

**Reading Historical Alterity: Deconstructing the Muslim Other Trope in Hindutva
Historiography, 1910-Present**

By

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Table of Contents

<i>Table of Contents</i>	2
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	3
<i>Introduction</i>	4
<i>Chapter I—Ravana’s Many Faces: On the Origins of the “Muslim Other” Trope in Hindutva Discourses, 1910-1971</i>	10
<i>Chapter II—Hauntology of the Muslim Other: Historical Discourses in Action during Hindutva’s Ascendancy, 2019-present</i>	38
<i>Chapter III—The Guild’s Riposte: Preserving the Muslim (Past) in Indian History Today....</i>	62
<i>Conclusion</i>	79
<i>Appendix A</i>	84

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Introduction.

*'Who controls the past, 'ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.'*¹

For decades, many observers have described the field of Indian history as a “battlefield.”

² These battles over Indian history do not just include debates about *who* has the right to tell the history of the ancient nation, but also *what* the history of the nation even is. These debates are not limited to academic history conferences or university classrooms, but they resound over almost all strata of Indian society from *chai* shops to the Prime Minister’s podium. History is an especially important rhetorical device wielded by the currently reigning *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) administration under the helm of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who infamously labelled Indian history before his government’s rise as “1,200 years of slavery.”³ While it is never apolitical, we find in India today the ruling party’s penchant for instrumentalizing history with the aim of establishing a Brahmanical hegemony. Almost all marginal groups in India today—from the Sikhs of Punjab to the adivasis of the Northeast frontier to the Dravidian language speakers of the South—find themselves in the crosshairs of these hegemonizing histories. One group in particular that I have a personal connection with has drawn the ire of this regime in recent decades: Indian Muslims.

¹ George Orwell, *1984: 75th Anniversary* (New York, New York, USA: Signet Classic, 1961), 44.

² William Dalrymple, review of *India: The War Over History*, by James W. Laine et al., *The New York Review of Books*, April 7, 2005, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2005/04/07/india-the-war-over-history/>.

³ Debobrat Ghose, “1,200 Years of Servitude: PM Modi Offers Food for Thought,” *Firstpost*, June 13, 2014, <https://www.firstpost.com/politics/1200-years-of-servitude-pm-modi-offers-food-for-thought-1567805.html>.

Motivated by my heritage as a South Asian Muslim, this project analyzes the marginalization of Muslims in India via “rewriting history” by the dominant ideological movement known as Hindutva. As many journalists and activists have identified, the Muslim subject in India has been targeted at the state level to be erased out of the national history books and, by extension, the national memory.⁴ I will contend in this thesis that history is more than just academic discourse that is one of the many weapons being wielded against the Muslim minority in India; it is an *essential* ideological core to the Hindutva project. Thus, I treat history and the discourses about history that the various interlocutors in this project will produce not as epiphenomenal artifacts of the current regime’s majoritarian politics, but as serious articulations of the reality that devotees of the Saffron movement occupy and relate with on an affective, or emotional, level. In line with many recent intellectual histories of Hindutva historiography and of South Asian historiography in general, I take Hindutva’s historiographical projections as serious ideological statements that seek to distort and “other” the undesirable Muslim from the history of the Hindu *rashtra* (lit. “nation”), branding him for excision.⁵

My central questions and methodologies in this project do not resemble most “debunking” stratagems employed by historian activists looking to counteract the dangerous history-writing of the Hindutva ideologues. Rather, I employ close readings of various historical discourses, or writings produced by members of the Hindutva ideological collective that touch on historical themes, in effort to understand the cultural stakes at play in these ideations of history.

⁴ Manahil Faisal, “India And Pakistan Are Weaponizing History Textbooks To Manufacture Religious Nationalisms,” *The Gazelle*, April 30, 2023, <https://www.thegazelle.org/issue/247/erasure-in-pakistan-and-india>.

⁵ Priya Satia, *Time’s Monster: How History Makes History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2020); Vinayak Chaturvedi, *Hindutva and Violence: V. D. Savarkar and the Politics of History* (State Univ of New York Pr, 2022); Shruti Kapila, *Violent Fraternity: Indian Political Thought in the Global Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

In particular, I strive to locate the place of the “Muslim Other” in these writings and unravel its contours. What I find is that the Muslim Other is far from a stable projection in Hindu fundamentalist historiography. Rather, he is often linked syntagmatically to different sources of anxiety, other “Others,” that plague the Hindutva imaginary at the time the discourse is fathomed and deployed. In other words, the Muslim Other resembles more of an assemblage, a historical alterity that takes chimeric shape. In the Hindu religious repertoire, we can analogize this alterity to the *das mukh* or ten-faced demon king of Lanka and archnemesis to the god-king Rama: Ravana.

In essence, this project resembles a critical discourse analysis more than an intellectual history proper. Though I follow a diachronic mode of presentation, beginning with what many historians periodize as the beginning of the movement with the writings of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in the early 20th century, I leave wide, distant reading of the ideological source material to more capable hands and choose to drill deep into individual pockets of Hindutva-sanctioned discourses to parse out the narratives and metanarratives couched in the language of these discourses. While my readings may tend towards being more object-specific at times, I still contextualize the discourses under analysis as necessary to reiterate the complex historical and social processes that led to the formation of such discourse. In taking this approach, I am inspired by the work of historian and discourse theorist Hayden White. I treat the historiography constructed by these historians as discourse that floods the communicative sphere with significant semiotic content that influences actors who receive the messaging. This treatment of historiography as discourse is greatly influenced by White, who rightly recounts the fundamentally fragmentary and skewed nature of historical data in his definition of historiography. This epistemological limitation of historical evidence leads him to define

historiography as a narrativized prose discourse that is merely a *model* of past phenomena, and that seeks to explain the function of these processes by representing them.⁶ In other words, given that historical data by itself cannot give sound conclusions about the past as a result of its fragmentation, a historian must compellingly narrativize the data and construct a model that represents processes and structures of the past.

Though White's constructivist framework has been subject to critique among historians and theorists, I find in his work an indispensable fundamental insight that taps at the politicized state of historical discourses and their narratives today.⁷ Beyond just South Asia, we see everyday contestations over both what history is and the moral lessons we should derive from it; case in point, recent controversies surrounding the 1619 project and its inclusion into the United States' secondary education curricula have reached national headlines.⁸ As many observers of the Indian case report, Hindutva's writing of history that demonizes the Muslim Other or excludes him outright signal "an impending genocide."⁹ Historiography thus is not merely downstream of the Hindutva movement's violent and repressive politic but rather ideologically conditions the violence faced by the Indian Muslim at the hands of those who consume the movement's

⁶ Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 2, <http://archive.org/details/metahistoryhisto00whit>.

⁷ For a relatively recent critique of White's poetic and relativistic approach to analyzing historiography, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995), 26–28. White responds to his contemporary critics who object to his rejection of "scientific historical knowledge" in Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 23–50, <https://doi.org/10.56021/9780801821271>.

⁸ Sarah Schwartz, "Lawmakers Push to Ban '1619 Project' From Schools," *Education Week*, February 3, 2021, sec. Teaching & Learning, Social Studies, <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/lawmakers-push-to-ban-1619-project-from-schools/2021/02>.

⁹ Sanya Mansoor, "India's School Textbooks Are the Latest Battleground for Hindu Nationalism," *TIME*, April 7, 2023, <https://time.com/6269349/india-textbook-changes-controversy-hindu-nationalism/>.

exclusionary and hate-filled discourses. As I will present below, these cultural stakes are often lost on the professional academic's responses to this historiography, which is often dismissed as nothing more than bigoted drivel. This response from the "guild," or professional historians, I argue will only be a partial response at best since it presumes that the primary goal of the Hindutva intelligentsia in producing these historical discourses is an epistemological project. Far from just attempting to produce knowledge, Hindutva actors in their deployments of these historiographical tropes are actually fabricating an ontology, or in other words, creating a new condition of being through historical discourse in which Hindutva adherents relate to their past history and thus their sense of self in a nuanced, unique manner. In order to counteract this, we as historians must fight fire with fire and create better narratives that move the affect of Hindutva adherents like their own discourses.

Thus, in my study of a trope, my archive consists of materials published and circulated online, often in the language which arguable assures the widest intellectual reach in the South Asian context: English. Since my study strives to unpack the "tropological" dimensions to the Muslim Other, I use a publicly available archive in a most common denominator reading language so that we may better understand how the trope is being communicated at the level of high discourse in a pan-national scale.¹⁰ This necessarily entails working with translated materials which could indicate advantageously shades and contours to the trope of the Muslim Other that the current regime is prioritizing in their communication. The exception to this archival method is when I treat the speeches of Prime Minister Modi, who communicates in a heavily Sanskritized register of Hindi. Though those speeches also become translated and published online, I work with the Hindi that he deploys to better grasp the Hindu cultural stakes

¹⁰ White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, 1–2.

embedded in his language that often are dulled in the utilitarian English translations that make it online.

Nonetheless, I am aware of these archival limitations that prevent me from unpacking how individual Indians today subjectivize these discourses since I forgo engaging with vernacular materials; fortunately, there are plenty of other capable scholars working on these materials to dismantle Hindutva as an ideological mission from the ground up. In my search for the Muslim Other as historical alterity, I follow the intellectual strands presented at the level of high discourse in high politics so I may better understand what the thought leaders of Hindutva and their intermediary partners are doing and authorizing through the discourses they produce. In terms of signposting the rest of this analysis, I return to the “roots” of Hindutva ideology in Chapter I by looking at the historical works of V.D. Savarkar and how he presents the Muslim Other, finding that his representation of the historical alterity is not a stable representation and rather, linked to other foes and concepts that pertained to his politics. In Chapter II, I leap forward in time to analyze the Hindutva movement’s historical discourses during a period of political ascendancy closer to today. I look at the national-governmental level of discourse through Modi’s speeches and at intermediary levels in online published materials to unpack how the discursive trope of the Muslim Other is operating by creating a sense of “hauntology” that disjoins time for discourse consumers. Chapter III is dedicated to surveying the academic and non-academic responses to Hindutva’s ideological projections of its history, wherein I analyze how on different levels the Muslim past of India is being preserved.

Chapter I—Ravana’s Many Faces: On the Origins of the “Muslim Other” Trope in Hindutva Discourses, 1910-1971

I.

Hearing Sita’s words the powerful *ten-necked* Ravana clapped his hands and made ready to assume his massive form...And as Ravana was speaking thus in his wild rage, his yellow-rimmed eyes turned fiery red. Then, suddenly, Ravana, the younger brother of Vaisnavara, abandoned the kindly form of a beggar and assumed his true shape, one like the appearance of Kala, god of death, himself. His eyes blazing bright red, with his earrings of burnished gold, and with bow and arrows, he became once more *the majestic, ten-faced, night-roaming rakshasa*. [emphasis mine] ¹

Nevertheless there darted from the bow of the Hindu nation a Ram-ban [an arrow of Ram—an (unerring) unmistakable shot!] which put a stop, even if temporarily, to the *Ravan-like atrocities by the Muslims* perpetrated under every Sultan over the Hindus for centuries together! [emphasis mine] ²

In the intellectual histories and genealogies of the Hindutva movement, the roots and origins of the movement’s ideology remain a well-trodden field of study.³ Diachronically presented, many interlocutors across disciplines trace the ideological foundations of Hindutva to key ideologues operating in the prelude and dawn of independence in 1947, with “Veer” Vinayak Damodar Savarkar most cited as the chief ideologue of the Hindutva movement.⁴ This ascription

¹ *The Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki*, trans. Robert P. Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland Goldman, 2022, 319, <https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691206868/the-ramayana-of-valmiki>.

² Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, trans. S.T. Godbole, First Edition (Bombay: Bal Savarkar, 1971), 325, https://savarkar.org/en/pdfs/6_Glorious_Epochs_of_Indian_History.pdf.

³ Arvind Sharma, “On the Difference Between Hinduism and Hindutva,” *Association for Asian Studies*, accessed January 27, 2024, <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/on-the-difference-between-hinduism-and-hindutva/>.

⁴ Arvind Sharma, “ON HINDU, HINDUSTĀN, HINDUISM AND HINDUTVA,” *Numen* 49, no. 1 (January 1, 2002): 1–36, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685270252772759>; Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi’s India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*, trans. Cynthia Schoch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021); Tanika Sarkar, “How the Sangh Parivar Writes and Teaches History,” in *Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism Is Changing India*, ed. Angana P. Chatterji, Thomas Blom Hansen, and Christophe Jaffrelot (Oxford University Press, 2019), 0, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190078171.003.0009>; Anustup Basu, *Hindutva as*

is textually corroborated by Veer Savarkar's popularization of the term Hindutva itself in his manifesto, first published in 1923, *Hindutva, Who is a Hindu?* In the annals of Hindutva ideology, Veer Savarkar enjoys the accompaniment of other influential ideologues in his entourage, namely M.S. Golwalkar who would spearhead the RSS as a political and spiritual leader in 1940, and Deendayal Upadhyaya who preceded Atal Bihari Vajpayee in presiding over the political arm of the RSS and the precursor to the BJP.⁵ However, Savarkar seems to enjoy a privileged position amongst this entourage. On May 28th, 2023, Prime Minister Modi exalted the "freedom fighter" (*mahan swatantrata senani*) his birthday (*Jayanti*) on his radio program *Mann ki Batt* (lit. "talk of the self"); the radio clip was tweeted on that day to the Prime Minister's official X account with an accompanying video clip of Modi visiting Savarkar's prison cell in the Andaman islands, where he reverently holds his clasped hands before a framed photo as he meditates in the room where his predecessor served out his exile in punishment upon the "Black Water" (*kala pani*).⁶ What many term as the rehabilitation or "sanitization" of Savarkar in mainstream Hindu nationalist thought is further echoed in the bestowal of the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award, to Savarkar in 2019.⁷ Undoubtedly, within the frame of an arborescent model of Hindutva ideology, Veer Savarkar's thought is credited as a primary trunk

Political Monotheism (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); Janaki Bakhle, *Savarkar and the Making of Hindutva* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2024), <https://press.princeton.edu/books/ebook/9780691251486/savarkar-and-the-making-of-hindutva-1>.

⁵ Jaffrelot, *Modi's India*, 18–23.

⁶ Narendra Modi [@narendramodi], "India Remembers the Great Veer Savarkar on His Jayanti. A Devout Patriot, He Was Also Passionate about Social Reforms and Inculcating a Spirit of Self-Confidence among Our People. #MannKiBaat <https://t.co/F0royJktiB>," Tweet, *Twitter*, May 28, 2023, <https://twitter.com/narendramodi/status/1662815979569827841>.

⁷ Indrajit Roy, ed., *Passionate Politics: Democracy, Development and India's 2019 General Election* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023), 54.

upon which various other branches of Hindu supremacist ideas branch off by conventional historiographies of the Saffron movement.

In this historical analysis of an alterity, of being a Muslim subject in what is projected as a fundamentally Hindu history, the thought of the chief ideologue is not taken as a single originary point which merely supplies the discursive trope that is then replicated and parroted throughout transmissions of historical discourse. Even within the thought of these ideological forefathers, disjuncture and discontinuity abound within the thought leader's own conceptual frames about what form the alterity takes. Tropes, in their unit of transmission as "ideas," travel locally and globally, as recent methodological advances in intellectual history demonstrate.⁸ Because of their multivocal and cross-pollinating nature, the Muslim Other holds many faces even in the discourses that birthed its modern reverberations. Here, a literary allusion to the *Das Mukh* or ten-faced *rakshasa* king Ravana, the "big bad" of the *Ramayana*, illustrates the multiple nature of the radical Other's representation in a historical discourse teeming with moralizing modes of emplotment. Ravana possesses ten heads with differing attributes, with a few heads even possessing redeemable qualities in some discourses.⁹

What engenders this flight into the literary-mythical from the historical? To the nationalist leaders, Hindu supremacist or secular, history itself becomes a cathected plane of

⁸ Janaki Bakhle, "Putting Global Intellectual History in Its Place," in *Global Intellectual History* (Columbia University Press, 2013), 229, <https://doi.org/10.7312/moyn16048-010>.

⁹ See Pandurangan Harikrishnan, "Multiplicity of Heads in Indian Mythology," *Journal of Craniofacial Surgery* 31, no. 1 (February 2020): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1097/SCS.0000000000005831>; *Why Rama Did Penance After Killing Ravana*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/>. Though these discourses tend to be popular or spiritual interpretations of the character, they represent a current of thought at least in the popular imaginary of Ravana being a complicated character and not ontologically evil. For example, popular yogi guru Sadhguru ties Ram's performance of penance after his killing of Ravana to the fact that at least one of the latter's heads was noble in a video garnering 668,000 views.

conflict with moral dimensions that are expressed and explored with a Hindu religious symbolic vocabulary. With the *Ramayana* starting to occupy a “literal” in contrast to a purely literary space in Hindutva historical imaginaries with the recent consecration of the Ram Mandir, the text provides a moral idiom bleeding into historical reality that informs and even authorizes the acts of discourse producers and consumers.¹⁰ Given the ethical narrative undergirding the epic, a clear moral antagonism is presented with the main protagonist of the narrative and the ultimate preserver of the Hindu order, Rama, squaring against radical Other as demon-king, Ravana. Historically, Muslims-as-Ravana is not an unprecedented assemblage of literary and historical characters. For example, Vidya Dehejia finds in her narrational analysis of Rana Jagat Singh’s 17th century manuscript of the *Ramayana* that the Mughals are often equated to Ravana.¹¹ Even in the modern period, Golwalkar himself makes this connection in reference to Pakistan, implicitly connecting the belligerent nature of the two.¹²

¹⁰ See Ruth Tsoffar, *Life in Citations: Biblical Narratives and Contemporary Hebrew Culture*, 1st edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019). In her analysis of the citation of Hebrew scripture in contemporary Israeli society and culture, she deftly writes that “[T]he distance between metaphors and reality is itself a fiction. The attempt to live outside the story has failed. The political is fed by the metaphoric in a devouring system whereby even the language is deployed to camouflage dead bodies while the knives and swords draw the contours of luring violence.” (96).

¹¹ Vidya Dehejia, “The Treatment of Narrative in Jagat Singh’s ‘*Ramayana*’: A Preliminary Study,” *Artibus Asiae* 56, no. 3/4 (1996): 303, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3250121>. See also David N. Lorenzen, “Who Invented Hinduism?,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 4 (October 1999): 647, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417599003084>.

¹² “Pakistan's very existence is its war potential. People argue that we should hate the sin, not the sinner. But has any one ever been able to separate the two? Not even Bhagwan Ramchandra could do so—or else he would have destroyed only the sinful mentality in Ravana and saved Ravana himself from death. The aggressive mentality of Pakistan can end only when Pakistan itself is ended. There is no other way.” M.S. Golwalkar, *From Red Fort Grounds* (New Delhi: RSS, n.d.), p. 21. Quoted in S. P. Udayakumar, *Presenting the Past: Anxious History and Ancient Future in Hindutva India* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005), 36.

Savarkar and the other Hindutva ideologues were not alone in their historiographic demonization of the Muslim Other, as they stood to inherit many of their tropes from the historians of the British Raj. Savarkar himself would have spent considerable time reading British histories during his sojourn in Great Britain; he would rely on many of these histories to pen his own as evidenced by his bibliography in *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*.¹³ British historians, themselves foundational in establishing the disciplinary practice of history that Savarkar would consider himself a part of, derided the Muslims sovereigns they interacted with in India. In general, the British framed Muslim rule through the Mughals in India as ripe for “despotism” on account of their religion which predisposed them to authoritarian tendencies, “and so ‘habituated mankind to slavery’; polygamy, the immurement of women, the absence of primogeniture, with a host of other customs, all contributed to a state of society in which cunning and passion, jealousy and intrigue, flourished.”¹⁴ This conceptual frame of the Oriental despot contrasted with the enlightened, civilized self-perception that the British tried to maintain of themselves in their position of power over India.

Indeed, Mushirul Hasan lays the blame of this original distinction at the hands of the British ideology of rule, which would become internalized within the subcontinental subjects themselves during the nationalist period: “I am inclined to believe that this was so, though the critical issue is how the colonial government fostered the growth of such ideas and helped sections of the Muslim intelligentsia to etch a certain image of themselves. I also believe that the etching of ‘nationalistic’ images of India's Muslims was just as important as the framework

¹³ Bakhle, “Putting Global Intellectual History in Its Place.”

¹⁴ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, *The New Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 8–9, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521395472>.

adopted by the Raj to define and categorize ‘Indian Muslim society.’”¹⁵ Indeed, the intellectual inheritances that the nationalist leaders of India owed to their former colonial masters cannot be understated, especially in consideration of the role the British empire played in the creation of history as an epistemological domain. Yet, as I will demonstrate below, the Hindutva ideologues who act as my interlocutors depart in many ways from the British historiographical tropes. Namely, the Muslim Other takes on more shades in their thought, given that Muslims are not the dominant political and imperial foe to the Saffron-*bhakt*s (lit. devotee) as they are to the colonial British. When Hindutva analyzes and speaks of the Muslim Other, the latter is not in the position of political power he was when the colonial British fathomed their discourses and deployed them to legitimate their rule. As I will show below, the Muslim Other to Hindutva is multiple, at once a powerful and despicable foe but also a duplicitous one that lurks in the shadows, rife with moral weakness. In fact, at certain points the Muslim Other himself is deeply linked with the British foe within Hindutva ideology, the latter becoming enmeshed with the former in the ultimate expression of historical alterity.

In sum, I seek to track and contextualize the tropological variances or the multiple faces (*mukh*) of the Muslim/Mughal alterity in the historical discourses of a central Bharati ideologue, Veer Savarkar.¹⁶ I locate the cross-cutting and often incoherent depictions of the Muslim Other represented in, to use Guha’s typology, a “tertiary level of discourse” and contextualize the

¹⁵ Mushirul Hasan, “The Myth of Unity: Colonial and National Narratives,” in *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, ed. David Ludden (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 186.

¹⁶ I distinguish “Bharati” by specifically aligning it Hindutva ideology from “Nationalist” which refers to the mainstream nationalist ideological movement represented by the Congress and its partners.

multiple representations by close reading the poetic rhetoric of Savarkar's text during the prelude and dawn of the historically momentous occasion of independence in 1947.¹⁷

II.

As Vinayak Chaturvedi convincingly asserts in his analysis of the historical discourses produced by Veer Savarkar, we must take the Hindutva interpretation of history seriously.¹⁸ Through Savarkar's articulation of Hindutva as "history in full," Chaturvedi relates that the manifestation of Hindutva in force for Savarkar can be found in episodes throughout history, providing an empirical base to make the theoretical notion of a Hindu rashtra "knowable."¹⁹ In such discourse that looks to glorious epochs in the past to divine a notion of the utopian Hindutva future, notions of decline are integral to the act of prefiguration in Savarkar's histories. Indeed, if we are in the Kali Yuga which is a historical trope apparent in today's Hindutva discourses, history can provide glimpses of the prelapsarian past.²⁰ In such a teleological view of history, the role of the alterity that participates in acts of decline are important to note.

Beginning with his first work of serious history-discourse production, Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence of 1857* was published during the height of revolutionary fervor for Indian independence in 1909, as a result of which it would be promptly banned from circulation by the British. While abroad in England, Savarkar remained committed to the notion of violent revolution through his organization of seditious actions with the student resistance group India House during the time this text was being written. His revolutionary activities were reaching

¹⁷ Nicholas B. Dirks et al., *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 77. "Tertiary level" discourses refer to formal historiography wherein historical facts and reports are coagulated and reflected upon into cogent narratives.

¹⁸ Chaturvedi, *Hindutva and Violence*, 391.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Satia, *Time's Monster*, 13. The Kali Yuga refers to the "dark ages" cycle of time where the moral axis of the world falls off-kilter in Hindu cosmological thought.

their height in 1910, as he would eventually be sent to jail—to the very Andaman cell in which Prime Minister Modi would pay his obeisance more than 100 years later—after a botched escape attempt following his arrest and exile. The idealistic excitement and passion are palpable in the text, which is emplotted in a Romantic register wherein the colonized subjects of India, Hindu or Muslim, momentarily dignify themselves by rising above their differences and overthrowing the oppressor. As others have pointed out, in his account of the 1857 Mutiny, a young revolutionary Savarkar colors his projection of the Muslim Other in a way that would be considered surprising to informed discourse participants today, evoking Hindu-Muslim unity.²¹ The narrative function of alterity in Savarkar’s historical discourse takes on a unique shade contrary to our expectations as modern readers of Hindutva ideology. In Savarkar’s prefigured account of the 1857 War of Independence that ran concomitantly with his own armed struggle, what qualities of the alterity do we find and how does the conceptual frame of historical discourse configure this visage?

Before unpacking the position of the alterity in the work, the metahistorical poetics of *The Indian War* deserve further elaboration. The English translation of the work, produced by an unnamed “Indian Nationalist” originally in an “Indian vernacular,” prefaces with a reference to unnamed “Publishers” who take credit for the work’s translation and dissemination, while also making clear its polemical nature. As would befit a manifesto, the text’s very translation into English reflects a pan-national scale of intended audience so that “by retranslations into the other vernaculars, the whole of the Indian nation might be enabled to read the history of the ever-memorable War of 1857.”²² Not only does the text rely on the language of English to serve its

²¹ Amalendu Misra, “Savarkar and the Discourse on Islam in Pre-Independent India,” *Journal of Asian History* 33 (January 1, 1999): 178; Kapila, *Violent Fraternity*, 99–101; Chaturvedi, *Hindutva and Violence*, 236.

²² Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857* (s.n., 1909), v, http://archive.org/details/ldpd_6260651_000.

politically dissentious purposes, but it also relies on the tertiary discourses of the English historians who recounted the event. Mindful of the prefigurative act that English historians would have undertaken in relaying “faithfully as they have done their own” perspective of the 1857 Mutiny, the author acknowledges the necessity for retrieving the primary discourses in the form of oral histories.²³

Because of these archival limitations, the work conveys its own transient nature as a precursory survey into what might be a more “patriotic and yet faithful, a more detailed and yet coherent, history of 1857 [that] may come forward in the nearest future from an Indian pen, so that this my [sic] humble writing may soon be forgotten!”²⁴ Conscious of his archival limitations, the author remains committed to what he would term as the “scientific spirit” of his historical inquiry by listing them outright, claiming to be grounded in an empirical and positivist account of the 1857 War.²⁵ Yet, despite these limitations, the text still needed to exist for the author and his readers on account of the incendiary subject matter of the 1857 revolution itself passing into history, allowing itself to serve as a guidebook of revolution in the contemporary necessities of the nationalist movement. Notice the beginning of the preface: “Fifty years having passed by, the circumstances having changed, and the prominent actors on both sides being no more, the account of the War of 1857 has crossed the limits of current politics and can be relegated to the realms of history.”²⁶ The text begins with the assertion of the liminal moment wherein the historical phenomenon of concern slides from the “current politics” of the day into the realm of history. Why is this slide from the political to the historical necessary in the framing of the 1857

²³ Ibid, viii.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, 5.

²⁶ Ibid, vii.

narrative to the author? As Chaturvedi recounts, Savarkar’s definition of Hindutva hinged on historical conceptualization as a didactic source through which Hindutva can be theorized and achieved.²⁷ Similarly, Shruti Kapila finds the genre of history writing to be a pivotal testing ground for emerging notions of “violent fraternity” that united South Asian subjects through their violent struggle for autonomy.²⁸ The criteria by which the author predicates the transition from politics to the past through the linear progression of time, the evolution of circumstances, and the passing of relevant persons also indicate prerequisite conditions in his method of conceptualization which distinguish a historical discourse from an explicitly political one. Questions that emerge here are why, through these pronounced metrics, does the 1857 narrative need to slide from the political to the historical and what does this prefigurative act accomplish for the author?

The Indian War displays a “Mechanistic” form of historical explanation which “turns upon the search for the causal laws that determine the outcomes of processes discovered in the historical field...[a Mechanist] studies history in order to divine the laws that actually govern its operations and writes history in order to display in a narrative form the effects of those laws.”²⁹ The author employs this style of argumentation while preserving a positivist commitment to the scientific spirit of his analysis. In this combination of factors, the logic behind the author’s choice of a natural geological metaphor for framing his text comes to light; the four parts of his book are themed with the processes of volcanic eruption: “Book I—The Volcano, Book II—The Eruption, Book III—The Conflagration, Book IV—Temporary Pacification.”³⁰ Just as

²⁷ Chaturvedi, *Hindutva and Violence*, 44.

²⁸ Kapila, *Violent Fraternity*, 8.

²⁹ White, *Metahistory*, 17.

³⁰ Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*, xi–xii.

naturalized geologic processes lead to the eruption of the volcano and its subsidiary effects, the author searches and indeed finds the Mechanistic cause behind the 1857 conflict which could also be considered as a self-evident naturalized process.

He identifies this “fundamental principle,” in a cue he takes from an intellectual forbear Giuseppe Mazzini, as the great principles of “Swadharma and Swaraj.” Prior to this identification, he vehemently refutes the “misleading theories” which state that cartridges greased with animal fat and the annexation of Oudh inspired the revolt. Notice the analytical precision Savarkar uses to separate root causes from incidental causes, and the literary illustration he deploys:

The fear of greased cartridges and the annexation of Oudh were only temporary and accidental causes. To turn these into real causes would never help us in understanding the real spirit of the Revolution. If we were to take them as the real moving causes, it would mean that, without these, the Revolution would not have taken place—that without the rumour of greased cartridges and without the annexation of Oudh, the Revolution would not have been there... The real causes of the French Revolution were not simply the high prices of grain, the Bastille, the King's leaving Paris, or the feasts. These might explain some incidents of the Revolution but not the Revolution as a whole. The kidnapping of Sita was only the incidental cause of the fight between Rama and Ravana. The real causes were deeper and more inward.³¹

The fixation on real causes, as differentiated from accidental causes or rumors, represents the author's cathected objective as to him, “[i]n their proper classification lies the true skill of the historian.”³² In catching glimpses of what the author values in a historian's enterprise along with literary and historical allusions, a poetic logic to the text emerges which superimposes true causes over contingent inciting incidents. Non-immediate forces pit the two mythical beings of Rama and Ravana together, as inciting incidents of gluttony or economic despair during the

³¹ Ibid, 7.

³² Ibid, 4.

French Revolution did not pit the sovereign against his subjects. These “deeper and more inwards” causes happen to be religious-tinged proscripts which prioritize the subjective horizon of the self, in Self-Duty and Self-Rule, which Shruti Kapila contextualizes as part of “a new subject-oriented horizon of the political” that was typical during the emerging 20th century political consciousness.³³ This Mechanistic factor helps explain why the events of 1857 had to slip into history from politics the same way a signal must be discerned through the noise. Incidental causes, which manifest as the frenetic nature of primary historical discourses, have to be reduced for a true causal pattern to emerge outside of the extraneities. This discernment is made possible through a practice of historical reflection, available once the historian begins his acts of prefiguration and interpretation in a tertiary discourse.

Having established the poetic structures undergirding *The Indian War*, where does the position of alterity lie within its logic? How does the author situate the Other, especially given that the Mechanism guiding the revolutionary events involve an intact sense of Self through the morpheme *Swa-*? As established earlier, Savarkar’s rather ecumenical aspirations shine through the text in its assertion of Hindu-Muslim unity during the decolonial period, though with important caveats. During his treatment of the secret organizations that were planning the insurrection, one of the text’s chief characters, Nana Saheb Peshwa II, reflects on the concept of “Hindusthan” :

He, also, felt that the meaning of " Hindusthan was thereafter to be the Swadesh of the adherents of Islam as well as Hinduism. *As long as the Mahomedans lived in India in the capacity of rulers, so long, to be willing to live with them like brothers was to acknowledge national weakness. Hence, it was, up to then, necessary for the Hindus to consider the Mahomedans as foreigners[...]* Hindu sovereignty had defeated the rulership, of the Mahomedans and had come to its own all over India. It was no national shame to join hands with Mahomedans now, but it would, on the contrary, be an act of generosity. *So, now, the original*

³³ Kapila, *Violent Fraternity*, 8.

distinction between the Hindus and the Mahomedans was laid to eternal rest.
[emphasis mine]³⁴

Addressing the propositional content of this passage, indeed Hindu-Muslim unity is asserted in the face of the Greater Other, the evangelizing Christian English, who according to Savarkar's sources "openly described [Hindus and Muslims] in official and private documents as 'heathens.'" ³⁵ In establishing the paramountcy of the English threat, the author opens a space for a conditional alliance to emerge since Hindu and Muslim unity is only possible in the latter's distancing from power. With national pride at stake, the Muslims were seen as foreigner or Other until the arrival of other "*Ferenghis*" [lit. foreigners]. Relative position to power in the form of sovereignty over Hindusthan conditioned the standards of Othering that the author employed. In the Muslims' fallen state of being barred from power, it was conceivable to the author that original distinctions between Hindus and Muslims can indeed be "laid to rest." Again, in Kapila's framework, this fraternity predicated on the camaraderie forged in violence on the battlefield for independence began to take shape.³⁶

Yet, even in this description of what can be Swadeshi and Ferenghi, the multiple heads of Ravana appear in the author's poetic logic with the invocation of Aurangzeb's name. Long deployed in historiographical narratives of declension, the image of Aurangzeb manifests in *The Indian War* not as a member of the principal cast but as a mnemonic reference that the characters within the text can reflect upon and draw from as historical tropes. Aurangzeb, the "Mahomedan ruler of the Moguls," is invoked in relation to the British evangelizing mission:

England had learnt many lessons from the history of Aurangzeb. Both the strength and weakness of the policy of that monarch had been carefully studied by the English. Learning the wisdom of Aurangzeb [sic], that the destruction of the

³⁴ Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*, 62.

³⁵ Ibid, 48.

³⁶ Kapila, *Violent Fraternity*, 95.

religion of a conquered race makes the problem of retaining it in perpetual slavery much easier, the English had avoided his folly of open persecution for religion. Hence the stolid and continuous efforts of the English to make India Christian by indirect means only and not openly.³⁷

Aurangzeb, the “big bad” from when Muslims were still in power, becomes a trope upon which the English, the villain of the 1857 narrative, “studied” during their campaign of domination. He occupies a semiotic position associated with religious dogmatism and the idiom of “slavery” that is continuously invoked throughout the text. Aurangzeb enmeshed with the English Other becomes a chimeric face that makes up the multiplicity of Hindutva’s Radical Other. This will not be the only invocation of the Aurangzeb trope in Savarkar’s historical discourses. The author follows up this invocation of a historical villain with a list of heroes, and in the following case, this reference to heroism is tied to a justification of revolution: “And when the English had begun to take up the role of Aurangzeb [sic], there was no other remedy than that India must now produce a Shivaji or a Guru Govind. And such was the usual impression all over India.”³⁸

With the repeated invocation of historical personages as tropes in mind, the author’s foray into the interior lives of his subjects, using no sources other than pure speculation, reveals the function of historical memory’s deployment in Savarkar’s text. Almost like Proustian reveries, Savarkar imagines his historical subjects with a historical consciousness of their own who draw on their past legacies as Savarkar draws upon their stories for his own revolutionary activity. Consider the following passage and how Savarkar situates Nana Saheb vis-à-vis his historical forebears:

It is a significant fact, that in the main hall and in a prominent place were hung the portraits of those great and capable men who had adorned Mahratta [Maratha] history. What did those faces speak to him [Nana Saheb]? What did the portrait of Chhatrapati Shivaji say to him? What a tumult of feelings must have arisen in his

³⁷ Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*, 47.

³⁸ Ibid.

mind when he saw Bajirao I, the Bhao of Panipat, the youthful and regal Viswas, the wise Madhava, and statesman Nana Farnavis, in the portraits before him!³⁹

Savarkar imagines Nana Saheb who, inspired by a hypothetical musing upon famous portraits, is able to marshal an affective state with his connection to this projected historical past, enough so that the thought of Shivaji alone “must, without doubt, have set ablaze in his heart the flames of anger and vengeance.”⁴⁰ This allusion to Marathi heroes recalls the injustice of the earlier invoked Aurangzeb, who in Savarkar’s imaginary was the pinnacle oppressive Other that engendered revolution when he “persecuted” the religious sentiments of Hindus. As demonstrated, Savarkar’s first foray into serious historical discourse production is tinged with revolutionary fervor that did not immediately preclude the potential for Hindu-Muslim unity, as there was a Greater Other (read: the British) to face off against. Yet even this face of the Other was read and theorized in relation to a past period of revolution against what was projected to be Muslim hegemony.

III.

Several pertinent political events pass when Savarkar returns to his historian’s craft in what is translated as the *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*. Originally written in Marathi in 1963, the text was translated into English posthumously with the help of S.T. Godbole who also finished the text itself by inputting the citations. Put in circulation in 1971, Savarkar is reported to have approved of the translation himself.⁴¹ Contextually, Savarkar had presided over the Hindu Mahasabha, the organizational body in charge of advocating for Hindus, contra the Muslim League that lobbied for concessions on behalf of Muslims, during the 1930s in the

³⁹ Ibid, 31.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Chaturvedi, *Hindutva and Violence*, 322.

prelude to Indian Independence and inculcated a devout following of “Savarkarites.”⁴² The Mahasabha would suffer a political defeat at the hands of the Indian secularists, represented by Nehru and the Indian National Congress, and bipartition would ensue with the creation of India and Pakistan in 1947. Furthermore, Savarkar’s ideological foe, Gandhi, would be murdered by Nathuram Godse with Savarkar himself being implicated as an associate to the crime.⁴³ After an extended imprisonment under the British at Ratnigiri—which he would get out of by writing petitions for mercy to the British government⁴⁴—and with an ideological rival dead, Savarkar returned to history as a means of articulating Hindutva in a freer space of discourse.

Of course, such political changes wrought shifts upon his construal of alterity in his historical narrative as well. In the 1920s, Gandhi’s alliance with the Muslim-led Khilafat movement led Savarkar to realize that Hindu-Muslim unity is disadvantageous to Hindus who remained fragmented on religious and ideological lines in his estimation, unlike the Muslims who outwardly showed political unity.⁴⁵ This perceived fragmentation led to his prolific writings on Hindu identity as manifest in Hindutva. Then, with the withdrawal of the British and the violent post-independence division that led to the creation of Pakistan, the Muslim Other took on a new, more violent and damnable, face. Indeed, the communal violence resulting from partition would fuel Savarkar’s vitriol in this new text. Though repurposing some of the historical tropes

⁴² Jaffrelot, *Modi’s India*, 242.

⁴³ Kapila, *Violent Fraternity*, 92–95. She frames Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* and Savarkar’s principle of Hindutva in direct conflict with one another, so much so that *Hind Swaraj* is seen as a direct response to Savarkar’s calls for violence in the formation of Bharat.

⁴⁴ “Bhagat Singh and Savarkar, Two Petitions That Tell Us the Difference Between Hind and Hindutva,” *The Wire*, March 22, 2023, <https://thewire.in/history/bhagat-singh-and-savarkar-a-tale-of-two-petitions>.

⁴⁵ Savarkar dedicates space in the text to refute the hypothesis of Muslim solidarity: “Again it has been already shown and will hereafter be shown how foolish and baseless are our popular notions that the Muslims never fought amongst themselves[.]” Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, 337. See also Basu, *Hindutva as Political Monotheism*, 151.

he laid out in *The Indian War* as discussed above, a new context shaped by Partition and struggle against the secularist Congress shaded the trope additionally. The potential horizon for Hindu-Muslim unity is replaced by the reemergence of the discourse of *foreignness* to the Muslim Other. The “original distinction” that was laid to rest in 1910 rose from its grave.

How does Savarkar prefigure the historical field in *Six Epochs*? Though the Preface of the work establishes a direct intertextual link with *The War for Independence* ⁴⁶, tonally the work loses its revolutionary fervor and appears to take on a more Formist approach, with a positivist attunement to the facts of Savarkar’s history. ⁴⁷ He writes: “The main criterion of history is that the dates and places and descriptions of events referred to therein must necessarily bear the stamp of authenticity, and they should be corroborated, as far as possible, by foreign as well as indigenous evidence.” ⁴⁸ Savarkar’s appeal to evidence ties into his motivations to produce a scientific account of indigenous history as he laid out in *The Indian War*. He then identifies the dialectical “glorious epoch” model upon which his theory of history is predicated: “But by the ‘Glorious Epoch’ I mean the one from the history of that warlike generation and the brave leaders and successful warriors who inspire and lead it on to a war of liberation in order to free their nation from the shackles of foreign domination, whenever it has the misfortune to fall a prey to such powerful fatal aggression and to grovel abjectly under it, and who ultimately drive away the enemy making it an absolutely free and sovereign nation.” ⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, v.

⁴⁷ White, *Metahistory*, 13–14. White describes the Formist mode of explanation as “explanation to be complete when a given set of objects has been properly identified, its class, generic, and specific attributes assigned, and labels attesting to its particularity attached to it.” Ibid.

⁴⁸ Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 3.

Savarkar makes the “glorious epoch” category a universal one and cites the example of the United States breaking away from the yoke of the British Empire during the Revolutionary War as indicative of its status in the glorious epoch. In this historiographical project, he wants to retrieve the periods of victory and resistance that Hindu heroes and icons spearheaded in the face of onslaught by aggressors like the Huns and Muslims, a fact that in his estimation is lost in contemporaneous school history textbooks.⁵⁰ Savarkar’s idealist representation of history is framed in a dialectical, conflictual model that endows individual actors (“brave leaders and successful warriors”) with the agency to define a historical moment by violently opposing and warring with foreign invaders who threaten Hindu’s sovereignty over the land of Bharat. This extension of agency to the individual draws cues from what Priya Satia identifies as the Romantic movement’s philosophies of history; examples of historians from this period include Thomas Carlyle and Karl Marx.⁵¹

Indeed, Savarkar’s fixation on the individual resistance leaders that he began referencing regularly in his books draw comparison with Carlylean notions of “great man” theory, where individual “Heroes” shape the “Universal History” and revolutionize the world order, often begetting some form of “Hero-worship” that resembles religious worship from the masses.⁵² Marx also falls into this category albeit with his narrational cathexis into the proletariat as the liberatory body eventually overcoming the bourgeoisie classes via a paradigmatic revolution.⁵³ In contrast to Carlyle, Marx of course emphasizes structural agency through socioeconomic classes

⁵⁰ Ibid, 131.

⁵¹ Satia, *Time’s Monster*, 60–107.

⁵² Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, ed. David R. Sorensen and Brent E. Kinser, *Rethinking the Western Tradition* (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 2013), 21–22.

⁵³ Satia, *Time’s Monster*, 97.

in turning over world orders, but there still is a Romantic logic of class “heroism” and its triumph over the injustices of the capitalist classes embedded in Marx’s materialist vision.⁵⁴ Despite this clear poetic logic employed in these historical narratives, both Savarkar and Marx are committed to the positivistic notion of “history as science.”⁵⁵ Though they signify opposite ideological positions, both men intertwine their poetic modes of emplotment with the vocabulary of scientism in an act of prefiguration. The narratives within these philosophies of history bleed into the “real” world through an enabling scientific discourse.

Alterity takes many different shades in *Six Epochs* as each identified phase of history is demarcated with its own special villainous Other that the “glorious” must vanquish. Most noticeably, this text also conducts an about-face treatment of the Muslim Other compared to *The Indian War*. Chaturvedi notices this harsher rhetoric and suggests that the changing language can be attributed to Savarkar’s time in the Andaman prison and the abuse he suffered at the hands of Muslim warders in addition to the forced conversions to Islam he saw Hindus make.⁵⁶ Of course, the violence of Partition also haunts this rhetorical turn which can be observed in Savarkar’s writing on the historical cases of Muslims committing violence against Hindu women, a common trope that emerged in the narratives of Partition.⁵⁷ This personal anecdote, in combination with the political events that transpired in the leadup to and following Partition, obliterate the

⁵⁴ Hayden V. White, *The Fiction of Narrative : Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957-2007* (Baltimore : Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 291, <http://archive.org/details/fictionofnarrati0000whit>.

⁵⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology: Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to The Critique of Political Economy*, Great Books in Philosophy (Amherst, N.Y: Prometheus Books, 1998), 34.

⁵⁶ Chaturvedi, *Hindutva and Violence*, 42.

⁵⁷ Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*, Contemporary South Asia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 83–84, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511613173>.

potential for Hindu-Muslim unity and construct the Muslim as the big bad to Hindutva history. Despite the multiple Others that Savarkar identifies in his text, the Muslim Other holds the primary targeted position in the text as he polemicizes against them recurrently, even in historical periods predating the advent of Islam. For example, during his exposition on the 1st Glorious Epoch which characterizes Alexander the Great as the Other of the age, Savarkar responds to the “Stupid Muslims” and their attempts to fold Alexander into Muslim history. Ironically, this appropriation is comparable to how he himself attempts to fold Sikh icons such as Guru Nanak or Guru Govind Singh into Hindu history.⁵⁸ He dismisses the Muslims’ attempt to include Alexander into their historical imaginary through positivistic means of falsification: “If any one tries to convince these fanatics, vulgar and vain-glorious Muslims that 'Shikandar (Alexander) was not a Muslim, that he could never be one, as Mohammed Paighamber, the founder of the Muslim religion, was himself born not less than a thousand years after the death of Shikandar, these, die-hard Muslims, would call that person un-informed.”⁵⁹ Here, Savarkar operates empirically by citing the obvious anachronism, dismissing the Muslims’ attempt to fabricate a historical lineage to the ancient Indian past. He also presumes that his Muslim interlocutors are operating on the same empirical level of discourse that he is by preempting the “un-informed” response, ignoring the symbolic and affective dimension that Sikander, or Zulkarnain, occupies in Muslims’ self-history.⁶⁰ Working in the positivist domain of history, Savarkar demeans

⁵⁸ Savarkar references his history of the Sikhs, a lost Marathi manuscript that he believes was destroyed by the British, in the text. Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, 396. As we will see later, Hindutva ideologues tend to valorize Sikh history for their rebellions against the Mughals, seeing them as fundamentally part of their own *rashtra* given that Sikhs see the Punjab, a part of Bharat, as their holy land.

⁵⁹ Savarkar, 9.

⁶⁰ Annabel Gallop, “How Alexander the Great Became Iskandar Zulkarnain, the Legendary Ancestor of Malay Kings,” *Scroll.In*, February 6, 2023, <https://scroll.in/article/1043072/how-alexander-the-great-became-iskandar-zulkarnain-the-legendary-ancestor-of-malay-kings>.

Muslims' attempt to craft a dignified lineage for themselves through falsification, even when he is striving to produce the same Carlylean historiography of "heroes" specific to Hindu civilization.

We can track the Muslim Other's tropological position in relation to Others in *Six Glorious Epochs* and witness the contouring of the Ravana assemblage. In other words, how does the Muslim fare in his villainy against Alexander, the Kushans, and the Huns, who embody the menace of the first/second, third, and fourth epochs respectively? In the case of Alexander and the Greeks, the comparison with Muslims leads to a semantic differentiation Savarkar undertakes between *yavanas* (the Greeks) and *mlechhas* (barbarians in general). The Greeks as Other, as enemy, are differentiated on account of their being "particularly devoted to learning and highly cultured and civilized" whereas the "highly fanatical, diabolic and ruthlessly destructive" Mussalmans must be referred to differently as *mlechha*, lest the latter be "flattered" by being compared to the noble former.⁶¹ Savarkar privileges Alexander and the Greeks as a valiant enemy for the hero of the epoch, Chandragupta Maurya, to vanquish, though the figure is curiously invoked alongside the ignoble *mlechhas* with respect to the practice of *johar*: "Whoever had donned this exceptional armour of 'johar' and its leaping flames were beyond all attempts of an Alexander, an Alla-ud-Din [Khilji] or a Salim [Jahangir]—why, even of Satan himself—to pollute them and convert them to his religion!"⁶² Here, Savarkar relays the story of a pre-Rajput incident of the immolation of women and children practiced by a "little Indian republic of the Agrashrenis" and recorded in the Anabasis of Alexander during the Macedonian invasions. When the sexual honor of Hindu women at stake, Savarkar expresses no qualms in

⁶¹ Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, 8–9.

⁶² *Ibid*, 30.

linking Alexander syntagmatically with the *mlechhas* or, as he writes later, the “Muslim wolves [who] ill-treated and molested the royal Hindu ladies who fell captives in their hands.”⁶³ Again, Savarkar’s repeated cathexis into the sexual honor of Hindu women against the sexually aggressive Muslim Other can be read as his response to the narratives of violence against women which emerged out of the partition of 1947.

Despite this slippage between the different conquerors, the Muslim Other remains exceptional in the text due to its projected religious fanaticism.⁶⁴ When he arrives to the 5th epoch emphatically titled “The Climax of Maharashtrian Valour!”, Savarkar writes:

For the Greek, Saka, Hun and other invaders, who came pouring in down the plains of the Punjab, had political domination of this country as their sole objective. Barring this political aim their raids had never been occasioned by any cultural or religious hatred . On the other hand, these new Islamic enemies not only aspired to crush the Hindu political power and establish in its place Muslim sovereignty over the whole of India, but they also had, seething in their brains another fierce religious ambition, not heretofore dreamt of by any of the old enemies of India. Intoxicated by this religious ambition, which was many times more diabolic than their political one.⁶⁵

Tied to the trope of India’s Muslim past is the superseding of religious dogmatism as the dominant motive of empire instead of political contingencies. We see this most clearly in the repeated allusion to Aurangzeb, who acts as icon of this projected tendency among Muslims. Aurangzeb’s elevation to the status of a villainous icon as opposed to treatment as a historical figure is evidenced by his repeated invocation, like a bogeyman, in historical periods outside of

⁶³ Ibid, 381.

⁶⁴ Savarkar prefaces this section with a quote from Will Durant’s multivolume *Story of a Civilization* to set the mood of his longest chapters in the text: “The Mohamedan conquest of India is probably the bloodiest story in history . It is a discouraging tale, for its evident moral is that civilization is a precarious thing, whose delicate complex of order and liberty, culture and peace may at any time be overthrown by barbarians invading from without or multiplying within.” Ibid, 127.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 129.

his own. As shown above, Aurangzeb's personage loomed over the British in 1857 who drew cues from his example. Even in *Six Epochs*, the example of Aurangzeb and Shivaji is alluded to in a discussion regarding Arya Chanakya and the insult he received from the Maurya sovereign Nanda during the founding of the Maurya empire, with emphasis placed on Shivaji's rebellion being caused by the ontological evil of domination represented by Aurangzeb and not mere insult.⁶⁶

In addition to Aurangzeb, Savarkar's historical enemy includes an assemblage of different actors and social groups that coalesce into a Ravan-esque image. Surprisingly despite the constant references, Savarkar does not lengthily treat the subject of Aurangzeb's kingship as it does not make it into his periodization. Instead, he valorizes the images of Vijayanagar and the Marathas as symbols of resistance against a flat, broadly defined period of "Muslim" incursions.⁶⁷ Still, he treats the rest of the assemblage in diversified ways by not sticking to a single characterization. For example, Akbar, the Mughal emperor often valorized for his pluralism by Savarkar's opponents, the secular nationalists, is considered as a shrewd politician who avoided imposing mass conversions in the vein of Aurangzeb or the predecessor Sultans purely to avoid mass revolt as opposed to any inner sense of equality between the sects.⁶⁸ Despite this critique, Savarkar still maintains Akbar as the "greatest" emperor of his age all the

⁶⁶ Ibid, 44.

⁶⁷ By this point in the text, Savarkar's polemical desires begin to win out over his historian inclinations, and he becomes less diachronic in his presentation of the history. Unlike the previous non-Muslim invaders, he flattens the distinctions between the different Muslim groups: "After Sindh, the Arabs did not attempt another invasion of India, yet the Arab bands did come here along with other Muslim armies, and like these Arabs, all those newly converted people like the Persians (Iranians) the Turanians, Afghans, the Turks, Moghuls and others fell on India with all the ferocity at their command." Ibid, 177. Interestingly, though his discussion of the 5th and 6th epochs form the bulk of the text, he expresses that "a detailed account of the continuous, long-drawn, fierce and gigantic Hindu-Muslim struggle is not intended here." Ibid, 128.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 400-401.

while asserting his foreignness: “But with all that greatness he was, from our Hindu point of view, foreign, belonging to another religion and mean-minded and as such he should be decried by us, Hindus!”⁶⁹ Honor in greatness is still extended to Akbar the Mughal though he is considered as an extrinsic part of the historical narrative that Savarkar elaborates. Non-Muslims also find themselves enmeshed in this assemblage as he expends ink vilifying the Christians who he calls “equally devilish” in their proselytizing attempts and the Buddhists who he indicts as collaborators with the Muslims to undermine Hindu sovereignty.⁷⁰ In the case of the latter’s position in Savarkar’s historical narrative, the Buddhist king Asoka is held to a different standard than the Muslim Sultans even though the former himself enforced vehemently a state religion; the language of this critique took on a more ethical dimension as Savarkar appealed to how Asoka’s edicts violated the *dharma* of the various castes yet he did pass edicts that extended tolerance to all different sects. The lukewarm criticism is associated with the “calm, cool, composed and considerate” king’s inconsistency between his beliefs and practice and not some ontological dogmatism as is found among the Muslim sovereigns.⁷¹

The alterity sprouts a face even from Savarkar’s own ranks as he criticizes historical Hindu subjects for their own lapses in judgement. Taking a cue from his intellectual rival Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj*, Savarkar also opines upon the historical missteps Hindus themselves undertook in their trajectory to land in their present dejected condition.⁷² First, in reference to the practice

⁶⁹ Ibid, 402.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 130-134.

⁷¹ Ibid, 64.

⁷² Mohandas K Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938), 36. Gandhi does not blame exogenous factors like the domination of the British in the subjugation of India but rather forms an inward critique wherein Indians themselves allowed the British Empire to overtake the country due to the expediency found in their modern machinery and economic system.

of hiring Arab mercenaries during the 8th century AD, he blames past Hindu sovereigns for their guilelessness in trusting Muslims within their military ranks as they trusted their enemy to conduct themselves honorably.⁷³ In this line where he also mentions future Hindu kings, Savarkar conveniently dismisses the apparent historical fact that Muslims often fought for Hindu masters against fellow Muslims on the basis of the *rajās*' gullibility in thinking that loyalty can be bought.⁷⁴ The duplicitousness projected against the Muslims here ties into Savarkar's expectation of a united Muslim front, flattening all other distinctions that can be made among this group in particular. Towards a more theological critique, Savarkar chastises norms within the caste system which were imposed not "by any Muslim, Christian or other foreign power; they were so fastened by the Hindus themselves, in their extreme anxiety for the protection of their religion. That is why we have been calling them through spoken as well written words not foreign shackles, but as 'seven native fetters.'" ⁷⁵ These bans in the caste system tie into Savarkar's overall critique of the social ostracization that first generation Hindu converts to Islam faced and began to articulate a *ghar wapsi* discourse that sought to reconvert them back into the Hindu fold, a resonant trope and tactic apparent in today's discourses as well. ⁷⁶ *Ghar wapsi*, or "return to home," refers to the ideological precept that pushes Hindutva to reincorporate minorities like Sikhs or adivasis back into the Hindu fold by asserting their

⁷³ Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, 135.

⁷⁴ Savarkar does assert how all "Muslims were not Moghals. As a matter of fact many of them hated the Moghals bitterly because he had extended his empire by destroying the old Afghan and Turkish Sultanates." Ibid, 401. Though this historical fact did not prevent him from lumping Muslims together, Savarkar does distance himself from others' historiographical tropes, even Muslim nationalist ones, that there was ever a unified Muslim polity in India.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 157. Savarkar cites "Lotibandi (prohibition of drinking water), Rotibandi (prohibition of food), Betibandi (prevention of inter-caste marriages), Sparshbandi (Untouchability) ... Shuddhibandi (prevention of purification of religious converts), Sindhubandi (ban on sea voyage) etc." He expressly names six though he mentions seven in total.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 160-161.

fundamental belonging in the Hindu family. Savarkar heavily invests in this perception of ostracization, since for him these conversions constituted not only change in religion but a change in nationality which he projects as a cause of political concern for the future.⁷⁷ His distinction between “foreign shackles” and “native fetters” as well as his projection into the future signals his concerns over the historical development of his blood and soil community and redirects his vitriol not just against the exogenous groups within the alterity but also fellow Hindus.⁷⁸ This nuance does not imply that Savarkar was a caste reformist by any means, but rather signals how he as head ideologue and president of the Hindu Mahasabha advocated for the narrative of a harmonious and united caste system that treated every strata respectfully.⁷⁹ Thus, the historical enemy for Savarkar took the shape of his fellow religionists as they threatened the longevity of his national Hindutva project.

IV.

Lest we forget the poetic mode Veer Savarkar is operating in within his historical discourses, he quotes an “English Poet,” Thomas Babington Macaulay, in reference to the invasions of Mahmud of Ghazna’s raid on the Somnath temple: “Thus outspake brave Horatius/the Captain of the gate,/‘To every man upon this earth/death cometh soon or late./And how can a man die better than/by facing fearful odds/ For the ashes of his fathers and/the temples of his Gods?’”⁸⁰ Consider the layered metonymical effect here; Savarkar in his retrieval of a glorious historical memory quotes a former colonial master of India, Macaulay, who in his

⁷⁷ Ibid, 155.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 157.

⁷⁹ John Zavos, “The Ārya Samāj and the Antecedents of Hindu Nationalism,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 3, no. 1 (1999): 76–77.

⁸⁰Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, 152. Found in Thomas Babington Macaulay Baron Macaulay, *Miscellaneous Essays, and The Lays of Ancient Rome* (Dent, 1915), 425.

anxieties about the decline of the British Empire remembers and poeticizes a Roman poet facing the ruin of his own civilization. Poetics drive the historical memory and discourse production found in Savarkar's histories, though he maintains that he is applying a layer of historical scientism. Poetics and science merge in the narrational scape that Savarkar constructs. Obviously, the modern History establishment would balk at this form of history writing and consign Savarkar's work to the dustbin of illogical, ahistorical, and bigoted screeds. The work as a whole should be viewed thusly, but we should take seriously Savarkar's attempt to craft a native scientific historical discourse and pay attention to the poetic form which he imbues into the work. As we will see in the following chapters, this fusion of epistemologies guides Hindutva's historical discourses about the Muslim Other and bleeds into the modern historian's reproach of such discourses. Moreover, the discourse of positivism and realism enables the poetic and mythic to bleed into reality. This transference cannot be written off as mere fictitious drivel and must be taken seriously if we are to understand the Hindutva intelligentsia's cultural stake in the presentation of its historical narrative and the Muslim Other.

With this reading in mind, what visage of the Other emerges in Savarkar's historical narrative other than the ten-faced king of the *rakshasa* Ravana? In other critiques of fascism, such an Other would be dismissed as an incoherent model that betrays the ideological inconsistency baked into such a pathetic world view.⁸¹ Yet, in a cultural domain where the Radical Other depicts an assemblage of many faces and shades that beget their own personalities and accord their own treatments, we cannot dismiss the multiplicity so easily. Savarkar's own

⁸¹ See Umberto Eco, "Ur-Fascism," *The New York Review of Books*, June 22, 1995, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/>. Point 3 on "Irrationalism" frames fascist ideology on rationalist terms that privilege logical consistency. But Fascism is also an emotional, poetic, and mystical endeavor that channels in bodies and brings them together through trans-corporeal affect.

texts intimate this multiplicity and show that there is no master narrative of a singular Muslim Other. There is an Other to be vanquished but also to be reintegrated, to be honored, or to be mourned. Like in Sara Ahmed's "affective economies," the power of the trope stems from its untethered nature, to be sought out in any form.⁸² The following chapters follow this assemblage of the Muslim Other in more recent discourses. Savarkar produced these histories in a jail cell when the Bharatis were pushed underground due to the triumph of the secular nationalists at the level of national politics. The vitriolic gaze of Savarkar and the early ideologues was cast from the shadows of social and political life like when Ram and Lakshman lived out their exile in the forest. How does the Muslim Other fare during the contemporary moment of political ascendancy, when the Hindu Right slides into power with fanfare, on the verge of establishing *ramrajya*?

⁸² Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004): 124–25, https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-22-2_79-117.

Chapter II—Hauntology of the Muslim Other: Historical Discourses in Action during Hindutva’s Ascendancy, 2019-present

I.

What is said here about time is also valid, consequently and by the same token, for history, even if the latter can consist in repairing, with effects of conjuncture (and that is the world), the temporal disjoining. “The time is out of joint”: time is disarticulated, dislocated, dislodged, time is run down, on the run and run down [traqué et détraqué], deranged, both out of order and mad. Time is off its hinges, time is off course, beside itself, disadjusted. Says Hamlet.¹

The previous chapter contended with Savarkar’s historical discourses that were produced in a jail cell, marginalized from political power during the heyday of Nehruvian-INC “democracy.” In this chapter, I analyze the reconstruction and dissemination of the historical alterity trope during a period of political ascendancy, years after when the Hindutva movement’s political arm, the BJP, ousted the INC from power and began to take over key state institutions. Many macroscopic political events occurred between Savarkar’s jail cell histories and the official historical discourses preached from the pulpit today that inform the shifting presence of the Muslim Other trope.² On an interstate scale from the 50s to the 70s, there were serious military engagements between Pakistan and India over territorial sovereignty in Kashmir and Bangladesh,

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning & the New International*, 1st edition (London: Routledge, 2006), 20.

² David Ludden contextualizes the Ayodhya spectacle within the international majoritarian movements that were occurring in the 70s and 80s: “Not only in India, but also in France, the former Yugoslavia, Algeria, Turkey, Germany, the United States, Sri Lanka, Russia, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Iran—anywhere that minorities face hostile majoritarianism—minority conditions worsened in the 1980s (Gurr 1994, 1993, 1986). Since the late 1970s, nationalist movements based on the assertion that one majority ethnic or religious group defines a nation have emerged with new force and creativity—with new rituals and spectacles, including televised violence—to revalorize old emotions and symbolic resources. The men who destroyed the Babri mosque marched to a cultural movement whose ideas, images, media, organizations, and resources are transnational in form, scope, and influence.” David Ludden, *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 2.

as well as the proliferation of terror attacks by subnational militant organizations like the Kashmir-based Lashkar-e-Taiba.³ These interstate conflicts in the decades following Partition would add a violent edge to the theorized Muslim Other, leading to what Jaffrelot characterizes as a “well-oiled politics of fear [that] heightened the majoritarian community’s sense of vulnerability.”⁴ By now, the horizon of Hindu-Muslim unity that Savarkar proposed in *The Indian War* has been completely shattered as the two sectarian categories partitioned into opposite ends of a border, with a significant contingent of Others left within India’s own borders needing to be treated with distrust by the state.

Endogenously, these external threats would compound with a growing internal movement for the reclamation of masculine self-sovereignty (*Swaraj*) that reached a crescendo during the *Ram Janambhoomi* movement. This period exploded onto the Indian public scene with then BJP President L.K. Advani’s widely televised *Ram Rath Yatra*, a cross-country chariot ride, on September 25th, 1990, and the demolition of the Babri masjid on December 6th, 1992, which resulted in larger electoral gains for the BJP in the 1991 electoral cycle.⁵ The destruction of the Babri masjid created a generative politic that the Hindutva movement would thrive upon in the coming decades just as it emblemized a destructive future for the Muslim minority. It effectively mobilized decades of infiltrative RSS *pracharak* and *karsevak* networks to bring to national prominence a symbolic assertion of reclaiming Bharat for a masculine Hindu body politic. The discourse of Babri provided a new currency to the symbolic economy of Hindutva through which it can galvanize the affect of its adherents into the destructive tendencies that

³ Jaffrelot, *Modi’s India*, 75–78.

⁴ *Ibid*, 79.

⁵ Ludden, *Contesting the Nation*, 16.

would materialize into pogroms against Muslim communities and, closer to the contemporary period, legal-institutional structures that ensconce the Otherness of Muslims into law.⁶

In this chapter, I unpack governmental, press, and social media historical discourses about the Muslim Other as disseminated rhetorically by the contemporary regime under Modi, the BJP, and other Hindutva intermediaries such as pundits and social media trolls. In doing so, I aim to ascertain how these discourses operate during a period of political ascendancy and if they continue to remain, as was in Savarkar's case, unstable representations of the Muslim Other. What facets of the alterity assemblage are emphasized or deemphasized in this new discursive market? Central to these representations is how historical time *itself* is represented in these discourses. As I will show, history is represented through specific word and semantic choices as non-linear and disjointed, producing an anxiety-inducing effect where the past continues to “haunt” the present. Additionally, I aim to explore how positivistic historiographical mentalities factor into this rhetoric's dissemination. Do Hindutva agents appeal to a positivistic view of history which is “true” or “scientific”? As Michel Rolph-Trouillot theorizes, the historical discourse market is no longer limited to the production within the guild and its members (i.e., professional academic historians) but subject to a wider range of producers.⁷ William Dalrymple corroborates this viewpoint for the case of India specifically, where what used to be arcane scholarly debates over history have become a mainstream point of dissent among non-

⁶ Tied to the *Ram Janambhoomi* movement's widespread appeal was state television channel Doordarshan's broadcasting of the *Ramayana* serial, which Arvind Rajagopal credits as helping prime Indian publics to the politics of the Ram Mandir restoration movement. See Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 72–121.

⁷ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 31.

scholars.⁸ This chapter is a study of this market and how it operates in different channels including national politics, internet press, and social media.

Rather than labelling Hindutva's penchant to "revise history" or forward contentious historical narratives as anachronism driven by ignorance or false consciousness engendered by zealotry, I appeal to the Derridean concept of "hauntology" as a framework to think through Hindutva's "disjoining" of time on an ontological level.⁹ The purposeful temporal displacements and the haunting return of old personages like Mahmud of Ghazna or Aurangzeb in contemporary discourses convey a "ghostly" apparitional presence that intimate a general anxiety embedded in this world view. Past, present, and future blend together in this ghostly assemblage and strike at the heart of the anxious affect the Modi-BJP regime attempts to martial in its campaign of violence against the projected invader. Peter Buse and Andrew Scott paraphrase Derrida and explain the concept as a "dual movement of return and inauguration a 'hauntology', a coinage that suggests a spectrally deferred non-origin within grounding metaphysical terms such as history and identity."¹⁰ Thus, a hauntological trope does not possess

⁸ William Dalrymple, "India: The War Over History | William Dalrymple," accessed November 28, 2022, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2005/04/07/india-the-war-over-history/>.

⁹ Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 20–29. My application of "disjoining" here refers the how stark historical categories such as "past" and "present" meld together in discursive formations. Derrida expresses this relationship as "[t]he disjointure in the very presence of the present, this sort of non-contemporaneity of present time with itself[.]" (29) Clearly, as articulated by backwards projection of categories like "Hindu" or "Muslim" in the historiography of the Hindu right, they are conducting presentist narrativizations of historical data. Rather than dismissing these historiographical projections as mere anachronisms that do not possess intellectual merit, I use hauntology to take seriously these narratives and the effect they have on the Saffron-*bhakt*.

¹⁰ P. Buse and A. Stott, *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History* (Springer, 1999), 11. Quoted in Mark Fisher, "The Metaphysics of Crackle: Afrofuturism and Hauntology," *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture*, October 24, 2013, 45, <https://doi.org/10.12801/1947-5403.2013.05.02.03>.

a definitive originary point but rather, as theorist Sarah Ahmed points out, circulates relationally in an affective economy of other tropes, or linguistic markers of difference.¹¹

As we observed in the symbolic economy of Savarkar, the Otherness of Muslims is syntagmatically linked with other Others, or manifestations of the alterity. Hauntology as a concept allows us to explore the eternally deferred construction of difference with the Muslim Other trope and the various referential ways Otherness is constructed in the language and rhetoric of the current regime. It also allows us to analyze this historical discourse as an ontological state related to feelings of civilizational anxiety and disorientation as opposed to a politically contingent strategy that the regime deploys. This move allows us to unite Savarkar, Modi, and other discourse producers in their shared flight into historicization as the primary discursive pathway through which the alterity can be expressed.

II.

As with Savarkar, we must note that these discourses do not occur in a vacuum and are situated in a field to themselves. Anustup Basu theorizes this new era of Hindutva as “Hindutva 2.0” wherein various new media forms brought about by the economic liberalization policies pursued in the 1980s and 1990s like Bollywood, social media, and market advertising flood consumers with “consumable mythograms.” These mythograms do not operate as cogently formulated ideological thoughts as expressed in Savarkar and Golwalkar’s era through print media, but rather affect-laden spectacles that “particularize and synchronize key words” and “hollow out historical consciousness and memory” to create a new advertised Hindutva that spans across the globe.¹² Thus, diasporic Hindus have a claim to participate in the movement

¹¹ Ahmed, “Affective Economies.”

¹² Basu, *Hindutva as Political Monotheism*, 158.

alongside natives, almost flouting Savarkar’s consideration that the axis mundi of Hindutva devotees must be present within the contiguous Bharati homeland.¹³

Banu Subramaniam corroborates this vast field of discourse production and transmission as part of the rhetoric of the “postcolony,” where the Indian state attempts to project itself as a unified modern nation through “[p]assionate speeches by politicians, emotional and uplifting plots in Bollywood movies, diverse languages on television, government sponsored posters and slogans, and rousing songs and pledges in school all attempted to cajole and consolidate a singular nation.”¹⁴ Tied to this media is an attempt to project the country as at the forefront of science education that involves a fusing of religious and scientific horizons, leading to the infamous and often derided claims professed by Hindutva intelligentsia about how scriptural sources like the Vedas contained arcane scientific knowledge that is *now* being discovered and implemented.¹⁵ Consider Modi’s claim about Ganesha’s head being stitched on by a primordial plastic surgeon or the Mahabharata’s Karna being born outside of the womb thanks to “genetic science.”¹⁶ As Subramaniam rightly exhorts, these claims should not be dismissed as a cryptohistorical gaff on the part of the Prime Minister—whose whole public persona is carefully curated to project the BJP’s image of the saintly everyman¹⁷—but rather as a deep articulation of

¹³ Savarkar expresses the paramountcy of the territorial linkage here: “A Hindu then is he who feels attachment to the land that extends from Sindhu to Sindhu as the land of his forefathers—as his Fatherland[.]” Vinayak Damodar Savarkar., *Hindutva, Who Is a Hindu?*, 5th ed. (M/S Bhave Ltd., 1969), 100, <http://archive.org/details/hindutva-vinayak-damodar-savarkar-pdf>.

¹⁴ Basu Subramaniam, *Holy Science* (University of Washington Press, 2019), X, <https://uwapress.uw.edu/book/9780295745596/holy-science>.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 6-7.

¹⁶ Maseeh Rahman, “Indian Prime Minister Claims Genetic Science Existed in Ancient Times,” *The Guardian*, October 28, 2014, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/28/indian-prime-minister-genetic-science-existed-ancient-times>.

¹⁷ Jaffrelot, *Modi’s India*, 463.

the fused horizons of religion and science that serve as epistemological priorities for the current regime. The positivism embedded in such an outlook bleeds into the realm of history as well, as we saw plainly with Savarkar and his commitment to produce a “scientific history.”

S.P. Udayakumar attests to this fact in his treatise on the mythologization effect in “communal histories” that Hindu nationalists profess: “Hindu communal historiography, or any other communal narrative for that matter, is a positivistic and simpleminded truth claim that dons the objective lens but doffs the subjective frame.”¹⁸ Recalling Chaturvedi on Savarkar’s historical visions, these discourses must be taken seriously. Udayakumar correctly diagnoses these discourses as dangerous revisions of history that attempt to exclude minorities, primarily Muslims, from the Hindu fold by, citing Michael Shapiro’s framework, using representational practices that “sharpen boundaries” between subjects rather than “softening boundaries.”¹⁹ However, rather than viewing these discourses as derivative propagandistic devices to inculcate a false historical consciousness amongst an ideologically pliable public, I join Chaturvedi and Subramaniam in treating these discourses as a serious expression of a “hauntological” anxiety that relates Hindutva-receptive subjects in the present moment to the past in a nuanced manner using the trope of the Muslim Other. This uneasy relation filled with collectivized memories of anguish at a proposed “subjugation” by Muslims presents nuanced information about the discourse producers and their audience as it does about the Muslims they target with such rhetoric. As we saw in Savarkar, the multiplicitous alterity was not a stable representation and meshed with “others,” creating the chimeric assemblage that is the Muslim Other.

¹⁸ Udayakumar, *Presenting the Past*, 31.

¹⁹ Michael J. Shapiro, *The Politics of Representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography, and Policy Analysis* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 98–100. Cited in Udayakumar, *Presenting the Past*, 19.

III.

In this section, I unpack Modi and his speech writers as producers of historical discourse to analyze the conventions he uses to disseminate the trope of the Muslim Other and deconstruct the ideologies such discourses portend. Modi's entire public persona has been a subject of curation, and his oratory strategies indicate precise symbolic deployment to cater to his audiences.²⁰ Two speeches from within the last two years, a period where Modi's BJP enjoyed a resounding electoral victory in 2019 and pursued a more sharply inflected Hindutva statist authoritarian alignment²¹, will showcase this deftness as Modi engages in historical discourse for two different main audiences, though given the scope of television and internet broadcasting, the reach of each speech is meant to be further than the immediate crowd that received it. Not only do these speeches indicate the significance of historical discourse production in its public rhetoric, but it also shows how Modi as orator-historian himself floods the discursive sphere by manipulating temporalities to create a sense of disjointed history where past, present, and future mingle together and where the Muslim Other lies becomes unclear.

Clad in a saffron headscarf emblazoning the *Sikhi khanda*, Modi addressed a crowd at the Major Dhyanchand Stadium in Delhi on December 26th, 2022, commemorating the martyrdom of the *Sahibzade*, the children of Guru Gobind Singh, under the auspices of Aurangzeb.²² His government sought to declare the "Veer Bal Diwas" as a national day of commemoration.²³ In

²⁰ Ronojoy Sen, "Narendra Modi's Makeover and the Politics of Symbolism," *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 9, no. 2 (May 3, 2016): 108–9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17516234.2016.1165248>.

²¹ Jaffrelot, *Modi's India*, 404.

²² J.S. Grewal, "Negotiations with Aurangzeb (1705–7)," in *Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708): Master of the White Hawk*, ed. J.S. Grewal (Oxford University Press, 2020), 178, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199494941.003.0009>.

²³ "Veer Bal Diwas 2023: History, Significance & Other Key Things to Know," *The Economic Times*, December 26, 2023, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/new-updates/veer-bal->

the televised cut of the address uploaded to YouTube, throngs of turban and beard wearing Sikhs can be seen in the audience.²⁴ What was the ulterior motive behind this overture to the Sikh community in India? Punjabi Sikhs formed the backbone of the Farmer's Protest Movement that challenged the Farm Bills passed by the BJP-led Parliament in 2020 which were subsequently repealed in the year after due to widespread opposition. In light of this public opposition, Modi's government sought to make grounds in Sikh communities lest they lose them ideologically to growing sentiments of Sikh separatism.²⁵ In light of these political exigencies, the Modi regime martialled the symbolic power embedded in the state's authority to commemorate events²⁶, leading Modi to don the headscarf, prostrate before the Guru Granth Sahib, and make this speech.

Within the first five minutes, Modi makes two appeals to the past (*ateet* and *itihās* [lit. "history"]) and how the young generation of Bharatis, to whom Veer Bal Diwas is dedicated to, played an instrumental role in redeeming Bharat in an age of darkness. Notice how Modi vacillates between different temporal tenses and references in this short segment:

Every year this auspicious occasion of Veer Bal Diwas will inspire us to recognize our past (*ateet*) and build the future (*bhaviṣhya*). For decades and centuries (*dasiyon aur sadiyon*) to come, 'Veer Bal Diwas' will keep us reminding of the potential of India's young generation (*yuva peedhee*), the way the young generation of India has saved the country in the past (*ateet*) and has pulled India out of the severe darkness plaguing humanity... The thousands of years old history (*itihāsa*) of the world is full of dreadful chapters of cruelty. In every history and

diwas-2023-history-significance-other-key-things-to-know/articleshow/106289708.cms?from=mdr.

²⁴ PM Modi's Speech at "Veer Baal Diwas" Programme at Major Dhyanchand Stadium in Delhi, 2022, sc. 4:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JoK8vv2ownY>.

²⁵ Gunisha Kaur and Simran Jeet Singh, "Why India Is Targeting Sikhs At Home and Around the World," *TIME*, December 5, 2023, <https://time.com/6342873/india-sikhs-persecution/>; Suhasini Raj, Mujib Mashal, and Hari Kumar, "Sikh Separatism Is a Nonissue in India, Except as a Political Boogeyman," *The New York Times*, September 28, 2023, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/28/world/asia/india-punjab-separatism.html>.

²⁶ Rajagopal, *Politics After Television*, 75–86.

legend, there have been great heroes and great heroines too facing every cruelty. But it is also true that whatever happened in the battles of Chamkaur and Sirhind had never been witnessed before and would never be seen in future (*bhut aur bhavishy nahin tha*). This incident is not thousands of years old that the wheels of time (*samay ke pahiyee*) might have blurred its memories. This had happened only three centuries ago on the soil of this country.²⁷

In these few utterances that occur within seconds of each other, Modi does not employ a simple diachronic measure of time. Time discourse markers layer on top of one another that disorient the listener with respect to temporal specificity. Aided by the semantic fluidity that Hindi as a language offers, references to time as subject to the clauses or as prepositional modifiers further this wormhole effect of jumping between different tenses and periods. Modi's usage of an archaic Sanskritized Hindi add to this historicizing effect in the listeners' ears. Historical allusions to Chamkaur and Sirhind, both battles of resistance against the Mughals by non-Hindu actors, weave into the speech to further the disjoining effect. Finally, Modi's use of *bhuta* (भूत) to refer to the past in his clause about the historical battles signals the hauntological anxiety accomplished by the disjoining of the time discourse markers. *Bhuta* from Sanskrit carries a valence where it refers to both the past tense but also spirits, demons, and ghosts. Modern Hindi speakers will also recognize the word as explicitly meaning ghosts. Thus, a hauntological effect is manufactured wherein ghosts of the past remain ever present in the current moment.

How does the Muslim Other rear its head in Modi's discourse here? Both the occasion of the event and the content signal the particular facet of the alterity assemblage that is addressed: the Mughals. The Modi regime intended for Veer Bal Diwas to memorialize an instance of

²⁷ PM Modi's Speech at "Veer Baal Diwas" Programme at Major Dhyanchand Stadium in Delhi, sc. 2:34-5:32; Narendra Modi, "Sikh Guru Tradition Is a Source of Inspiration for 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat': PM Modi on Veer Baal Diwas," December 26, 2022, paras. 2-4, <https://www.narendramodi.in/category/text-speeches>, <https://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-prime-minister-narendra-modi-s-address-at-veer-bal-diwas-programme-at-new-delhi-566699>.

Mughal violence on the Sikh community by elevating the sacrifice made by the young *Sahibzades*. Here, Modi's narrative of Mughal rule collides with an already made cultural reference point that Sikhs possess towards the Mughals who are symbols of despotism considering the martyrdom of many Sikh Gurus under their auspices. Of course, at the heart of this discourse is the symbol of Aurangzeb and his cruelty in sentencing innocent children to be "entombed" alive within his regime:

On the one hand, there was religious bigotry (*dharam kattarata*) and a huge Mughal Sultanate blinded by that bigotry, while on the other hand, we had our Guru, who was engrossed in knowledge and penance as well as our traditions and ancient human values of India! On one hand there was the height of terror (*aatank ki parakshtra*), while on the other hand there was the pinnacle of spirituality! On one hand, religious fanaticism (*mazhabi unmaad*), while on the other hand, generosity that sees God within everyone [...]²⁸

Another great lesson is hidden in this sacrifice (*balidaan*) of Sahibzadas at such a young age. Imagine that era (*ap us dor ki kalpana kariye*)! Against (*khilaf*) the terror of Aurangzeb and his plans to change India, Guru Gobind Singh ji had stood like a mountain. But, what enmity (*dushmani*) could Aurangzeb and his Sultanate have against young children like Jorawar Singh Sahab and Fateh Singh Sahab? Why was such a cruel act of entombing two innocent children alive in the wall undertaken (*Do nirdosh balakon ko deewar mein zinda chunvane jaise darindagi*)? It is because Aurangzeb and his people wanted to convert the religion (*dharm*) of Guru Gobind Singh's children forcibly (*talwaar ke dam par badalna chate the*).²⁹

Modi structures this segment of discourse along the axis of two polarities, pitting Aurangzeb (and the Mughal Sultanate at large) and "our" Guru. Dealing with excesses on both ends, each

²⁸ Modi again references the nation's need to take pride in their *itihasa* in this sequence. "But unfortunately, we were told and taught those fabricated narratives (*ghate hue narrative*) in the name of history, which created an inferiority complex within us!" (Ibid, sc. 8:00; para. 5) Notice the deployment of the English word "narrative" and the passive conjugation of *ghatana* which can mean "decrease" or "lowered." Modi keeping the English term can signal a historiographic sensibility by distinguishing narrative from a word like "*kahanee*," which carries a more trivial connotation related to a story of some kind.

²⁹ Ibid, sc. 5:32-10:32; paras. 4-7.

pole is coded with value judgements, where the Mughals epitomize religious bigotry and the Guru, coopted into the cannon of Hindutva's historical heroes, represents spiritual purity.

Moreover, the use of *mazhabi unmaad* or “religious hysteria” to code Aurangzeb and the Mughal apparatus, contrasted to the stalwart and resolute Guru, connotes a beastly or monstrous attribute which resonates further down when Modi likens the murder of the children to “*darandegi*” or “beastliness.” This emphatic connotation is diluted in the English translations of the speeches. Within this conflictual framing, the audience is invited to reflect on Aurangzeb and Guru Gobind Singh, who each personify and represent their side of the polarity. The villainous Aurangzeb dispatches the Guru's children in a horrific fashion that left a traumatic imprint on Sikh memories of the Mughal period. The reference to the *Sahibzades* being “bricked alive” also reflects a conscious choice to use the narrative drawn from popular tradition, rather than other historical accounts which label the occurrence as beheading. Supposedly, the Gurudwara of Sri Fatehgarh Sahib still holds the immured corpses of the children within its walls.³⁰ Thus, the villainous Mughal Aurangzeb not only operates as a symbol for Islamic dogmatism, but also historically in that he, out of sheer malice which remains uncontextualized in the speech, ordered the martyrdom of innocent children and supplied the present moment with its symbols of bravery but also its ghosts. We observe here the deft audience-attuned deployment of historiographical discourse that coopts Sikh historical memory with the broader rhetoric of the Muslim Other's detrimental effect on Indian history.³¹

³⁰ Fenech, “The Sikh Zafar-Nāmah of Guru Gobind Singh,” 19. To see observe the popular tradition in action, see the official government page that preserves this story: “Gurudwara Sri Fatehgarh Sahib | Fatehgarh Sahib, Govt. of Punjab | India,” accessed March 9, 2024, <https://fatehgarhsahib.nic.in/tourist-place/gurudwara-fatehgarh-sahib/>.

³¹ The Sikh community, or at least a projection of it, occupies a valorized space in the minds of certain Hindutva intelligentsia; recall Savarkar's professed wish to write a history of the Sikhs in *Six Epochs*. Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, 396.

Modi's deployment of historical discourses is a dynamic process which contours to the audience that consumes the discourse. In the following excerpt from the 77th Independence Day address, delivered from the steps of the Mughal-built Red Fort, Modi's tenor to describe the historical alterity changes compared to the emphatic polemical style seen above. The stakes behind this address include the unfolding violence occurring in Manipur in 2023, which Modi was reticent to comment on initially, between the Meitei-ethnic factions and the Kuki tribal community. This outbreak of violence also concerns majoritarian pogroms against a minority group, where the Meitei community themselves have been subject to BJP outreach.³² After gesturing towards the Manipur violence, Modi starts a historical discourse where he refers to the historical alterity in much vaguer terms compared to the speech above:

My dear family members, when we look back at history (*itihās*), there are moments that leave an indelible mark (*amit chhaap*), and their impact lasts for centuries (*sadiyon*). Sometimes, these events might seem small and insignificant at the beginning, but they lay the roots for numerous problems (*anek samasya ki jarh ban ja ti hai*). We all know that our country was invaded 1000-1200 years ago. A small kingdom and its king were defeated. However, we couldn't have known that this event would lead India into a thousand years of subjugation (*hazaar saal ki gulaami*). We got ensnared in slavery, and whoever came, looted us, and ruled over us. What an adverse period (*vipareet kaam*) it must have been, that thousand-year span.³³

Notice the lack of historical detail or context present in this segment. *Hazaar saal ki gulaami* or *bara sau saal ki gulaami*, "1,000-1,200 years of slavery," has become a catchphrase

³² Sushant Singh, "Manipur Crisis Tests Modi's India," *Foreign Policy* (blog), March 14, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/08/01/india-manipur-violence-crisis-modi-bjp-majoritarianism/>.

³³ *Live: Independence Day 2023: PM Modi Speech on 77th Independence Day of India | Red Fort*, 2023, sc. 18:51, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XYddvSeaVk>; "English Rendering of Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi's Address from the Ramparts of Red Fort on the Occasion of 77th Independence Day" (PIB India, August 15, 2015), para. 5, <https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1948808>.

of the Modi regime, repeatedly referred to in his other speeches.³⁴ Functioning as a dog whistle, an RSS cadet or an informed Modi voter would know this references the initial Turkic incursions made by the Ghaznavids, a predominantly Muslim polity, into the subcontinent. An unnamed “small kingdom,” presumably the Gujurati Chaulukyas or the Hindu Shahis based out of modern Peshawar, were not able to stem the *mlechha* incursions into Greater India, leading to the fester of a poison, *jarh*. This emphatic sentiment of a festering wound that debilitated the nation is numbed in the English translation. Pure affective ranges of a cancerous shame are conveyed in this acontextual historical discourse, though Modi would continuously refer to the *hazaar saal* and how the present moment, through his “*panch pran*” or five resolutions³⁵, history will be corrected, and his regime will “determine our direction for the next 1,000 years and will write the fate of India.”

The erasure of specific historical context as well as the iconicity of “1,000 years” contribute to the disjuncture of time by forming a historical relationship with the present moment with a nameless and simplified historical past in a different manner compared to the Veer Bal Diwas address.³⁶ The latter layered discourses of time into a quagmire while the former presents

³⁴ See also Ghose, “1,200 Years of Servitude.” Modi has been deploying this trope even during his first term, when the Hindutva rhetoric has not been ramped up yet.

³⁵ “‘Panchpran’: PM Modi’s 5 Pledges to Make India a Developed Nation in 25 Years,” *The Times of India*, August 15, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/panchpran-pm-modi-calls-for-moving-forward-with-5-pledges-to-fulfill-freedom-fighters-dreams-by-2047/articleshow/93565620.cms>. These resolutions include: “1) Goal of Developed India, 2) “Remove any trace of colonial mindset, 3) Take pride in our roots, 4) Unity, 5) Sense of duty among citizens.” These five resolutions, far from being actionable political policies, will usher in Modi’s theorized utopia of “*amrit kaal*” or the “Era of Elixir” in the next 25 years.

³⁶ Given the wider audience that Modi reaches on an Independence Day address, the erasure of specific historical details can signal a wary rhetoric to avoid offending international audiences and bolstering the now rising body of criticism Modi faces for his treatment of Indian Muslims. See *India: The Modi Question*, 2023, <https://www.bbcselect.com/watch/india-the-modi-question/>. It could also signal an ironic awareness that Modi is delivering this address on the

a collapsed time without further contextualization. A reduced narrative of a small kingdom's ignominious defeat is all that is needed to communicate to the audience the relevant legacy that the Modi regime is trying to redeem. Both of these narratives deploy historical discourse differently but indicate the Modi regime's cathexis into a historical consciousness to sway the affect of the discourse consumers in the audience. The Muslim Other, through dog whistle, haunts this discourse as well.

IV.

Modi's tongue may act as the highest-ranking source of the historical discourses of the Muslim Other that we have seen. Compared to Savarkar's trope of the Muslim Other, we find many convergences, like a fixation on the personage of Aurangzeb, a polemical edge martialled against the outsider, and a deep concern for the future of the nation. Like the dynamism in Savarkar's portrayal of the Muslim Other, Modi's rhetoric on historical discourses also displayed an instability dependent upon the audience he is addressing. Moving on from the "high" discursive spaces like the words of Prime Ministers and founding ideologues, we turn to the rhetoric of intermediary agents who parrot and propagate these discourses in concerted efforts.

Backing Modi and the BJP's regime is the extensive network of the RSS, which as a "well-organized mafia through its subsidiaries" holds many voices through which historical discourses are produced.³⁷ Priding itself as a primarily activist organization as the world's largest "NGO," historical discourse dissemination has been a core element of the organization's mandate. Much work has been done tracking the myriad of "educational" organizations within

steps of the Red Fort, a recognizable artifact from the Muslim dynasties that his regime denigrates.

³⁷ Shamsul Islam, *Hindu Nationalism and RSS* (New Delhi, India: Pharos Media & Publishing Pvt Ltd, 2022), 305.

the RSS network that infiltrate local communities and build new histories from below. Daniela Berti's ethnographic work on the *Akhil Bharatiya Itihas Sankalan Yojna* (ABISY) show how this subsidiary produces not only formal scholarly work through its academic journal *Itihas Darpan*, but also how it embeds itself into communities and actively shape local lore to emphasize core Hindutva themes in diverse local histories.³⁸ Alice Tilche demonstrates how Hindutva activists embed themselves into adivasi communities and coopt indigenous iconography as a means to bring in adivasi subjects into the Hindu fold by placing them in Hindu religious history.³⁹ Arkotong Longkumer notes a similar process occurring in Northeast India and the *Sangh Parivar's* activism in Nagaland to bring back Christians into the Hindu fold through their program of *ghar wapsi*.⁴⁰ As can be demonstrated, the RSS' usage of historical discourse is a local affair that relies on active discursive work by the throngs of *karsevaks* under its command to disseminate on-brand historiographical tropes as, in Basu's words, consumable mythograms.

From the mouths of Prime Ministers we move to the mouthpiece of the RSS itself, *Organizer* (*Panchjanya* in Hindi) the self-proclaimed "Voice of the Nation." This New Delhi-based media outlet has reportedly been circulating weeklies since 1947 and boasts a readership of more than 500,000 "thinkers, writers, opinion-makers, legislators, members of both the Houses of Parliament, editors of dailies and other periodicals with a countrywide circulation" as "regular readers."⁴¹ In addition to editorials about current events, this periodical consistently

³⁸ Daniela Berti, "Hindu Nationalists and Local History: From Ideology to Local Lore," *Rivista Di Studi Sudasiatici*, 2007, 5–12, <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02334464>.

³⁹ Alice Tilche, *Adivasi Art and Activism: Curation in a Nationalist Age* (University of Washington Press, 2022), 6–8.

⁴⁰ Arkotong Longkumer, "The Power of Persuasion: Hindutva, Christianity, and the Discourse of Religion and Culture in Northeast India," *Religion* 47, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 203–4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2016.1256845>.

⁴¹ Sreekandakumar Pillai, "About Us," *Organizer: Voice of the Nation*, accessed March 11, 2024, <https://organiser.org/about-us/>.

produces historical discourse meant for dissemination to the RSS *pracharaks* and *karsevaks* who regularly consume it. Indeed, as seen in the ethnographic work cited above, historiography is not just an elite activity in India but a tool of praxis for the rank-and-file organizers that make up the Hindutva movement's backbone. Savarkar himself penned pedagogical tools for "Hindu *Sanghatanists*" to instruct Hindu supremacist histories.⁴²

There is no shortage of historical discourse found on *Organizer's* online repository; a simple search on of "history" on its engine will yield dozens of editorials debating some historical narrative with most of them tagged as in the "Bharat" category. Here, I focus on an article by Prof. Rajiv Chopra titled the "Narratology of Hindu Genocide in India," published in June 2022.⁴³ Though the editorial is tagged under "Opinion" rather than "Bharat" or "Analysis," Prof. Chopra's use of the term "Narratology" in the title promises a historiographic discourse that attempts to unpack a trope or frame commonly cited in contemporary histories. Affixing the title of "Professor" in front of his name also declares to the reader an air of experience on the subject matter; his other published works in *Organizer* include the analysis "Hindu Universalism and Dharmic Roots of Buddhism" and the Bharat piece "Recalling Sangh's contribution to freedom struggle," with both titles suggesting a degree of historiographic literacy. A professor of commerce and former principal at the Delhi College of Arts and Commerce affiliated with Delhi University, Prof. Chopra seems to have run into some career friction for unpublicized reasons as he was removed from his post as principal, an administrative decision which he threatened to take to court in 2020.⁴⁴ In a welcome address published on the Delhi College site, he markets his

⁴² Udayakumar, *Presenting the Past*, 31.

⁴³ Prof Rajiv Chopra, "Narratology of Hindu Genocide in India," *Organizer*, June 8, 2022, <https://organiser.org/2022/06/08/84719/opinion/narratology-of-hindu-genocide-in-india/>.

⁴⁴ "DU College Principal Removed," *The Hindu*, May 25, 2020, sec. Delhi, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/du-college-principal-removed/article31674846.ece>.

college as an institution that “creatively negotiate[s] between traditional values and the possibilities offered by the modern world, to create a space where students can blossom into confident and sensitive young adults, forge lifelong relationships, ready to take on the world.” He ends his address with a word from Rabindranath Tagore: “The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence.”⁴⁵ These declarations of Chopra’s pedagogical sentiments that connote values of holism and “harmony” find brutal and violent expression in “Narratology of Hindu Genocide.”

In his “negotiation” of traditional values and modern possibilities, we find the collapse of historical contextualization and a strong polemical edge determined to refute perceived historiographical wrongs. The article features an untitled and uncontextualized black and white photograph of throngs of shirtless, emaciated bodies being corralled by gun-wielding, cap-wearing soldiers (Figure 1). A Google Image search yields that this image is found in the Wikimedia Commons, reproduced in the Wikipedia entry on the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. Considering the subject matter of the article, perhaps the author thought that the mise-en-scene in the photo captured an instance of violent Hindu suppression at the hands of armed Muslim aggressors, which is a communal narrative of the Malabar revolt that the BJP has certainly attempted to perpetrate.⁴⁶ Though the violent event indeed resulted in reported murders of Hindus on religious grounds as well as forced conversions, the image the article foregrounds displays the Mappila, or Malabar Muslim, rebels themselves being corralled by none other than

⁴⁵ Chopra, “Welcome to Delhi College of Arts & Commerce,” accessed March 12, 2024, <https://dcac.du.ac.in/principal-desk>.

⁴⁶ Shoaib Daniyal, “Revolt against British or Communal Riot? Removal of Kerala Mural Revives Debate on Moplah Rebellion,” *Scroll.In*, November 13, 2018, <https://scroll.in/article/901670/revolt-against-british-or-communal-riot-removal-of-kerala-mural-revives-debate-on-moplah-rebellion>.

the British Colonial Army, which in many accounts of the Rebellion was the initial target of agitation. In this reading, the image of the emaciated, corralled bodies is of primarily Muslim bodies. Of course, a contradictory reading of the image could attempt to indicate that the Muslim bodies themselves are offensive with respect to the crime they committed; “these are throngs of murderers that must be surveilled,” Chopra may counter to us. The point here is that this contradiction is maintained through the de-contextualization and de-historicization of the image to produce a complicated affect that engages with an unspecified point in the past—negotiated by the black and white composition—within the reader that “disjoins time” and inculcates an anxiety.

Addressing the text of the article, Chopra’s presentation of the Muslim Other is clear and simplified within this discourse, as he primarily works with the identity categories of Hindus and Muslims. No real distinction is made between which “Muslim” or “Hindu” group is at fault or being persecuted, except a couple of proper nouns like Babur and Timur. Furthermore, he rhetorically creates a double front where he polemicizes not only against the object of the historical alterity, Muslims, but also against rival historiographic discourse producers:

Hindus have suffered religious persecution and systematic brutality in the form of forced conversion, massacres, demolition, and vandalism of educational institutions and temples. It’s unclear how many Hindus Islam has killed...All direct documented evidence is Islamic: court records, history books (testimonial and synthesizing), and Timur and Babar’s autobiographies. Few are in Arabic or Turki. Nehruvian and their Indologists try to diminish Islamic crimes by saying chroniclers exaggerated to flatter their supporters because killing unbelievers was highly regarded in Islam (which reveals a lot about Islam’s principles).⁴⁷

Here, we see the repetition of the alterity and its multiplicitous forms. The Muslim Other committed the historical crimes of mass violence—Chopra entertains the notion of labelling this

⁴⁷ Chopra, “Narratology of Hindu Genocide in India,” para. 1.

“genocide” below where it not for the term’s “overuse—but it is aided and abetted by the “Nehruvian-cum-Marxist” historians who dress the crime and obfuscate its communal nature. The author possesses a historiographical awareness when he factors in how “[a]ny violation of the canon of the scholarship will generate an impression of ‘anti-science’, ‘amateurism’, ‘superstition’, or ‘jingoistic history distortion’ [to the “fake” historians and secularist media].”⁴⁸ He is clearly aware of the positivistic domains of discourse his critics operate in and is able to muster a historiographical critique of his own, while also urging in a call to action for his comrades to “present the facts accurately.” Chopra does not make this critique a generic statement but rather converses with a literature within Hindutva historiography by citing Koenraad Elst, a Belgian-born Indophile who wrote “Negationism in India—Concealing the Record of Islam.” This text, published in the Flemish monthly journal *Nucleus* in 1992 when it supposedly faced “pro-Islamic pressure,” compares the “negationism” found in Holocaust denial to the Indian brand of negationism peddled by the Indian intelligentsia who “deny that there ever was a Hindu-Moslem conflict. They shamelessly rewrite history and conjure up centuries of Hindu-Moslem amity; now a growing section of the public in India and the West only knows their negationist version of history.”⁴⁹ Thus, Chopra presents a logically informed historiographical critique by speaking to a broader literature that pushes forward a “communal” rendering of history, but in this critique he works with decontextualized categories that carry ambiguities in minute details, such as his display of the Malabar Rebellion image. Though the categories of “Hindu” and “Muslim” that he projects seem to be stable, the enemy he names as who he is arguing against seem not to be the Muslim minority of today, but the historical

⁴⁸ Ibid, para. 5.

⁴⁹ Koenraad Elst, *Negationism in India: Concealing the Record of Islam* (The Voice of India, 1992), 8, <http://archive.org/details/negationism-in-india-concealing-the-record-of-islam>.

“Muslim” who is guarded from outright condemnation and exorcism by the secularist intelligentsia. Chopra is haunted by the historical Muslim and the haze of consciousness that, in his view, alters modern Indian historical memory. Time again is off-kilter.

As the field of historical discourse production widens, legitimate sources like politicians or regime agitprop are not the only ones forwarding the discourses. Social media has become a new frontier for these discourses to develop and circulate, prompting and provoking the affects of both sides of the historiographical debate. As observed by a well-established body of research, Hindutva thrives in cyberspace.⁵⁰ Sahana Udupa’s work on “enterprise Hindutva” and social media, along with Deepa Reddy and Anustap Basu, corroborates the idea of a “diffuse logic” to the movement in cyberspace, where there is no coherent ideological kernel being transmitted by the plethora of actors in these virtual spaces.⁵¹ Specific social media platforms carry economic logics for the sake of gathering data and generating engagement. They prioritize and incentivize behaviors that lead to trolling, mobbing, and disseminating misinformation. The Hindutva movement’s latest prerogative to bring together different segments of societies thrives in such a cyberspace, creating an assemblage that contains “a variety of motivations and dispersed actors, allowing contradictions to flourish.”⁵²

Historical discourse is not insulated from this phenomenon. Social media becomes another discourse production site that also produces and circulates the image of the Muslim

⁵⁰ See Sahana Udupa, “Enterprise Hindutva and Social Media in Urban India,” *Contemporary South Asia* 26, no. 4 (October 2, 2018): 453–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2018.1545007>; Deepa Reddy, “Hindutva as Praxis,” *Religion Compass* 5, no. 8 (2011): 412–26, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2011.00288.x>; Kiran Vinod Bhatia, “Hindu Nationalism Online: Twitter as Discourse and Interface,” *Religions* 13, no. 8 (August 2022): 739, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13080739>.

⁵¹ Udupa, “Enterprise Hindutva and Social Media in Urban India,” 456.

⁵² *Ibid*, 465.

Other, though this projection may not be as well cited or subtle as the ones heretofore discussed. This discursive site also produces the effect of a disjointed time and indicates hauntings of the historical alterity. Focusing on Twitter, now branded as “X,” I turn to a close reading of a piece of social media discourse located in “Enterprise Hindutva,” or alternatively “Hindutva Twitter,” that emerged shortly after the outbreak of the Israeli war of retribution against Gaza after the October 7th “al-Aqsa Flood” attacks. The Modi regime’s support for Israel in the aftermath of the attacks has been widely noticed by commentators, as the Islamophobic tendencies of the former found a kindred spirit in Netanyahu’s genocidal campaign in the Palestinian territories.⁵³ In this climate, a young content creator uploaded a video discussing the new ideological convalescence between Modi’s and Netanyahu’s initiatives to vilify and exterminate Muslim populations on account of their religious nationalist goals.⁵⁴

The video creator was assailed with a maelstrom of abuse and harassment, much of which featured disgusting personal attacks. In the mud, the nameless throngs of trolls did employ historical discourses about the Muslim Other that demonstrates the ubiquity of such tropes in online Hindutva spaces. They also demonstrate how tropes that are specific to the Indian case collide with global idioms of Islamophobia and general right-wing, culture-war discourses. Content aggregator “MeghUpdates” reposted the video, captioning it with “Wokeism is a disease.” (Figure 2) The post received considerable engagement on X with 922.8 thousand

⁵³ Daniel Markey, “Amid War in the Middle East, India-Israel Ties Reach New Milestone,” *United States Institute of Peace* (blog), November 7, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/11/amid-war-middle-east-india-israel-ties-reach-new-milestone>.

⁵⁴ The source video is difficult to ascertain because of how it is cross-posted on different platforms without identifying markers. For protecting the identity of the video creator, I will not include any identifying information here and instead reference the media discourses surrounding the video.

views, 2.5 thousand comments, and 3 thousand retweets. The account borrows the source video from “Laav Patel” whose handle is “@VaidikaHindu” (Vedic Hindu). One of the top comments under MeghUpdates’ repost is from “Pratik V,” self-avowed “consultant, research junkie, and dissemination expert.” With 1.9 thousand likes, Pratik shares “Surprisingly, all these wokes talk about British colonisation of 200 years but not Islamic plunder and colonisation of 400+ years.”

55

Corrections to the periodization are offered below this post, with some claiming that 800, 1,000, 1,200, and 1,500 years are more accurate measures. Many other interlocutors agree with Pratik’s assessment and cite the video creator’s lack of “true” historical knowledge, contra the “false” and “one sided” history they present. Some light pushback is offered by contextualizing the Islamic period of India by either referring to the coordinated system of rule the Muslim sultans employed or by revising these periods of domination as ultimately periods of progress for India (Figure 3). However, this light pushback is immediately met with dissent. Most often, the discourse of plundered temples is invoked alongside invocations of cultural prescripts ordained by Muslim rulers. “Tipu Sultan” is specifically named in one segment. Again, this discourse collapses history through acts of decontextualization and dismissal. Time periods are fungible, adding to the temporal disjoining effect. They use established historiographical tropes but in a diffuse manner that provokes emotions rather than present a cogent argument. Academic responses to this manner of discourse often miss this point and frame their criticisms either by dismissing this discourse as nonsensical drivel or by appealing to the “facts.” The next chapter

⁵⁵ Pratik V [@ResearchMonk], “@MeghUpdates Surprisingly, All These Wokes Talk about British Colonisation of 200 Years but Not Islamic Plunder and Colonisation of 400+ Years.,” Tweet, *Twitter*, November 17, 2023, <https://twitter.com/ResearchMonk/status/1725448278433792061>.

will further detail the critical response to this historiographical current in the Hindutva movement.

V.

This chapter contended with the hauntology of the Muslim Other in contemporary Hindutva historical discourses. Moving beyond the commonly attributed ideological originary point with Savarkar, we observed a range of historiography produced in discourse markets in high and intermediary politics. As others have theorized, this “Hindutva 2.0” is diffuse in how it incorporates its discourses. It relies on decontextualization and simplified narratives that become “communicable mythograms” that provoke the discourse consumer rather than present a coherent argument to persuade them through logic. Historical time becomes “off its hinges” as these discourses produce an air of general anxiety on the “ghosts” of the past; this is an active process achieved by manipulating notions of historical time through decontextualization and erasure. “Feeling” takes precedence over “fact” in these discourses. Given the inchoate nature of this historical alterity that is presented by the discourse producers in this chapter, the Muslim Other models similarly to Savarkar’s own representation. Modi, Chopra, and Hindutva Twitter form dynamic representations of the Muslim Other, emphasizing various faces of its *das mukh* assemblage according to the expediencies of the moment of utterance. Thus, the only facet constant in the representation of the Muslim Other is its multiplicitous and pluralistic nature. Despite the Hindutva regime’s insistence on the singularity of the subcontinental Muslim, their own representations of the alterity undercut this. How do the guardians of Lanka, the historians and activists embroiled in this “war for history” to use Dalrymple’s phrase, react to this tide of Othering?

Chapter III—The Guild’s Riposte: Preserving the Muslim (Past) in Indian History Today

I.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF), 2005, recommends that children’s life at school must be linked to their life outside the school. This principle marks a departure from the legacy of bookish learning which continues to shape our system and causes a gap between the school, home and community... The success of this effort depends on the steps that school principals and teachers will take to encourage children to reflect on their own learning and to pursue imaginative activities and questions. We must recognise that, given space, time and freedom, children generate new knowledge by engaging with the information passed on to them by adults.

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to reduce content load on students. The National Education Policy 2020 also emphasises reducing the content load and providing opportunities for experiential learning with creative mindset. In this background, the NCERT has undertaken the exercise to *rationalise* [emphasis mine] the textbooks across all classes.¹

Commentators both international and domestic stirred a media storm in 2023 when news broke that the National Council of Educational Research and Training in India revised their textbooks. These revisions, made under the claim of “rationalizing” student workloads due to the duress of the pandemic, deleted key passages pertaining to Muslim rule in India during the medieval and early modern periods.² These articles emphasize the “revisionary” nature of what NCERT is striving for by writing Muslims out of the annals of Indian history, with one

¹ Bijnan Sutar, ed., *Themes in Indian History Part II*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: National Council of Educational Research and Training, 2022), v–vii.

² Mansoor, “India’s School Textbooks Are the Latest Battleground for Hindu Nationalism”; Shrishti Jaswal, “Mughals, RSS, Evolution: Outrage as India Edits School Textbooks | History News | Al Jazeera,” April 14, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/14/mughals-rss-evolution-outrage-as-india-edits-school-textbooks>; R Mahalakshmi, “History Textbook Deletions: Why NCERT Argument That It Is Trying to Reduce Pressure on Students Is Weak,” *The Indian Express* (blog), April 6, 2023, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/history-textbook-deletions-ncert-argument-weak-8542044/>.

interlocutor calling this act “signs of an impending genocide.”³ As others point out, NCERT’s transformation into a tool of the BJP regime began as far back as 2014 during Modi’s rise to power, wherein RSS leaders like Dinanth Batra headed committees seeking to “Indianize” the educational curriculum.⁴ These omissions were met with intense disavowal and rebuttal from professional journalists and historians in India itself, while also receiving international audiences like in the American academy.⁵ Though differing truth claims over history is endemic to the historical writing process and Hindutva is known for fudging its narratives by blending them with “myth,” why this hullabaloo over textbooks now? After all, are not *all* textbooks themselves complicit in nationalist projects where “common” narratives of the past are projected to the impressionable younger generations?⁶

As the interlocutor above alluded to, the stakes are much higher in India as the group being written out of these common narratives, Indian Muslims, are at the risk of extermination by the state. The year 2019, when the Modi regime began to solidify its grip over Indian political institutions, brought many legislative changes that threatened the position of Muslims in the country. The abrogation of Article 370, which allowed the Muslim-majority state of Jammu and Kashmir a relative degree of political self-autonomy, led to an authoritarian clampdown on civil

³ Mansoor, “India’s School Textbooks Are the Latest Battleground for Hindu Nationalism.”

⁴ Jaffrelot, *Modi’s India*, 169–75; Sylvie Guichard, *The Construction of History and Nationalism in India: Textbooks, Controversies and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203848579>.

⁵ Ritika Chopra, “Express Investigation — Part 1: From Emergency to Gujarat Riots, Lessons of Past Deleted from Textbooks of Future,” *The Indian Express*, June 18, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/express-exclusive/express-investigation-part-1-from-emergency-to-gujarat-riots-lessons-of-past-deleted-from-textbooks-of-future-7976207/>; Hamaad Habibullah, “Erasing the Past: The Indian Government’s Dishonest History,” *AHA Perspectives on History*, January 23, 2024, <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/january-2024/erasing-the-past-the-indian-governments-dishonest-history>.

⁶ Mario Carretero, Mikel Asensio, and María Rodríguez-Moneo, *History Education and the Construction of National Identities* (IAP, 2013), 49–55.

unrest that violated the human rights of the state's denizens.⁷ After targeting the Muslim-majority state that contests the nationalist borders, the Modi regime looked inward and passed an amendment to the Indian Citizenship Act that excluded Muslim migrants from pathways to citizenship, setting a religious criteria for recognition by the state in the erstwhile "secular" democracy. Though the law was approved by the government in 2019 and provoked a widespread protest throughout the country, the Act will be put into force by the second quarter of 2024 ahead of the incoming elections.⁸ These threats to the citizenship of Indian Muslims are not relegated to amorphous legal categories either, as massive detention centers are being built to house the soon-to-be non-citizens of the country.⁹ Thus, the concern over the erasure of India's Muslim past maps onto the ongoing erasure of Muslims' legal and social position within the state itself.

Understandably so, no front is too "theoretical" or too "academic" in the advocacy of Indian Muslims. Scholars, journalists, and activists all have worked together to combat the spread of rampant anti-Muslim rhetoric in contemporary India. In this chapter, I will survey these responses to the circulation of the Muslim Other trope in contemporary historical discourses and the multiplicitous ways that critics of Hindutva confront such dangerous rhetoric. I also will explore the affective dimensions of this struggle, arguing that approaching Hindutva's projection of the Muslim Other from a purely positivistic, empirical perspective is only half the battle.

⁷ "India: Basic Freedoms at Risk in Kashmir | Human Rights Watch," August 6, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/08/06/india-basic-freedoms-risk-kashmir>.

⁸ "India Implements 'Anti-Muslim' 2019 Citizenship Law Weeks before Election," *Al Jazeera*, March 11, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/11/india-implements-anti-muslim-2019-citizenship-law-weeks-before-election>.

⁹ Mobashra Tazamal, "The Islamophobia Pandemic: The Rise of Muslim Detention Camps in Asia," *Byline Times*, July 16, 2021, <https://bylinetimes.com/2021/07/16/the-islamophobia-pandemic-the-rise-of-muslim-detention-camps-in-asia/>.

Devoting our energies as scholar-activists to purely “debunking” Hindutva historiography on empirical bases ignores the affective elements at play in their rhetoric. It assumes that the Hindutva discourse apparatus is primarily engaged in an epistemological mission with their chief concern being knowledge production, and not that they are also engaging in an ontological program to define the Hindu *rashtra* itself and what it means to be Hindu and, contrarily, what it means to not be one. Savarkar, Modi, and the intermediary agents in between have spent decades inculcating this program which requires engagement on empirical, emotional, and narrational fronts to properly dismantle. In short, we must produce *better narratives* in our effort to stem the tide against Hindutva.

II.

In the recent history of the discipline, historians have begun to take social positions as critics of power, rather than aiding and abetting it as they did during the colonial period in places like the British empire.¹⁰ Therefore, the “guild” proper has taken an invested interest in leading the charge against Hindutva historiography by branding it as “revisionary” and dangerous to its core. In an op-ed from the American Historical Association’s newsmagazine *Perspectives on History*, published in 2024, Hamaad Habibullah writes about the significant elisions and erasures that the recent textbook revisions make about Muslim history in India, resulting in “radical manipulation and selective elimination of historical topics such as the Mughal Empire and themes that contradict the present government’s narratives, alongside demonization of the Muslim rulers of India whom the BJP equates with the current Muslim population.”¹¹ The freelance article ties these revisionary attempts to the BJP’s overall anti-Muslim politic, though

¹⁰ Satia, *Time’s Monster*, 245–98.

¹¹ Habibullah, “Erasing the Past.”

this trope is not the only educational subject they targeted as units about Gandhi's assassination and various STEM curricula also received dramatic changes. Thus, Habibullah finds in the textbooks broader revisions that extend beyond Muslim histories but into other domains of knowledge as well. Additionally, he does not consider how in the intellectual genealogy of modern day Hindutva tracing back to Savarkar, a narrow horizon of unity did exist for Hindus and Muslims and that the high politics of Indian history was distinguished from the quotidian Indian Muslim, who in Savarkar's words, had cause to hate the Mughal sovereign.¹² In this AHA opinion-editorial, written by a journalist rather than a historian, the historical background of Hindutva's anti-Muslim rhetoric remains unacknowledged, treating the phenomenon as a byproduct of solely modern political processes. Despite this, it is noteworthy that historiography has at all entered the domain of journalistic inquiry precisely because of the stakes mentioned above.

While this may have been one of the guild's preliminary responses, Rutgers historian Audrey Truschke has been fighting this historiographical battle for a lengthier period of time at a great personal cost to her own safety and well-being. A publicly card carrying member of the South Asia Scholar Activist Collective (SASAC), Truschke has been combatting Hindutva historical revisionism through both her public presence as an academic on X/Twitter and through her formal scholarship as well, even enduring (and evading) a defamation lawsuit from the known Hindutva advocacy group, Hindu American Federation, as a result of her online activity as a watchdog, monitoring their use of U.S. federal COVID relief funding.¹³ Her articles back up

¹² Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, 337.

¹³ "US Court Dismisses Hindutva Group's Defamation Case against Academic Audrey Truschke, Four Activists," *Scroll.In*, December 21, 2022, <https://scroll.in/latest/1040232/us-court-dismisses-hindutva-groups-defamation-case-against-academic-audrey-truschke-four-activists>.

her activist persuasion. Writing for both academic and nonacademic audiences, Truschke has published numerous articles detailing Hindutva's historical discourse. In the *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, she published "Hindutva's Dangerous Rewriting of History" in which she identifies the dominant categories and tropes Hindutva ideologues use to construct their historical narratives: "In this article, I outline some of the patterns in how Hindutva ideologues construct a fanciful past and, now that they enjoy broad political power in India, how they disseminate their mythology, which often supplants scholarly inquiry. I argue that outlandish Hindutva claims regarding the past are most fruitfully understood to be, in the end, about present-day goals and anxieties. Nonetheless, Hindutva interventions have deep implications for both popular and academic understandings of Indian history."¹⁴ Truschke confirms in her thesis my point in the previous chapter that Hindutva ideologues now enjoy position of power, giving them access to disseminate their "mythologies." This proximity to power that her targets enjoy allows Truschke to deploy a more forceful rhetoric in her reproach against these historiographical narratives. Outright, Truschke condemns these historical discourses as "fanciful, outlandish" myths that "supplant scholarly inquiry" and are "about present-day goals and anxieties." She is firmly locked into the "debunking" frame by considering these discourses as serious historical scholarship that needs to be emphatically delegitimized and falsified for its dangerous claims on empirical grounds. She situates the professional academic historian in a logocentric paradigm where the boundaries of fact and fiction are clear, and any attempt to blur the boundaries between the two categories must be met with hostile denunciation.

¹⁴ Audrey Truschke, "Hindutva's Dangerous Rewriting of History," *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal*, no. 24/25 (December 15, 2020): 2, <https://doi.org/10.4000/samaj.6636>.

Aware of the necessity of targeting public history channels as an avenue to combat this misinformation, she writes: “In terms of influencing public opinion about history, it is not clear that we have the right tool set to succeed against the Hindu Right. Any debate with Hindutva ideologues features sophistry more than substance, and the ethics of historians prevent us from copying their dishonesty and bellicose demeanor. But, if we bow to political pressure and do not continue the pursuit of history or do so only within the ivory tower, then we cede entirely the realm of public-facing historical work and fail to help people understand the perverse nature of Hindutva approaches to the past.”¹⁵ By labelling her opponents as concerned with “sophistry” over “substance,” Truschke indicates an awareness that Hindutva agents are not concerned with knowledge production as their primary goal, but the hijacking of the public’s affective relationship to their history. Elsewhere, she even acknowledges that this mission is carried out under the frame of “decolonization,” a buzzword in mainstream academic and progressive circles.¹⁶ Certainly, as Modi’s previous reference to “*ghate hue* narratives” shows us, Hindutva actors premise their ideological mission on removing the mental shackles that the colonial period inflicted upon the minds of Indians. Here, we see the deployment of “decolonizing history” rhetoric that stands opposed to colonial historiography like that of the British, but yet it furthers its own violent, subjectivizing mission against undesirable populations. In other words, claims at “rationality” or “scientific” views of history are being made by both sides of the political aisle and standing in the center of this struggle is “historicism” itself.

¹⁵ Ibid, 10.

¹⁶ Audrey Truschke, “‘Decolonizing’ Indians Through Hindutva Ideological Control,” *শুদ্ধস্বর Free Voice*, April 30, 2022, <https://shuddhashar.com/decolonizing-indians-through-hindutva-ideological-control/>.

Truschke is aware of the high stakes of this debate for India's Muslim past which stands to be extricated from the history books as the real population stands to be from the Hindu *rashtra*. She selected as a zone of resistance against this violent historiography the visage of a recognizable manifestation of this Muslim Other: Aurangzeb himself. We have established the symbolic power imbued in the image of Aurangzeb to Hindutva, who have attributed to him an unambiguous beastliness (*darendagi*). Indeed, to rehabilitate this monarch's image is a controversial act even in secularist circles who denounce him due to his perceived hyper-sectarianism. Nehru himself wrote in *The Discovery of India* "Aurangzeb, far from understanding the present, failed even to appreciate the immediate past; he was a throw-back and, for all his ability and earnestness, he tried to undo what his predecessors had done. A bigot and an austere puritan, he was no lover of art or literature."¹⁷ Using textual sources like the high *tarikh* or "histories" genre of Persian writing, Truschke strives to offer a "new narrative" of the contentious emperor:

Setting the record straight falls within a historian's purview, and this much is true: Aurangzeb was less malevolent than his contemporary reputation would have us believe. But by merely trumpeting that Aurangzeb did not show total depravity, we do not move beyond the terms set by popular condemnations of Aurangzeb. More troublingly, we fail to do justice to India's intricate past. Surely there is more to say about a man who ruled for half a century and reshaped the political landscape of precolonial India than whether he is palatable according to twenty-first-century sensibilities? We must resist the strong, modern instinct to summarily judge Aurangzeb and, instead, first recover what we can about the actions and ideas of this influential king.¹⁸

Here, Truschke again appeals to her obligations as a member of the guild to, empirically, "set the record straight." Yet, she espouses awareness that she is contending with a narrational element as

¹⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India*, 1946, 271, <http://archive.org/details/DiscoveryOfIndia>.

¹⁸ Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Man and the Myth* (Gurgaon, India: Penguin/Random House India, 2017), 24.

well, as she could risk valorizing Aurangzeb in attempt to save his image from demonization. Linked with this tension is her commitment to keep the past *as past* and not encumber it with modern “sensibilities.” Earlier, she denounced this blurring between the categories in Hindutva historiography, maintaining an aversion of “presentist readings” that is on-brand in the contemporary historical establishment.

This critical distance of present and past raises questions about the contemporary historian’s mission: is Truschke not responding to a presentist concern herself, as evidenced by her signing on with a scholar activist collective (SASAC)? Surely, with the legal marginalization of Muslims in India imminent, Truschke has no qualms tying her scholarly mission with her activist persuasion. What cognitive legwork allows her to dismiss Hindutva’s attempts at refashioning historical narratives and admit as permissible her own? Two potential caveats come to mind. On one hand, Truschke can justify her narratives on empirical grounds as she is conducting close critical work on her sources, contra Hindutva agents who by and large invent their fabricated pasts with loose invocations to their scriptures. In fact, she does this in the book itself by alluding to how “[m]odern historians read historical sources with rigour. This means that we place texts in their wider social and literary contexts, weigh and assess evidence, and compare texts to one another.”¹⁹ Secondly and more implicitly, Truschke can justify her project on pure political grounds. Her position as a historian-activist is in service to protect the disenfranchised and marginal subjects of her place of study, India. Plain and simple, she advocates for their protection when her adversaries push for their extrication and erasure. Taking this liberal-progressive position and a moral stance on the issue allows Truschke as a historian, in White’s terms, the “metahistorical consciousness” needed to adjudicate different narratives for

¹⁹ Ibid, 118.

their validity.²⁰ Indeed, present and past are not so bounded even in the guild's historiographical recovery of the Muslim Other.

III.

The guild abroad has been especially proactive in combatting international Hindutva as the “Hindutva Harassment Field Manual” run by the South Asia Scholar Activist Collective can attest to. This field resource provides resources and tips to thwart Hindutva intimidation tactics as we observed in the last chapter, primarily in cyberspaces. In this collective, historians form a significant block as evidenced by the publicly listed members: Manan Ahmed, Ananya Chakravarti, Purnima Dhavan, and Audrey Truschke.²¹ Though professional historians affiliated with North American academic institutions make a significant contingent of the resistance, academics based out of India as well other actors outside of mainstream academia have waded into historical discourse production to join the fray against the Hindutva movement.

Tanika Sarkar, historian at Jawaharlal Nehru University, continues to be a vocal critic of the movement's historical narratives, outright connecting them to the ongoing violence that Muslims in the country are subject to. In a chapter for an edited volume, Sarkar exposes “How the Sangh Parivar Writes and Teaches History” and identifies the reasons the Hindutva movement cathects into history: “Much can be explained, I think, by the critical role of the historical lessons that the Sangh conglomerate produces. What the ‘science’ of race difference was to Nazi ideology, the discipline of history is to Hindutva: a claim to ‘formal knowledge’, which exalts political mission as accredited Truth. But whereas Nazi power lasted twelve years, the Hindu Right has been pursuing knowledge-production and dissemination for ninety-three

²⁰ White, *Metahistory*, 51.

²¹ “About SASAC,” South Asia Scholar Activist Collective, accessed March 30, 2024, <https://www.southasiacollective.org/>.

years now.”²² Sarkar here expressed poignantly through analogy a central claim running through in these preceding chapters: that history as an epistemological project enables the Hindutva movement an empirical base upon which they can project and actuate their ideology. History functions *as* racial sciences functioned to the Nazi regime in legitimating by empiricizing the Othering embedded in their worldviews. In departure with some other interlocutors who may see such discourses as merely propaganda or hate speech, Sarkar sees this as genuine knowledge-production. In the rest of the article, she surveys mainstream avenues of how such knowledge was disseminated pedagogically through Indian academic institutions. The Muslim Other trope is deeply embedded in these historiographical discourses, Sarkar finds, with the whole identity dissolving into the “figure of the invader.”²³ She captures the the instability of the Muslim Other representation in Hindutva historiography: “The Muslim becomes an open, floating signifier on which any kind of Hindu communalised histories can be freely inscribed. At the same time, he is also a closed category, representing fanaticism and oppression alone...A glorious medley of referents, a universe of magical realism calling itself history.”²⁴

Again, as we see above with Truschke, Sarkar as a member of the guild differentiates what her political opponents are doing as “magical realism” from “history” proper. Sarkar is cognizant of this critique as she later writes: “Their failure to compete with RSS public histories has often been blamed on their ‘scientific’, secular approach. That, however, is not a correct nor a fair diagnosis. The flaw actually lies in their circumscribed view of educational dissemination, a focus on national level textbooks: written by the best minds, no doubt, but in isolation from

²² Sarkar, “How the Sangh Parivar Writes and Teaches History,” 152.

²³ Ibid, 157.

²⁴ Ibid.

local, organic social-cultural processes.”²⁵ Thus, Sarkar does not blame the secular-left historians’ ineffectiveness at combatting these narratives at the level of analysis but rather a matter of rhetoric dissemination; she maintains that scientific-secular critiques of these histories are the proper way forward but we must conduct a more encompassing dissemination effort. Her conclusion is certainly correct if partial. As Chaturvedi showed us, history is not downstream of Hindutva’s political objectives but rather steeped in it. Treating history as a purely epistemological domain that does not carry with it sacral significance elides the true stakes of the discourse for the adherent of Hindutva ideology. Sarkar clearly understands the stakes for the targets of such harassing discourse: Muslims. In her conceptualization, history becomes a club that the Hindutva agent wields against his Muslim target. But what is driving the agent to wield the club and beat his target in the first place?

In order to dive into the cultural stakes behind this mission by Hindutva, I will dedicate space to recounting a non-academic attempt to thwart this historiographic Othering. Of course, this fight for the preservation of the Muslim Other is, echoing Sarkar, happening at a “local, organic” level across different strata of society; for my purposes, I will pay attention to a more artistically inclined usage of history created by Muslim subjects currently operating out of India: a play written by a non-playwright. Penned by Indian Muslim journalist Saeed Naqvi, *The Muslim Vanishes*, follows the country of India immediately after the disappearance of its Muslim population in a rapture-like event.²⁶ Published with wide critical acclaim and with one reviewer asserting that it is “[a] dire warning about the future if the true wisdom of the past is ignored,” Naqvi who is himself neither historian nor playwright plays with historical narrative in this stage

²⁵ Ibid, 173.

²⁶ Saeed Naqvi, *The Muslim Vanishes* (Vintage Books, 2022).

play that imagines the future that the Hindutva movement wants to usher in. In his preface which he titles “Not in the Play,” he admits that wrote the text as an exercise of contending with the “amalgamation” of political issues that have been attached to the “Muslim question” in India which include not only the political ascendancy of the Hindu Right but also the issue of Kashmir, the legacy of Partition, the problem of caste inequality, and the globally perceived threat of “Islamic terror.”²⁷ This slate of political issues that attach themselves to the signifier of the Muslim Other could only be parsed out, according to Naqvi, “by a format of dialogue, point-counterpoint, peel by peel like an onion, all set in a fast-paced drama to keep the attention riveted.”²⁸

While there is no straightforward narrative following a protagonist laid out, the play follows vignettes of different characters contending with the vanishing of Muslims along with their cultural contributions to India’s scape. Though the material contributions like the Qutub Minar and the Mughal miniature paintings return after a panicked reaction by the citizenry, the Muslims do not. The narrative itself in later scenes deploy an nonlinear and dreamlike fabrication of history where elite cultural icons from India’s past like Amir Khosrow, Kabir, and Tulsidas appear as characters in the third act which depicts a court room scene where a Hindu representative and Muslim representative litigate if Muslims may belong in the Indian country at all. In this scene, where the aforementioned premodern subjects “time-traveled” to sit in the jury, the Muslim objects to the Hindu’s charge the Somnatha was raided by Mahmud of Ghazni for dogmatic reasons and, more broadly, his retelling of Islam’s 1,300-year-old history as a story

²⁷ Ibid, 10.

²⁸ Ibid, 11-12.

ridden with “religious persecutions, demolition of temples, forced conversions” with an appeal to the renowned historian Romila Thapar herself:

MR: Let me quote what the distinguished historian Romila Thapar had to say about this in her book *History of Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*.² [Reading from the book] ‘There is no reference in contemporary or near contemporary local sources of the raid on Somanatha, barring a passing mention in a Jaina text, nor is there any discussion of what might have been a reaction, let alone a trauma among Hindus. Jaina sources describe the renovation of the temple by Kumarapala, the Chalukya King, the reasons for its falling into disrepair were said to be a lack of maintenance by negligent local officers and the natural decay of age. Two centuries after the raid, in the thirteenth century, a wealthy shipowning merchant from Hormuz Persia, trading at Somanatha, was given permission by the Somanatha town authorities to build a mosque in the vicinity of the now renovated temple and to buy land and property for the maintenance of the mosque. He was warmly welcomed and received assistance from the Chalukya–Vaghela administration, the local elite of thakkuras and ranakas, and the Shaiva temple priests.’²⁹

Consider the layered effect of historiographical discourse produced in this literal citation of Romila Thapar. As per the stage direction, the Muslim directly quotes word for word a historian rather than relaying this information in more subtle fashion. In a play that already distorts the strict bounds of temporality that history is predicated on—Amir Khosrow is in the jury after all—Naqvi pays fidelity to the academic historian’s craft by creating a separate textual space for its invocation and reciting it carefully. In doing so, the text maintains a critical distance between its own artist-activist intent to depict the centrality of the Muslim in Indian history and the historian’s craft which, though it may share the activist intent, does not deal with the affect generated by the work of art directly at least. In short, historical discourse operates in two different capacities simultaneously and the author holds these two operations as separate. In the delivery of the verdict of the jury, Amir Khosrow takes on the voice of the author and poetically

²⁹ Ibid, 80-81. Quotes from Romila Thapar, *The Penguin History of Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*, (Penguin India, 2003), pp. 430–31.

relays that in order for the “Gordian knot” of political issues that prevented the Muslims from returning to unravel, the legacy of Partition must be addressed: “In simple terms, Indo–Pak friendship, on mutually beneficial terms, will resolve a whole complex of issues.”³⁰

Bracketing aside the validity of his proposed remedy, Naqvi poignantly captures in artistic form the complexity of the Muslim Other assemblage which as I have reiterated connects to a slate of other political questions that produce a chimeric representation of Hindutva’s enemy, the historical alterity. The delivery of this historical discourse through artistic expression holds the potential to engage the viewer multi-sensorily and move his affect in similar ways as Hindutva rhetoric moves the affects of its discourse consumers. One reviewer from the Wire succinctly captures this affective element to the play: “Naqvi’s play is a universal plea for empathy, while fully recognising the apathy that prevails like dark matter in the universe. It is saddening yet enlightening. It signifies that history is a legacy to be held on to and not something that you selectively choose to remember.”³¹ As a play rather than a collection of essays or an edited scholarly volume, artistic expressions of shared history have the potential to make change happen by engaging discourse consumers with their senses as well as their intellects.³² As part of Sarkar’s proposed “organic” outreach, this play helps take back history as a discourse field from the agents of Hindutva.

³⁰ Ibid, 131.

³¹ Akash Khurana, “Review: ‘The Muslim Vanishes’ Is a Universal Plea for Empathy in Times of Apathy,” *The Wire*, March 12, 2022, <https://thewire.in/books/the-muslim-vanishes-saeed-naqvi>.

³² Naqvi has also published a collection of essays about his experience being Othered as a Muslim: Saeed Naqvi, *Being the Other: The Muslim in India* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt Ltd, 2016). Another play published earlier that has a similar mission to Naqvi’s is penned by former politician Salman Khurshid and it stars the late Mughal king Bahadur Shah Zafar II in another attempt to preserve Muslim histories of India by blending historical fiction to create space for historiographic reflection: Salman Khurshid, *Sons of Babur: A Play in Search of India* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications India, 2008).

IV.

Returning to the epigraph of this chapter, NCERT's couching of its modifications to history curriculum in the language of departing from "bookish learning" and encouraging "reflection" and the "pursuit of imaginative questions" tie into the questions about approaches to counteracting Hindutva historiography that this chapter raised. NCERT here is admitting to doing to public education what the Hindutva movement has been deliberately doing for decades: slow and careful infiltration into local communities and configuring their domains of knowledge. Admitting this mission in a history book in such public fashion galvanized the professional guild, but it also moved those activists, artists, and organizers outside of the guild to deploy their own responses that lied beyond pure academic refutation. These domains do not have to be distinct as we see in Naqvi's play, for the empirical can mesh with the artistic to create new types of discourse that convey different affects. These examples show the emotional core at the heart of making, writing, and communicating history.

Without this affective element, historicism risks becoming a tyrannical force like the hard "sciences" which stave off critical reflection by asserting aggressively their empirical validity. In the American education system, this dynamic is emblematic of the so-called death of the "humanities" and the domination of STEM in public education. Historical narrative allows for this movement of emotional affect which eventually pushes and pulls bodies and the subjects that are housed in them to lobby for positive social change. Yet, as the previous chapters show, the same logic must be extended even to those who use history's meaning-making power for excluding marginalized groups, like the Hindutva intelligentsia. They are also shaping and manicuring the affect of their adherents, shoring up the discourses of historical shame and directing it against their multiplicitous target. By acknowledging this, we can read Hindutva

historiography as not purely empty drivel but as affective provocations that contribute to forming a historical consciousness by moving the emotions and creating disjointed ontological states.

Thus, the mission to debunk historical claims and thereby preserve India's Muslim past must be done on both logical *and* affective fronts. In a word, we need better narratives that account for both of these fronts.

Conclusion.

“Today our Lord Ram has come. After centuries of waiting, our Ram has arrived,” Modi said. “Our Ram idol will not stay in a tent anymore. Our Ram idol will stay in a divine temple now.” He added: “The sun of 22 January, has brought with it a wonderful aura. 22 January 2024 is not just a date (*tareekh*) on a calendar but a beginning of a new time cycle (*nae kaalachakr ka udgam hai*).”¹

On January 22nd, 2024, the contemporary Hindutva movement achieved their aspiration after decades of grassroots work with the inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, to the tune of affirmative chants, “Jai Shri Ram,” by Saffron-clad devotees. Following this momentous occasion were burst of violence across the country; in their moment of victory, throngs of Saffron-*bhakt*s could not heed their Prime Minister’s warning to “show faith, not aggression,” making no mosque or Muslim safe from their victorious marches of aggression.² However, how could they exert restraint in such an epochal moment? Modi dissolved the date January 22nd from the banality of time recorded on calendars, prophetically heralding a new *samsara*, or a cycle of time, where perhaps the *gulaami* of the previous thousand years can finally be redeemed. Modi’s invocation of the Persian loan word *tareekh* did not escape my ears. *Tareekh* carries with it the valence of the broader current history as well the quotidian meaning of a snapshot of time, a date. January 22nd is denied the connotation of mere date and history, instead being subsumed into the extension of a new epoch or *yuga*. Thus, Ram Mandir’s inauguration or *pran-pratishtha* symbolizes the dawn of a new age where a menial ideology of history is not sufficient to capture the paradigmatic shift that the event brings to the Hindutva mode of being.

¹ Rhea Mogul et al., “India’s Ayodhya Ram Mandir Temple Inauguration,” *CNN*, January 22, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/asia/live-news/india-ram-mandir-ayodhya-inauguration-24-01-22-intl-hnk/index.html>.

² “India: Violence Marks Ram Temple Inauguration | Human Rights Watch,” January 31, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/01/31/india-violence-marks-ram-temple-inauguration>.

This subsumption of history and demarcation of a new ontological category can be observed at the bodily or affective level. Observe the Prime Minister's embodied reaction to this event: "I am present before you after bearing witness to the divine consciousness in the sanctum sanctorum. There is so much to say, but my throat is choked. My body is still trembling, and my mind is still immersed in that moment. Our Ram Lalla will no longer reside in a tent. Our Ram Lalla will now reside in this divine temple."³ The heralding of a new age where the Ram Lalla icon resides in a less transient abode, symbolized in the tent, and moves into a more permanent residence in the state temple built upon the burnt ashes of the Babri mosque affects the Prime Minister in a visceral, emotional way.⁴ Contrast the embodied passion in these opening lines with former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's beginning address at the golden jubilee of the restoration of the Somnatha temple in 2001, wherein after invoking the 125th birthday of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel he goes on to say: "But Somnath is the symbol of our *sanatan sanskriti* (timeless culture), our *shaswat dharma* (eternal religion, way of life), the symbol of successive shifts and changes in our history. History had also witnessed that movement when conquering invaders razed Somnath to the ground. Today too such tendencies are becoming stronger."⁵ Finishing the

³ "English Rendering of PM's Address at the Pran-Pratishtha of Shree Ram Lalla at Ayodhya Ji" (PIB India, January 22, 2024), para. 5, <https://pib.gov.in/pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1998560>.

⁴ Ironically, temples themselves represent temporary abodes for the gods: "As sacred images and symbols in Hindu art represent only temporary receptacles for the gods and goddesses who intermittently inhabit their outer forms, so the temple as a whole is also understood as a temporary abode of the gods in the world of man." George Michell, *The Hindu Temple: An Introduction to Its Meaning and Forms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 62, <http://archive.org/details/hindutempleintro0000mich>. One possible reading of Modi's airs of finality in bringing Ram Lalla to the temple signals a discursive form of entombment of the child god, being bricked alive but also becoming a martyred symbol, or a ghost, for future generations to hold on to in their historical memory.

⁵ Sunil Kumar, *Demolishing Myths or Mosques and Temples? Readings on History and Temple Desecration in Medieval India* (Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective, 2008), 175.

thought via dog whistle about the September 11th attacks, Vajpayee's flight into historicizing Somnath indicates a marked shift from Modi's heraldry of a new age. The former is very much *in time* or discoursing with a notion of historical time while the latter breaks the historic mold, vocalizing the effect such an event is having on his body.

In relation to the Muslim Other, both addresses speak to how, in the Hindutva collective historical consciousness, the symbol of the primordial desecrated temple, now restored, materializes a discursive representation of historical time that indexes foreignness and otherness for India's Muslim past. The Hindutva regime's investment into temple restoration lies at the nexus of a historic projection of Otherness and a reclamation of self-sovereignty that further contours the trope of the Muslim Other from the vantage point of political power, as opposed to political marginalization in which it was originally conceived. In brief, the temple becomes a site linked to the historical alterity, physically materializing the discourse of the Muslims-as-demonic invader tropes into a sacred geography that is greater than the sum of its parts. The Muslim Other trope heretofore discussed in this study does not remain an idea parroted by the Hindutva intelligentsia in effort to disseminate mere propaganda, but rather becomes a material prompt that authorizes acts of self-reclamation against the Other, such as the rebuilding of demolished temples, and the violence such redemptive processes entail. Thus, the Otherness of the Muslim moves beyond a position of pure historiographical or literary trope and enters the domain of praxis through its deployment. Central to this theory is the practical role that history-as-discourse plays in mediating how individuals who consume Hindutva discourse relate to their pasts, confirming White's assertion that discourse is fundamentally a "mediative enterprise."⁶ It does

⁶ White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, 4.

so by moving the affect of the adherent, where the emotional impressions prompt the body they are housed in to commit to action.

My effort to deconstruct the Muslim Other trope in Hindutva historiography by shading its contours, exposing its often-contradictory logics, and reading its instability led me to this articulation of discourse theory and the place historical consciousness occupies in this structure. What began as an inquiry into the Hindutva regime's cathexis into producing historical narratives ended up exposing me to the broader role the deployment of language plays in manufacturing an Other. Chalking the Hindutva intelligentsia's efforts to erase or negatively prefigure India's Muslim past to mere propagandistic actions did not form for me an adequate theory as to why history as a discourse occupies such a contentious sphere in South Asia. Indeed, the field of history becomes a "battlefield" as it bleeds from the discursive domain into the mode of being for a Hindutva agent. Thus, the Hindutva project to "revise" histories is a more nefarious project than labelling such as a form of hate speech lets on. To hearken back to one of Orwell's most cited quotes, the politics of the present require notions of the past as a source of authority and legitimacy to continue their project. History as a form of discourse and a frame of consciousness thus plays an *enabling* role here.

To conclude, I offer a few words on the role of "secularism" in combatting this perceived "religious fundamentalist" revision of Indian history, as it may be noticeable that I have not treated the question of India's possible secularity in the study so far. Indeed, scholar activists like Tanika Sarkar would maintain the importance of approaching and falsifying these historical revision attempts with a secular-scientific frame of reference in mind. I echo what many other postcolonial theorists propose to be the mythic nature of the Nehruvian tenet of secularism: India was never secular in the first place. Coloring Nehru's projections of the secular nature of the

Indian nation-state was always a predominantly Hindu cultural heritage.⁷ As Dipesh Chakrabarty points out, the intellectual precepts of secular and humanist notions of history predicate themselves on a “universal,” wherein “[c]laims about agency on behalf of the religious, the supernatural, the divine, and the ghostly have to be mediated in terms of this universal.”⁸ The “universals” baked into secularism as well as the self-delusion that lulled the secular nationalist intellectuals of India and across the world to not interrogate secularism’s position in India led us to this very predicament, where religion, stirred out of its presumed “slumber,” is rearing its ugly head. In order to understand the cultural stakes of the Hindutva historiographical mission, I had to eschew interpreting their discourses from the standpoint of these universals tied to distant sociological analysis and lean into the “divine” and “ghostly” to understand them on their own terms. A secularist program alone cannot preserve the Muslim Other from excision by the current regime. The fight for his preservation must be taken on Hindutva’s own turf using better historical narratives that reopen the horizon for Hindu-Muslim unity that even Savarkar, in his most radical and seditious phases, was able to fathom.

⁷ Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation* (Columbia University Press, 2009), 48.

⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference (New Edition)* (Princeton University Press, 2000), 76, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rsx9>.

Appendix A.

Key Figures.



Figure 1: Wikimedia Commons Image of the Malabar Revolt from "Narratology of Hindu Genocide in India" by Rajiv Chopra.

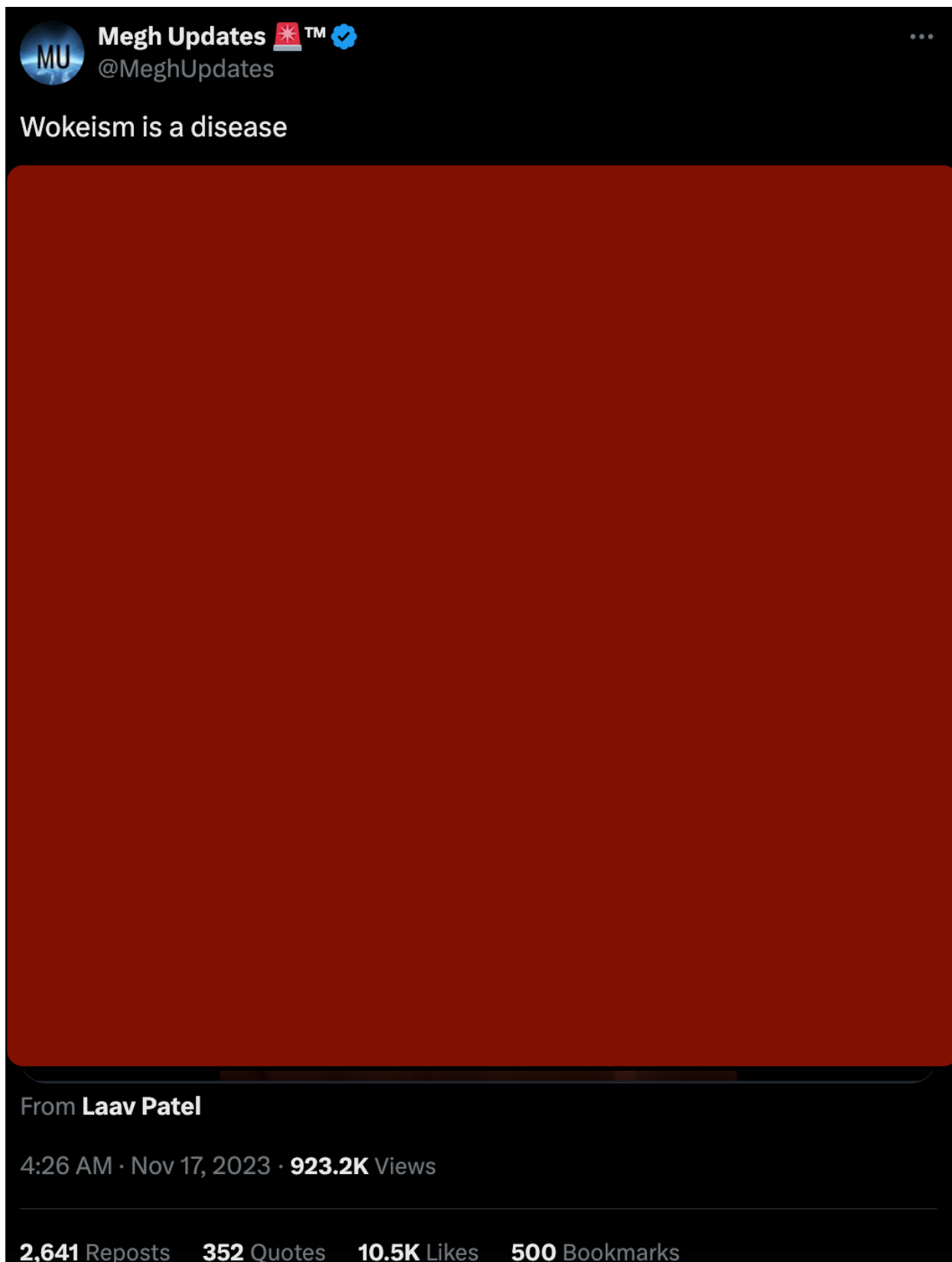


Figure 2: Reposted Video from "MeghUpdates" with video censored.



Figure 3: X users "The Real Speaker" and "sri" offer light pushback to Pratik V's claims.