



ISLAMOPHOBIA IN LITERATURE:
THE MISREPRESENTATION OF MUSLIM RULE IN
V.S. NAIPAUL'S DISCOURSE ON THE HISTORY OF
INDIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates V.S. Naipaul's depiction of Muslim rule in the Indian subcontinent. It focuses on three of his books: *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilization* and *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, which constitute Naipaul's narrative on India. It also delves into sections pertaining to the Indian subcontinent in his travelogues, *Among The Believers* and *Beyond Belief*, as well as some of his essays and interviews directly related to the subject and traces the development of both British and Hindu nationalist historiography of Muslim rule in India. It introduces the figure of Naipaul, the formative influences in his life and the global milieu that shapes his perception of himself, his quest for a homeland and his increasing identification with India as the "land of his forefathers", given his birthplace is Trinidad. This dissertation probes Naipaul's two travelogues into non-Arab Muslim countries, in order to identify his general theses on Islam and their philosophical underpinnings. This enables us to gauge numerous misinterpretations in his biased assessment of Islam and its manifestation in non-Arab countries, in general, and in India, in particular. Naipaul's three books that form a trilogy on India are further covered to identify the historical instances put forward by him to construct his negative representation of Muslim rule in the sub-continent. The historical accuracy of the claims made is also analyzed and alternative historical narratives are provided to Naipaul's singular conception of Muslim rule in India by delving into recent research in the field of historiography there. This research can dispel some of the confusion Muslims in Pakistan have experienced due to literature such as that of Naipaul's in regards to the conception of their historical roots and the negative image of their role in Indian history. The thesis shows that Naipaul's discourse about Muslim rule in India is political; it is ensconced within a general Islamophobic narrative perpetuated by some modern historiography of India. The study makes certain recommendations about the production of evidence-based literature on Muslim rule in India.

ملخص البحث

تبحث هذه الدراسة في تصوير نايبول لحكم المسلمين في شبه جزيرة الهند. بالتفصيل تسلط الاهتمام حول ثلاثة من كتب هذا المؤلف، وهي؛ مكان الظلام، الهند: حضارة مجروحة، والهند: مليون حالة تمرد الآن، والتي تشكل رواية نايبول عن الهند. ينقّب هذا البحث أيضاً في أقسام متعلقة بشبه جزيرة الهند موجودة في مدونات سجل سفر نايبول المنشورة وهي مسمات ضمن المصدقين وما بعد التصديق، بالإضافة الى بعض مقالاته وبعض مقابلاته التي لها صلة بالموضوع. تبدأ الدراسة أولاً برسم خطوط نشأة كتابة تاريخ حكم المسلمين في الهند لدى القوميين البريطانيين والقوميين الهندوس. من بعد ذلك تقدم الدراسة شخصية نايبول من خلال العوامل المؤثرة على حياته والمناخ العام العالمي الذي أثر على نظرتة الى نفسه، وعلى صراعه في البحث عن الوطن تحت التزايد في شعور الانتماء الى بلد أجداده الهند في حين أنه ولد في جزر ترينيداد الأمريكية. بالإضافة فان البحث ينظر في مدونات نايبول لسفره الى بلدين اسلاميين غير عربيين من أجل التوصل الى أفكاره حول الاسلام والتحليل لمنطلقاتها الفلسفية. كل هذا يفسح لنا المجال من أجل التدقيق في بعض تأويلاته الخاطئة والتي يصحح بها من خلال تقييمه المتحيز ضد الاسلام بالصلة الى تلك الدول غير العربية وبالصلة إلى الهند نفسها. بالتالي فإننا ننظر مجدداً في سلسلة نايبول الثلاثية حول الهند من أجل التوصل الى بعض الأمثلة التاريخية التي يثيرها في إعلان مواقفه العدائية ضد حكم المسلمين في الهند. موضوعية هذه المواقف تشكل منحى آخر من دراستنا حيث نقوم بإسداء البدائل القرآنية للنظرة الشاذة التي يثيرها نايبول معتمدين في ذلك على بعض الدراسات الحديثة حول تاريخ الهند. إنّ صاحبة هذه الدراسة ترى أنّ الموضوع المثار هنا قد يساهم في إزالة بعض التشوش الذي يُلاحظ عند بعض المسلمين في باكستان والتي تسببه بعض الكتابات ككتابات نايبول في إثارة الشكّ حول بعض المواضيع التي لها علاقة برؤية هؤلاء الى جذورهم التاريخية ونظرتهم الى أنفسهم من خلال إسهامات المسلمين الى تاريخ الهند. لذلك فإنّ معالجتنا هنا تقترح الفكرة بأن تقديم نايبول التاريخي لحكم المسلمين في الهند هو تقديم محفوف بخطاب تخويفي ضد الاسلام كما نرى في العديد من الكتابات التاريخية المعاصرة. بالتالي فإن المطلوب في رؤيتنا لكتابات نايبول هو إدراك هويتها السياسية. في النهاية، تقدم هذه الدراسة بعض المقترحات حول إنتاج أدبي يستهدف تاريخ حكم المسلمين في الهند والذي يُرغب أن يكون معتمداً على الدليل من الواقع التاريخي نفسه.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts in The Contemporary Muslim World.

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Abdullah Al-Ahsan
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Arts in The Contemporary Muslim World.

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This dissertation was submitted to the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in The Contemporary Muslim World.

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DECLARATION

I here declare that this thesis is the results of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for my other degree at IIUM or other institutions.

Raaza Jamshed Butt

Signature.....

Date January 7, 2014

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*I dedicate this thesis to Mustapha,
our children and the home we have built together.*

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CHAPTER ONE

THE MISREPRESENTATION OF MUSLIM RULE IN LITERATURE ON THE HISTORY OF INDIA

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the late 1980s, the ancient Hindu epic Ramayan¹ was serialized and broadcast throughout India. The centuries old epic, narrating historical events that ascribed primacy to Hindus in Ayodha, incited the passions of Hindu masses against Muslim rulers. In 1992, a frenzied mob demolished the five hundred year old Babri Mosque², brick by brick, in an illogical bid to avenge past injustice. The sixty year old virulent Ramjanmabhoomi³ movement was resuscitated, leading to the worst communal riots between Hindus and Muslims since the gory Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. Alarming, this instance of an appeal to a particular historical discourse to generate communal agitation is not an isolated one in an expanding Indian public culture. Writers and authors have employed the tool of literature at an alarming rate to fan communal hatred and further deepen the Hindu-Muslim divide.

V.S Naipaul is one such literary figure who is reputed for inciting Hindus in India against the Indian Muslim citizenry through the medium of his literary works. Recipient of literature's highest award, the Nobel Prize, and of Indian origin, Naipaul's opinions are given high credibility and media repeatedly turns to Naipaul for shedding light on issues concerning India and Hindu-Muslim relations. At the

¹ For an in-depth analysis of the political manipulation of this text and its potential for violence see Sheldon Pollock's "Ramayana and The Political Imagination of in India", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 52, no. 2 (1993), 261-297.

² Babri Mosque is said to have been built in 1528 on the ruins of a Hindu temple at Ayodha in North India, held sacred as supposedly the birthplace of Hindu god Rama.

³ It is a campaign based on the idea of recapturing the so-called "birthplace" of Ram from Muslim control. It is backed by the prominent Indian far right political party BJB.

crucial time of the destruction of Babri Mosque at Ayodha in 1992, Naipaul endorsed the incident and consequent Muslim pogroms as ‘a new historical awakening’ within India. This endorsement comes in the wake of a sustained literary effort by V.S. Naipaul aimed at a significant revisionist reading of India’s conception of its history. V.S. Naipaul is widely held by many as the greatest living writer of Indian origin; indeed some would go further and argue that he is the greatest living writer of English prose. During the course of his long career, Naipaul has maintained a sustained engagement with both India and Islam, explicit in both his non-fiction books and his essays and interviews. Further, his thesis about Islam as a manifestation of Arab imperialism in South Asia intrinsically links to his representation of Indian history in his works. In recent articles and books on India and Islam, Naipaul has indicted Islam for the decline of Indian civilization and called the period of Muslim rule as “India’s equivalent of Dark Ages”⁴. He has maintained that the advent of what he calls Muslim “invaders” in India was nothing short of “vandalism” of the Indian land that has left a wound on the psyche of India, which it is still grappling with.

Today, against the backdrop of mounting Hindu-Muslim hostilities in South Asia, when a religiously defined rivalry of atomic proportions threatens the region, this amputation of Indian history from its Islamic influence has far reaching implications for Muslim identity and Hindu-Muslim relations in the Sub-Continent. Thus, it is imperative to analyze Naipaul’s views on Islam in Indian history, which bear a long-standing impact on academic circles across the globe.

⁴ V.S. Naipaul., *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, (India: Rupa & Company, 1990), 517.

1.2 CHAPTER OUTLINE

This thesis investigates Naipaul's historical representation of Muslim rule in the Indian Sub-Continent. Specifically, we wish to focus on three of his books; *An Area of Darkness*, *India: A Wounded Civilization* and *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, which constitute the major themes of Naipaul's narrative on India. We also wish to delve into sections pertaining to the Indian Sub-Continent in his travelogues; *Among The Believers*, and *Beyond Belief* and some of his essays and interviews directly related to the subject. My thesis attempts to investigate in these books V.S. Naipaul's historical analysis of Muslim rule in India. We wish to further argue that in a post-Foucaultian era, literature written about the Muslim World should be studied by incorporating a critique of instances that systematically lead to reductive views. This thesis, therefore, proposes to give an in-depth analysis of V.S. Naipaul's discourse on this theme, as well as its philosophical underpinnings as covered in the aforementioned texts.

Part of my research is to identify general trends in Naipaul's historical narrative that are borrowed from the existing historical tradition of disparaging Muslim rule in India. This enables the research to unravel some of the philosophical underpinnings of Naipaul's historical discourse of Muslim history in India.

The first chapter traces the development of both British and Hindu nationalist historiography of Muslim rule in India as well as overlapping assumptions that form a historical base extensively employed for much of the preceding exploration on the subject. The aim of the chapter is to trace major trends concerning Muslim rule in India authored and authorized by each school and the political motives that provided the impetus for presenting a particular picture of this rule in the overall history of India. A study of the historical tradition of Muslim rule in India is crucial to any

understanding of Naipaul's discourse, which is firmly situated within that tradition. The second chapter introduces the figure of Naipaul, the formative influences in his life that shape his perception of himself, his quest for a homeland and his increasing identification with India as the 'land of his forefathers'. This chapter also explores Naipaul's general thesis about Islam and the reception of his work from prominent critics. The third chapter delves into Naipaul's two travelogues into non-Arab Muslim countries to identify his general theses on Islam and their philosophical underpinnings in order to gauge possible reasons for his low assessment of Islam and its manifestation in non-Arab countries, in general, and in India, in particular. The fourth chapter covers Naipaul's three books that form a trilogy on India to identify the historical instances put forward by him in order to construct his overall negative representation of Muslim rule in India. This chapter puts forward, in a systemic manner, an analysis of the historical examples cited by Naipaul to assess their veracity and correctness in view of historical literature present on the subject. This is done through the following three themes; (1) on bloody invasions, (2) on temple destruction, and (3) on the spread of Islam. The historical accuracy of the claims made are then analyzed and alternative historical narratives are provided to Naipaul's singular conception of Muslim rule in India by delving into new and recent research authored by objective researchers in the field of historiography of India. This chapter also brings together the main themes and arguments of the thesis.

We believe this research can dispel some of the confusion Muslims in Pakistan have experienced due to literature such as that of Naipaul's in regards to the conception of their historical roots and the negative image of their role in Indian history. We hope to make a contribution towards disentangling some part of the

conceptual muddle that has been formed by prejudiced historiography on this subject matter.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

During the course of its torturous history, the Indian sub-continent has been peopled by many civilizations. Starting with the Dravidians from before 2000 B. C., followed by Aryans, Greeks, Sakas and Kushanas, Muslims and the British, the region was invaded repeatedly due to its fertile lands and inviting geography. Muslims came in contact with the Indian sub-continent in the 7th century at the time of the second Caliph of Islam and still form a sizeable community within India. Interestingly, none of the above mentioned people are as vilified in the annals of modern Indian historical discourse as are the Muslim rulers. Where the Aryans are glorified in Indian history as the forbearers of Indian civilization, despite their ongoing conflict with the native Dravidians⁵, the Muslim rulers are to this day defamed as ‘foreign invaders’. As a community that has been part of the rich tapestry of Indian civilization for over nine hundred years, it is still relegated a dubious ‘foreign’ status. The communal riots in contemporary India and their endorsement from the countries major political parties such as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and revolutionaries⁶ speaks volumes for the tenacity of historical discourse that has instilled a suspicion of Muslims in their own homeland. This chapter delves into the representation of Muslim rule in India in British and Hindu nationalist literature in order to trace the patterns and themes that influence the contemporary literature, such as that of V. S. Naipaul’s, is being

⁵ For a detailed account of the arrival of Aryans and their ongoing confrontation with the native Dravidians see Romila Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 2nd edn., 1999).

⁶ Pollock, 261-297. He suggests that Karl Marx's insight that revolutionaries often "anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battles cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history" can help one gauge the potential for violence within present-day Hindu invocation of past events such as those narrated in Ramayana.

produced on the subject.

Scholars agree that much of the hatred that Muslims face in contemporary India is due to the British legacy of hegemonic historical discourse that aimed at vilifying Muslim rule in India⁷. As Foucault sees it, discourse is a severely bounded area of social knowledge or “heavily policed cognitive systems which control and delimit both the mode and the means of representation in a given society.”⁸ It is a series of statements, through which the world can be known, as it is not recognized by simply analyzing objective data. Its recognition is brought into being through discourse, which is ideologically loaded, but independent of individual will and judgment. According to Edward Said, discourse is the system of thought by which dominant powers establish claimed spheres of ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’, and it is through such discursive practices that religions, races, cultures, and classes are represented. These discursive “practices make it difficult for individuals to think outside them – hence they are also seen as exercises of power and control”⁹.

The dominant discourse of an oppressive Muslim rule is disseminated through historical literature through which the Muslim citizenry in India is represented. Modern historiography of India, as we shall see later in this chapter, is being employed as a power tool aimed at claiming the inferiority of the Muslim community in the Indian sub-continent vis-à-vis the majority Hindu community¹⁰. This hegemonic discourse has stunted the ability of individuals to look beyond their prejudices on both sides of the border line in the Indian sub-continent. It is, therefore, crucial to trace the

⁷ Barbara D. Metcalf, “Too Little and Too Much: Reflections on Muslims in the History of India”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 54, no. 4, (November, 1995), 953-4.

⁸ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: a Critical Introduction*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 77.

⁹ Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, *An Introduction to Post –Colonial Theory*, (Essex: Prentice Hall, 1997), 101.

¹⁰ Metcalf, *Too Little ...*, 953-44.

contours and development of modern historiography of Muslim rule in India to gauge how this discourse was constructed and established as ‘truth’ about Muslim history in India and also its implications for the identity of Muslim citizenry within India.

According to the historian Romila Thapar, the enterprise of modern historiography of India can be divided into three broad schools; the colonial interpretation, the nationalist interpretation, and the post-colonial interpretation¹¹. Each school’s interpretation of history was implicated by the general political currents of the time of its development. The three schools converged and borrowed in certain areas and some major assumptions emerged with the progression of modern historiography of India. It is, therefore, imperative to trace the major trends set in these three schools to gain an understanding of the prevalent historical discourse of Muslim rule in Indian history.

The modern historiography of India was enunciated by the British in the late 18th and 19th centuries¹². The development of British historiography of India was deeply implicated by the political pursuits of the ruling British. The foremost preoccupation of the British was to portray their rule’s superiority over Muslim rule hence assigning themselves the role of liberators of Indian people¹³. This perception of the British rule could consequently be perpetuated among the Indians once they were convinced that the rulers of India prior to the British were degenerate and vile. Muslim rulers and their presence in India became a natural target.

¹¹Romila Thapar, “Interpretations of Indian History: Colonial, Nationalist, Post-colonial”, in P.R. Desouza, *Contemporary India: Transitions*, (New Delhi: SAGE, 2001), 200.

¹² For a thorough exposition of the history of historical thought and writing on India and Muslim rule see, Peter Hardy, *The Historians of Medieval India*, (London: n. p., 1960), Philip C.H., *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). Also See S. Grewal, *The Muslim Rule in India: The Assessment of British Historians*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1970).

¹³Metcalf, *Too Little...*, 953-4.

The particular position of Muslim rule in Indian history had far reaching implications for the development of historiography of medieval India. As predecessors to the British rule, they became the natural foil against which the British compared themselves to in order to gain legitimacy for their rule in the eyes of the majority community of India. The justification of British rule in India went hand in hand with the belittling of the Muslim achievement in India.¹⁴ This approach was augmented by a general adherence of early British historians to the liberal tradition in the West that enabled them to project the same framework on India's past as they did for their own European history. Alexander Dow was one of the earlier British historians, whose treatment and interpretation of Muslim rule was largely influenced by this conception of politics.¹⁵ He despised the marriage of religion with politics and strongly advocated secular administration. He derided the Asiatic absolute despotism and indicted Islam as being responsible for it.¹⁶

The European secular tradition also enabled British historians of the time to place Indian history into three specific periodic compartments as they did with their own European history. Just as they had assumed that European history started with the Greeks and Romans and then passed through the dark Catholic Ages and eventually had the Renaissance marking the beginning of modernity, they approached India with similar assumptions. Many of them identified classical Hindu civilization with that of classical Greek civilization as the foundation of Indian Civilization and Western civilization respectively. One significant theory that emerged in the early

¹⁴ S. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India: The Assessment of British Historians*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1970), 171.

¹⁵ S. Grewal (1970: 17) sums up Dow's interpretation of Turko-Afghan character in these words: "The expansion or recession of their Empire depended largely on the vigor or degeneration of the ruling princes. Their government reflected their native character: they were oppressive and tyrannical because of their pride and passions. Unrestrained by reason they indulged themselves in excessive pleasure amidst the wealth and luxury of Hindustan and political degeneration followed upon their excessive indulgence",

¹⁶ Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindoostan*, (London: n. p., vol. III , 1768-1772), xiii-xx.

nineteenth century, the theory of Aryan Race, played a vital role in this admiration and affinity with the Ancient Indian era. It was held that large numbers of Aryans, described as a branch of Indo-European race and language group, invaded Northern India in the second millennium BC, conquered the indigenous peoples and established the Vedic Aryan culture which became the foundation of Indian culture¹⁷. According to this theory, the ancient Hindu Aryans were considered by some the 'parted cousins'¹⁸ of the British. Muslim rule, on the other hand, was seen parallel to the dark Catholic era¹⁹, representing stagnation in the civilization. James Mill²⁰, much celebrated British historian of India, is one example of such a historian who assigned this particular periodization of Indian history in his much celebrated book 'History of British India'²¹. His theory of Indian history evolving out of three civilizations became axiomatic to the periodization of Indian history and is still with us, though sometimes in a disguised form²².

Furthermore, British historiography evolved with the changing political climate. The pre-1857 war of independence historiography was designed to paint Muslim rule in dark colors hence exaggerating the importance of British rule as liberators of the Indian people. The war of independence of 1857 changed the course of the British historiographic enterprise. This event is an important landmark in Indian history. After the war of 1857, popularly termed as the Sepoy Mutiny by the British, the administration of India passed from the East India Company to the British

¹⁷Romila Thapar, *History and Beyond: Interpreting Early India, Time as a Metaphor of History, Cultural Transaction and Early India and from Lineage to State*, (USA: Oxford University Press, 2000 April 6), 3.

¹⁸Keshab Chander Sen, *Lectures in India*, (Calcutta: n.p., 1923), 323.

¹⁹Romila Thapar, *History and Beyond: Interpreting Early India, Time as a Metaphor of History, Cultural Transaction and Early India and from Lineage to State*, (USA: Oxford University Press, 2000 April 6), 3.

²⁰Father of John Stuart Mill (1773-1836).

²¹James Mill, *History of British India*, (London: n.p., 1918), 23.

²²Thapar, 89.

sovereign. Its significance also owes to the fact that it was an occasion where Muslims and Hindus displayed their solidarity as a united front in rebellion against the British. Unprepared by the strength of this mutiny that was brought about by India's disparate castes, creeds and religious affiliations, this incident jolted the British awake to the reality of Indian people's strength if they were united in their opposition against the British.²³ This proved a point against which the British launched a coordinated policy of 'divide and rule' in both its policies²⁴ and its historiography in order to put a permanent wedge between any future Hindu-Muslim alliances. The post-mutiny Viceroy of India, Lord Elphinstone in 1858 unhesitatingly remarked, "Divide et impera was the old Roman motto, and it should be ours."²⁵ Similarly in 1887, R.A. Cross, the Secretary of State, wrote to the Viceroy that "this division of religious feeling is greatly to our advantage."²⁶ Furthermore, Birkenhead, Secretary of State, communicated to the Viceroy in March 1925 to this effect: "I have placed my highest and most permanent hopes in the eternity of the communal situation."²⁷ In the Cabinet papers of the Churchill era, there is a reference to the fact that "... he did not share the anxiety to encourage and promote unity between the Hindu and Muslim communities. He regarded the Hindu-Muslim feud as the bulwark of British rule in India."²⁸

After the Mutiny of 1857, the nature of British historiography assumed a significantly new character. The focal point of this new tradition was to interpret

²³ For an interesting and fresh perspective on the Mutiny and its settings See, William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty*, (Delhi: n.p., 1857, US: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 1st Edition, 2006).

²⁴ The complicity of colonial administration in this "image building" extended all the way up to the Viceroy. Lord Dufferin in his character sketch of Muslims declared in 1888 that they are a people known for their 'monotheism, iconoclastic fanaticism and animal sacrifices who harbored the memory of Muslim supremacy over India'. 59

²⁵ R. Palme Dutt, *The Problem of India*, (New York: International Publishers, 1943), 98.

²⁶ Dufferin Papers, (Reel, 518). Quoted in Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, (New Delhi: Vikas, 1987), 244.

²⁷ G. R. Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India*, (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1975), 173.

²⁸ R. J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps and India 1939-1945*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 28.

historical facts in such a way that Muslims and Hindus would be seen as two mutually hostile communities where Hindu masses were constantly oppressed by their Muslim rulers. British historiographers, in keeping with their tradition of complicity with British political interests in India, launched a comparison between the Hindu and Muslim communities, highlighting the negative aspects of Muslim rule. This move not only supposedly legitimized British hold over economic and political power, but also guaranteed an endemic strife between Hindus and Muslims while keeping them away from the real question of self-rule.²⁹

When James Mill, in pre 1857 historiography, represented Hindu civilization in a disparaging manner as compared to the Muslim rule, he sought to further the political consolidation of British in the early nineteenth century³⁰. He suggested that, “Despotism and priest craft taken together, the Hindus, in mind and body, were the most enslaved portion of the human race”.³¹ Muslim rulers, although their hold was fragmentary, were still considered as the spokesmen for Indian government and Mill’s representation of Muslim rule was to be seen as a means of placating the nominally ruling elite of the time. While Mill described the siege and eventual destruction of Somnath Temple³² as a Muslim victory in order to appeal to the sentiments of the ruling Muslims of the time, the post-1857 historiography treated it as an act of gross violence and irrational aggression against Hindus and their way of life, aiming at an inverse of the previous depiction of the event³³. Also as in that past British historians imagined Hindus as the original inhabitants and Muslims rather as they, the British,

²⁹Amalendu Misra, *Identity and Religion: foundations of anti-Islamism in India*, (London: SAGE Publications Pvt. Ltd, 1st Edition, August 30 2004), 275.

³⁰ James Mill was actively associated with the East India Company's and was receiving regular salary from it. His services included that of formulation, projection and promotion of its policies. For a good discussion, see J. P. Guha's biographical note on James Mill in *History of British India*, xii.

³¹ Mill, 166-167.

³²Somnath is a Hindu temple, which was destroyed by Mahmud Ghazni in 1024 CE.

³³Misra, 207.

imagined themselves: as foreigners, as imperial rulers, who arrived as successful conquerors. Muslims served as the other against which the British defined themselves. By declaring Muslim rule as oppressive and incompetent, lascivious, and given to self-indulgence, the post-1857 British historiography could define precisely what they imagined themselves to be, namely, enlightened, competent, disciplined, and judicious. At the same time, they imputed to Muslims certain qualities they admired, such as masculinity and vigor, in contrast to allegedly effeminate Hindus.”³⁴

Since their predecessors had already narrated the History of India there was nothing novel for the post-1857 British historiographers to discover from India's history³⁵. Therefore, following the mutiny, these historians' focal point was to excavate instances of injustice towards the Hindus at the hands of Muslim ruling elite. The aim was to cut a wedge between the two communities by manipulating Muslim history in India³⁶. New literature was penned to assign credibility to this new emphasis on old facts. H. M. Elliot and J Dowson's 'The History of India as Told by its own Historians' was one instance of such a work. The eight volumes of Elliot & Dowson appeared successively in the years 1867,1869, 1871, 1872,1873,1875 and 1877.This work, published in 1867-77, sought to create awareness among the Hindu community of the wrongs their people endured by the Muslims. Elliot and Dowson engaged themselves in telling the same story told by their predecessors with a tilt towards the

³⁴ Metcalf, *Too Little...*, 953-4.

³⁵ The Indian Rebellion of 1857 (a.k.a. the Indian Mutiny) began on 10 May 1857 as a mutiny by *sepoys* of the East India Company's army and soon escalated into other mutinies and civilian rebellions. See Barbara D. Metcalf & Thomas R. Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 100–106.

³⁶ The main advocates of this argument are Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960), Allen J. Greenberg, *The British Image of India: A Study on the Literature of Imperialism, 1880-1960*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1972), Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces Muslims, 1860-1923*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1974) and Gyan Pandey, *The Construction of Colonialism in Colonial North India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Hindus and with a sympathetic tone. Their eight volume work “invited” the readers to selections purporting to show the “intolerance” of the Muslims, a story of “forcible conversions and marriages, proscriptions and confiscations, of murders and massacres, and of the sensuality and drunkenness of the tyrants who enjoined them.”³⁷

Elliot and Dowson based their compilation on Persian chronicles of India to assign credibility to their work. It is noteworthy here that even though the compilations supposedly claimed to be based on works of Muslim historians, they indicted the Persian works to be prejudicial towards the Muslim ruling elite. Elliot and Dowson seemed to launch in a quest for truth, and to claim authenticity and objectivity of their works the title ‘History of India as told by its own Historians’ was employed. In Henry Elliot's words:

In Indian Histories there is little which enables us to penetrate below the glittering surface, and observe the practical operation of a despotic Government... If, however, we turn our eyes to the present Muhammadan kingdoms of India, and examine the character of the princes,... we may fairly draw a parallel between ancient and modern times... we behold kings, even of our own creation, sunk in sloth and debauchery, and emulating the vices of a Caligula or a Commodus... Had the authors whom we are compelled to consult, portrayed their Caesars with the fidelity of Suetonius, instead of the more congenial sycophancy of Paterculus, we should not, as now, have to extort from unwilling witness, testimony to the truth of these assertions.³⁸

The British histories and their credibility among academic circles and policy makers was further augmented by reviews of these works in academic journals that cemented the view that indeed Muslim rule in India was detrimental to the larger community, that is the Hindus, and formed an epistemological authority on the subject. The following excerpt from the British magazine ‘The Englishman’ shows the significance of Elliot & Dowson in the political milieu of the post 1857-58 era:

³⁷Metcalf, *Too Little...*, 954.

³⁸ For details, see Henry M. Elliot, *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period*, ed. John Dowson, (London: Trubner, 1867-77), xv-xxvii.

The extracts from the various Muhammadan histories are interesting, and give a clear idea of the nature of the Moslem conquest, and rule in India. The constant wars, rebellions, and massacres, as detailed in these histories, should do more to reconcile the Hindus to British rule than all the preaching and speechifying of the English in India, who are, of course, considered to be interested parties. Whether Hindus consider peace and the reign of justice as an equivalent for the loss of the excitement of wars, plunder, and employment in political life, is another question. There is no doubt they pay heavily in many respects for the order they enjoy under British rule, but a comparison with the amount of suffering they underwent during the Moslem reign should make the cost appear not too much. These volumes of the late Sir H. Elliot should be used in all the schools in India as text-books. As histories of the Muhammedan period they would be received as authentic, and they would teach the rising generations what the ancient rule really was, which they are but too ready to believe in as far better than the modern government they are under. They cannot but conclude that as Hindustan appears they would be received as authentic, and they would teach the rising generations what the ancient rule really was, which they are but too ready to believe in as far better than the modern government they are under.³⁹

The latter scholars also gave primacy to British political incentives in India. Their conceptions of British interests were behind their study of certain aspects of medieval Indian history. For Example, James Talbot Wheeler, another 'strategic historian' of post-Mutiny British India, almost made it his vocation to construct a past where Hindus and Muslims were in perpetual conflict and sustained religious collision⁴⁰. Wheeler wrote, "Mughal administration has been held up as a model for British imitation. In reality, it was a monstrous system of oppression and extortion."⁴¹ A major theme of Muslims as, 'foreigners' in the Indian subcontinent, emerged in British historiography. For example, Vincent A. Smith labeled Akbar as a 'foreigner in India' and pronounced India as an essentially Hindu land where Islam was a forced manifestation. Muslims, in Smith's interpretation, were foreigners and

³⁹The Englishman, September 21 1871, 2.

⁴⁰Misra, 280.

⁴¹ James Talboys Wheeler, *History of India*, (London: Hutchinson, 1876), 125.

were never an 'integral part of the Indian people'.⁴²

Summarily, British historical inquiry into Muslim rule in India was dictated by the political concerns of the British. The major themes emerging from important historiographic works show that British conceived and sought to perpetuate Indian identity along religious lines, where Hindus, the predominant numerical majority, were assigned the position of oppressed natives, and the Muslim ruling minority the derogatory status of 'oppressive foreigners'⁴³. The British scholars' interpretation of medieval India in terms of Hindu-Muslim relationship or antagonism manifests a fundamental conceptual limitation of the nineteenth century British historiography of medieval India. A general story of Muslim barbarity towards Hindu people and their religious symbols was told and retold until it seeped into the very consciousness of educated Hindu circles.

The second phase of Modern Indian historiography, according to the aforementioned three-phase division, is considered to have emerged towards the end of the 19th century. The authors of this school were Indian historians using the methodology of British historiography but were motivated ideologically by the national struggle for independence polemics and thus were labeled as nationalist historians. They borrowed heavily from the historical discourse articulated by the British; many of their prime ideas regarding Indian history converged with that of the British. But where they differed was the ends towards which the nationalist historical discourse was aimed. These historians preoccupied themselves with issues that were directly pertinent to the nationalist struggle. This school's historical discourse was

⁴²See the concluding section of Vincent A. Smith's *Oxford History of India*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920).

⁴³ According to Bipan Chandra (1987: 245-6), this method helped the British to 'check the politicization of the Indian people, to curb their consolidation and unification and to disrupt the process of Indian nation-in-the making'.