Law* 34, no. 3 (1940): 473–91; Ernest P. Young, “The Emergence of the French Religious Protectorate in China,” in *Ecclesiastical Colony: China’s Catholic Church and the French Religious Protectorate* (New York: Oxford Academic, 2013): 11–34.

³⁰ See, for example, Róisín Áine Costello and Sahar Ahmed, “Citizenship, Identity, and Veiling: Interrogating the Limits of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights in Cases Involving the Religious Dress of Muslim Women,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 38, no. 1 (2023): 81–107. The prohibitions or the regulations are never about, say, the length of the beard or how trimmed and shaped it should be.

compensation in taxes (like the situation of foreigners in contemporary nation-states). The Mughal polity never took up as a political project to administer a community's laws to that community as superior to the native legal authorities. In the Ottoman Empire, while Islam was the primary religion, there were multiple legal systems functioning that served different purposes. The legal system that applied to Muslim subjects of the empire was based on the dual systems of shari'a and what is known as the *kanun*, the Ottoman secular legal system. These two sets of laws guided the justice structure and, in theory, were meant to apply only to Muslim subjects of the empire. The Ottomans gave non-Muslims a significant degree of autonomy within their own community, and Jewish and Christian subjects, technically, were supposed to go to their own courts for matters of inheritance, marriage, divorce, custody, any kind of sale, property, guardianship, and dowries. Examining the rights of Ottoman women, research suggests that Christian, Jewish, and Muslim women all used the Ottoman shari'a court to their advantage, especially for economic transactions. They bought and sold property, inherited and passed on their wealth, established endowments, borrowed and lent money, and even served as partners in businesses. In certain fields, women had full legal rights that were indistinguishable from those for males.³¹

In 1923, the Turkish Grand National Assembly "separated" the Caliphate from the Sultanate, abolishing the latter and proclaiming the Republic. The former was eliminated in 1924, and the new regime was characterized by its fierce *laïcité*. However, at the same time, the Turkish state created a Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Dîyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) to manage religion. A century later, the current government in Turkey, which is (proto-, neo-) Islamist, uses the power at its disposal to redefine and redesign what it means to be a Turk, blending an idealized vision of Ottomanism with a particular interpretation of what it means to be a Muslim, using the legal instruments created by Kemalism.

To say that the world is secularizing or that a state is secular is redundant. This world is, by its own nature, secular. *Saeculum* originally meant a period of time, but this expression also referred to imperial authority and then to the idea of *this world*. Every state is secular, including Saudi Arabia, whose capital is Riyadh, not Mecca or Medina, and where the political power controls (or tries to control) what the imams and *'ulama* say. Even Iran and the Vatican are secular because on a day-to-day basis they must deal with the issues of *this world*. But because to be *modern* and *secular* is viewed positively, governments try to sell an image of *modernity* and *secularity*, even when interfering with religious issues.

When the followers of Hindutva that have been ruling India intermittently for the past twenty-five years say that they are secular—even when targeting Muslims and their symbols, and filling the state with Hindu symbols—they are not lying. When *Indianizing/Hinduizing* India, proponents of Hindutva are being secular and modern. To be modern is to be uniform and homogenous, and that, too, is what the Taliban and the military in Myanmar are doing. The former want to create a state for the Pashtuns based on their interpretation of Islam, and the latter want a state for the Burmese only and based on a Buddhism that mixes religion and race, using indiscriminate violence against Muslim Rohingya and other minorities, who, it seems, are not considered sentient beings.

The National Register of Citizens is meant to be a register of all Indian citizens; its creation was mandated by the 2003 amendment of the Citizenship Act, 1955. Its purpose is to document all the legal citizens of India so that the illegal immigrants can be identified and deported. The State of Assam originally published the National Register of Citizens in 1951; in 2013 an Indian Supreme Court order required an update in that state. The government of

³¹ For further details, see Betül Basaran, *Selim III Social Control and Policing in Istanbul at the End of the Eighteenth Century: Between Crisis and Order* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Fariba Zarinebaf-Shahr, "Women and the Public Eye in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, ed. Gavin R. G. Hambly (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998): 301–24.

India has announced plans to implement it for the rest of the country.³² In 2019, the government passed another amendment (referred to as “CAA 2019” or “CAA”), which promised an accelerated naturalization process for immigrants of non-Muslim religious minority communities, which was widely seen to exempt non-Muslims that might fail the criteria for inclusion in the National Register of Citizens. Widespread protests against both measures were held by various citizens across the country. Protesters in all regions were concerned that the compilation of the National Register of Citizens would be used to deprive Muslims of Indian citizenship. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA) was passed by the Parliament of India on December 11, 2019, amending the Citizenship Act (1955) and providing an accelerated pathway to Indian citizenship for persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan who are Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, or Christians and arrived in India before the end of December 2014. The law does not grant such eligibility to Muslims from these countries. The act was the first time that religion had been overtly used as a criterion for citizenship under Indian law.³³

In George Orwell’s *1984*, we follow Winston Smith’s life. In his schooldays the Party had claimed to invent the helicopter; a dozen years later when Julia, Winston’s younger lover, was at school the Party was already claiming the airplane; “one generation more, and it would be claiming the steam engine.”³⁴ The past, for Winston, had not merely been altered, it had been destroyed. For Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), when people write discourses about history, they imagine it through the prism of their own experiences and, when they try to ponder over the future, they refer to presupposed analogies with the past—the latter justifies and impacts the future one wants.³⁵

Islam’s legacy in precolonial South Asia has never been more in question than it is today. Modern nationalisms in the region have altered—in some cases beyond recognition—the memories of Islam’s millennial legacy in India. Proponents of Hindutva have been erasing, bit by bit, the Mughal and Muslim presence from textbooks, schools’ curricula, and even destroying material culture, while teaching pseudo-history and claiming as Hindu achievements, in the distant past, plastic surgery, genetic surgery, airplanes, stem cell technology, the internet, claims that put the controversial Swiss author Erich Anton Paul von Däniken to shame for his lack of boldness when claiming about extraterrestrial influences on early human culture.

Historians in the future, when all traces of the Muslim presence in India have been erased, will have difficulty in accurately describing Muslim social relations with India’s non-Muslim majority during the nearly thousand years of Muslim presence in pre-colonial India. And, given the abiding popular association of South Asian Islam with certain genres of poetry and music (such as *ghazal* or *qawwali*), painting (such as miniatures), architecture (such as mosque and *dargah*, or the Taj Mahal), and even cuisine (for example, the samosa), they will have a hard time explaining Islam’s aesthetic legacies in the region and all the Indo-Muslim manuscripts in libraries *outside* India. But the most insurmountable task will be to

³² National Register of Citizens, Government of Assam, Cachar District, accessed April 21, 2024, <https://cachar.gov.in/frontimpotentdata/national-register-of-citizens-nrc>; Uma Menon, “India’s National Register of Citizens Threatens Mass Statelessness,” *Journal of Public and International Affairs*, June 2, 2023, <https://jpia.princeton.edu/news/indias-national-register-citizens-threatens-mass-statelessness>; Vatsal Raj, “The National Register of Citizens and India’s Commitment Deficit to International Law,” *LSE Human Rights* (blog), August 10, 2020, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/humanrights/2020/08/10/the-national-register-of-citizens-and-indias-commitment-deficit-to-international-law/>;

³³ Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, https://indiancitizenshiponline.nic.in/Documents/UserGuide/E-gazette_2019_20122019.pdf; <https://indiancitizenshiponline.nic.in/>.

³⁴ George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1949); 154.

³⁵ See Jeffrey Andrew Barash, *Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

explain the fact that the Indian government used an Islamicate, in this case Persian, word—*Azadi* (Free[dom])—to name its initiative to celebrate and commemorate seventy-five years of independence and the history of its people, culture, and achievements, and that they insist on calling themselves Hindu, another word with Persian roots and which *Muslims outside India* used to call the inhabitants of Bharat.

These three books, in addition to enriching the debate around issues of modernity, secularism, political Islam, and political Hinduism, are important for the preservation of the memory and legacy of Islam in South Asia, in all its variety and contradictions. In the end, more important than what people call themselves is how they behave and what kind of community they want to build, irrespective of whether they name it *secular, modern*, or any other thing.

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