

## **Bi-Cultural Societies and the Historian: Nationalism and History in India and Pakistan**

Fritz Lehmann

Volume 3, Number 1, 1968

Calgary 1968

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/030697ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/030697ar>

[See table of contents](#)

---

### Publisher(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

### ISSN

0068-8878 (print)

1712-9109 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

### Cite this article

Lehmann, F. (1968). Bi-Cultural Societies and the Historian: Nationalism and History in India and Pakistan. *Historical Papers / Communications historiques*, 3(1), 180–188. <https://doi.org/10.7202/030697ar>

# BI-CULTURAL SOCIETIES AND THE HISTORIAN : NATIONALISM AND HISTORY IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

FRITZ LEHMANN  
*University of British Columbia*

Nationalist ideologies have been closely connected with the study of national history in the modern world. Although the complex mixture of ideas and attitudes that composes nationalism varies from one nation to another, a well-developed sense of a unique national historical experience is invariably one of its major elements. Uniqueness may be seen in past greatness and success — as witness the medieval slogan “God acts through France” and its successor ideas about cultural leadership, glory and prestige. But past greatness is not essential, and a nation with so unfortunate a history as Poland or even Ireland can make past suffering the theme of national historical consciousness. Whatever the history may be, the awareness of a shared historical experience contributes in a major way to the consciousness of a national identity.

Nationalist politicians use history by appealing to the inheritance of a shared historical experience in order to strengthen national identity in the present. This does not always have the desired effect. In general each nationalism has provided itself with a suitably self-justifying, self-congratulatory history. But many, perhaps a majority, of the modern nations contain among their populations more than one major cultural element with self-conscious historical traditions of their own. In such polycultural societies the events of the past may symbolize one thing to one group and something very different to another group. Canada is an obvious example. Here, according to Professor L. F. S. Upton, nineteenth-century amateur historians defined a national identity for English-speaking Canadians based on three “certainties” derived from their view of history : “the superiority of the English to the French Canadian, the superiority of the English Canadian to the United States American; and the superiority of the English Canadian by virtue of his first class membership in the British Empire.”<sup>1</sup> Sometimes nationalists have proven able to reinterpret and update historical myths to suit new demands (e.g., examine the changing interpretations of Washington and Lincoln in U.S. historiography). However, historical views like the Canadian “certainties” of the Victorian era cannot be so easily remodelled and

<sup>1</sup> L. F. S. Upton, “In Search of Canadian History,” *Queen’s Quarterly* Winter Issue (1967), LXXIV:4.

kept alive because in a bi-cultural society like Canada they do not include all elements in a sense of common heritage but necessarily exclude one major group while providing another with an historical identity based on differentiation from the first group. Of course we could greatly complicate the question of nationalist history for Canada by considering the other groups — Amerindians, Eskimos, Chinese, Japanese, Punjabis, and various continental European nationalities — who share in neither the English-Canadian nor the French-Canadian historical experience.

An even more extreme case is modern Israel. It is difficult to conceive of a history that might persuade Palestinian Arabs that they too were citizens of "Eretz Israel" and partakers of a bi-cultural Israeli nationalism. In fact accounts of the efforts to develop a colonial policy towards the areas conquered in 1967 indicate that this has been the problem, with Israeli military authorities overruling enthusiastic civilians in the education ministry who had prepared Arabic translations of Israeli textbooks with passages from Theodor Herzl and other Zionists for use in the Arab schools.<sup>2</sup> The education officials were unrealistic, no doubt, but they were trying to offer the Arab pupils a view of history that justified Israeli nationalism.

Nationalism is a potent force in South Asia as in Israel, Canada, and elsewhere, and nationalist movements succeeded in 1947 in establishing the new independent states of India and Pakistan. As nationalism developed in South Asia, ideas about and interest in history were very much stimulated. The new nationalists had to discredit the myths and historical symbols that justified British imperialism — had to replace the "Black Hole" of Calcutta with the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. But in fact it proved easy enough to find historical justification for opposition to foreign rule; it has proven far more difficult to produce satisfactory nationalist versions of South Asian history in the post-independence period. The problem has been to find symbols that will include more than they will exclude, to develop historical syntheses which will help to integrate the new nation-states and develop the new sense of national identity.

Historians in South Asia thus face the same kind of national challenge as their counterparts in Canada, Israel, and elsewhere, and are expected to arrange and present the raw material of history in such a way as to help the nation find a sense of identity and purpose.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Amos Elon, "The Occupation," *Commentary* 45:3 (March 1968), 45.

<sup>3</sup> There is an enormous, if ephemeral, literature on this theme — politicians and dignitaries addressing historical societies, university convocations, opening research institutes, and in effect urging the boys to produce some nice tales of heroes and noble causes in order to foster nationalism. National and state governments in South Asia have sponsored their own ambitious histories "of the Freedom Movement" for this purpose. And compare this statement :

The historian's problem in South Asia, however, is on an immense scale far beyond comparison with Canada, or even France or the Soviet Union. Events over a time span of more than 4000 years still carry emotional meaning and can arouse controversy. Tamil-speaking intellectuals in the south of India like to amuse themselves with the notion that the ancient civilization at Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Lothal, and other northern sites was the work of their own illustrious ancestors, destroyed by the invading barbarian Aryans about 1500 B.C. — while north Indian Hindus trace all knowledge and virtue back to their noble Aryan ancestors. The first doctoral thesis accepted in Patna University's Ancient Indian History and Culture Department purported to prove that the Qutb Minar, a well-known landmark of the Muslim conquest of Delhi constructed in the early thirteenth century and still standing, was in reality not built by the Muslim Sultan Iltutmish (1211-36) but was an older Hindu observatory, Vishnu Dhwaj. This assertion could not be substantiated to the satisfaction of disinterested scholars, but for a time received favorable national publicity in India. The significant point is that such a minor piece of work on the construction of a part of one building in the early thirteenth century can arouse serious public attention in modern India.<sup>4</sup>

South Asia contains so many disparate linguistic and cultural groups that it is obviously difficult to develop any one view of history that will be equally interesting and acceptable to all. Regional

"Under the stimulus of national awakening and modernity, however, interest in historical research grew steadily, and history soon became, as elsewhere, an intellectual discipline as well as an instrument of political propaganda. The peculiar nature of Indian politics during the modern period, in which a triangular contest between the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League, and the British government dominated the scene, emphasized the need for political theoreticians to seek valid historical arguments in support of their respective assertions. Consequently there appeared in rapid succession a variety of inarticulate, tendentious, and superficial historical publications. Of little historical value, they did help to build a tradition of research and stimulate criticism." D. P. Singhal, *Nationalism in India and Other Historical Essays* (Delhi, 1967), 217.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, "Qutb Minar or Vishnudhwaja?", *The Searchlight* (Patna), March 26, 1963. Sunday newspaper supplements, *Link*, *Blitz*, and other weeklies also carried feature articles on this subject. Journalists and the lay public do tend to take this sort of thing more seriously than do professional scholars. The Government of India's own publicity department picked up the conclusions of one American archaeologist as useful ammunition against DMK separatists in South India: George F. Dales, "Civilization and Floods in the Indus Valley," *Expedition* VII: 4 (Summer 1965), 10-19, argues that soil erosion and floods resulting from loss of control of river waters destroyed the Mohenjo Daro-Harappa culture, not outside invaders; more provocatively, he specifically acquits the Aryans in another article: "... Indra and the barbarian hordes are exonerated" ("The Mythical Massacre at Mohenjo Daro," *Expedition* VI: 3, Spring 1964, 43), a reference to Mortimer Wheeler's earlier indictment of the Aryan immigrants and their war god.

loyalties, the opposition of peasant and tribal, rural and urban interests, and sect and caste rivalries all present their challenges to the would-be nationalist historian. But to a certain extent modern Indian and Pakistani historians are able to deal with these problems by offering some uncritical flattery to everybody. Militant Tilak and moderate Gokhale, revivalist Chaitanya and eclectic Kabir, socialist Nehru and fascist Bose are each praised, although the outsider might think these men stood for opposing ideas. Far more serious has been the problem of how to deal with the history of Hindu-Muslim relations, and here the historians have not yet found any easy solutions. In this case the consciousness among Hindu and Muslim elite groups of a differing, even opposing, view of their past helped reinforce the attitudes that led to Partition and the creation of two nation states instead of one. Since then efforts have been made in both countries to explain this catastrophe (or triumph) in historical terms. Events in the recent past during the rise of nationalism (differential impact of Western education, Bengal partition of 1905-1913, separate electorates, Hindu revivalism, and the like) are obviously very significant, and have been examined by historians of India, Pakistan, and indeed outside South Asia as well for their relevance in the shaping of the modern national identities.<sup>5</sup> The period of Muslim rule in medieval South Asia, and particularly the era of the Mughal empire in the early modern period (1526-1803), have received much attention from historians interested in the dynamics of Hindu-Muslim relations and their present state. Unlike the nationalist era, the Mughal period already has a well-developed historiography with considerable areas of consensus. Hence examination of the areas of disagreement among the modern historians may help to demonstrate the objectives and the problems of nationalist historiography in India and Pakistan.

For both nationalisms, the key figures in this history are the two greatest Mughal emperors, Akbar (1556-1605) and Aurangzib (1658-1707). Both men were unusual and complex figures who had to establish themselves by their own efforts, and both were intelligent, strong-minded, capable rulers who largely made their own policies. But their policies differed, so much so that Indian historians generally portray Akbar as the "good guy," Aurangzib as the "bad guy," while the Pakistani interpretation, although not quite so simple, reverses this and sees Aurangzib as the heroic figure, Akbar as the villain. These judgments, however, are based more on the present necessities

<sup>5</sup> For example, the Bengal partition has not only been much discussed by Indian and Pakistani historians, but is the subject of an important article by the brilliant New Zealander, John H. Broomfield, "The Vote and the Transfer of Power: a study of the Bengal General Election, 1912-1913," *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXI:2 (Feb. 1962), 163-181.

of nationalism than they are on an analysis of imperial policies in terms of the Mughal dynasty or empire.

Akbar's religious policies have become a major differentiating issue. Since Pakistan's existence is a product of the view that Islam and Hinduism in South Asia are irreconcilable, it is no surprise to find that most Pakistani historians censure or condemn Akbar's Rajput alliance, religious toleration, and flirtation with religious synthesis. The Pakistan History Board sees Akbar as an ignorant puppet: "Being himself not properly educated he confused issues and was led away by conflicting opinions and philosophies . . . he built a structure of eclecticism the significance of which he never properly understood."<sup>6</sup> Less temperate judgment by a popularizer portrays Akbar as an apostate, "the Great Pagan," whose "worship of superstition" and "persecution of Islam" were the determining factors in the collapse of Muslims rule in South Asia.<sup>7</sup> Other Pakistani works agree that Akbar's religious policies were the ruin of the Mughals.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps it is significant that Pakistani scholars who have taught in western universities take a rather more moderate view. S. M. Ikram, for example, considers Akbar's religious policy mistaken, but a failure partly due to external causes — Hindu revivalism and Muslim reactions — as well as his own misconceptions.<sup>9</sup> Aziz Ahmad considers Akbar's religious policies to have been politically a qualified success.<sup>10</sup>

Indian historians tend to take quite a different view. The Government of India's Information and Publicity Bureau in a survey of Indian history for school children asserts that Akbar's religious policy "increased the feeling of unity among residents of India, and they began to think of themselves as members of one family."<sup>11</sup> The Bihar Text Book Committee, in a book prescribed for the middle school examinations in that state, considers Akbar to be "especially renowned for the liberality of his religious policy," describes his Divine Faith in purely Hindu terms, and demonstrates

<sup>6</sup> Pakistan History Board, *A Short History of Hind-Pakistan* (Karachi, 1963), 220.

<sup>7</sup> A. Aziz, *Discovery of Pakistan* (Lahore, 1957), 40, 45-54. The book is dedicated "to the victims of Brahmanism."

<sup>8</sup> Sh. A. Rashid, *A short History of Pakistan: Book Three, The Mughal Empire* (Karachi, 1967), 156-157, 161-162; I. H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent (610-1947): A Brief Historical Analysis* ('s-Gravenhage, 1962) 137-148. Even an East Pakistani work sympathetic to Akbar repeats this view in a milder form: "The policy of Akbar was basically sound but he had gone too far in placating the Hindus. . . ." M. Arshad and H. Rahman, *History of Indo-Pakistan* (3rd ed., Dacca, 1966), 164.

<sup>9</sup> S.M. Ikram, ed. A. T. Embree, *Muslim Civilization in India* (New York, 1964), 164-5. Ikram has taught at Columbia University.

<sup>10</sup> Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford, 1964), 179-181. Professor Ahmad is now at the University of Toronto.

<sup>11</sup> *Bharat ka itihās baccon ke lie* (Delhi, 1962), 75. No author given.

the success of his policy by the fact that he appointed Hindus to high offices and won the friendship of the Rajputs.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, R. K. Chaudhuri asserts in another standard textbook that Akbar's religious policies were a consistent attempt to break down the separation and distrust between Muslim and non-Muslim subjects.<sup>13</sup> In a more sophisticated analysis, K. M. Panikkar considers Akbar's religious policy a successful element in a conscious effort to create a national monarchy.<sup>14</sup> A. L. Srivastava, who despite his anti-Muslim bias is one of India's leading Mughal specialists, also sees Akbar's religious policies as a national policy: "For many years Akbar had felt the insufficiency of Islam for being a national religion of India with its vast Hindu population . . ."<sup>15</sup> But Srivastava considers, too, that Akbar ceased to be a Muslim<sup>16</sup> — apparently in the belief, as Aziz Ahmad has pointed out,<sup>17</sup> that Islam is too rigid and doctrinaire for such tolerant liberalism as Akbar displayed.

In general, Pakistani historians criticize Akbar's religious policies on the grounds that they weakened Islam in India or at least were hostile to Islamic orthodoxy as represented by the professional expounders and custodians of Islamic law.<sup>18</sup> Indian historians generally find Akbar's religious policies praiseworthy, either because they view these policies as pro-Hindu or because they see Akbar's efforts as the forerunner of the religiously neutral secular state which they hope the Republic of India has now established.<sup>19</sup> This view is

<sup>12</sup> Bihar Text Book and Education Literature Committee, *Bharat ka adhunika itihās (1526 i. se aj tak)* (Patna, 1963), 29-30. The writers' committee for this textbook consisted of K. K. Datta, Yogendra Mishra, and Maneshwar Prasad.

<sup>13</sup> Radha Krishna Chaudhari, *Bharatiya Itihās ki ruparekha* (Patna, 1960), 223.

<sup>14</sup> K. M. Panikkar, *A Survey of Indian History* (3rd ed., Bombay, 1956), 152-155. Panikkar considers Akbar to have established "three essential lines of policy: the maintenance of the national State; the conciliation of the Hindus, and the unification of India." *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>15</sup> A. L. Srivastava, *Akbar the Great, Volume I: Political History 1542-1605 A.D.* (Agra, 1962), 303.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 508-509; A. L. Srivastava, *The Mughul Empire 1526-1803 A.D.* (3rd ed., Agra, 1959), 175.

<sup>17</sup> Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture*, 175. Here Ahmad also points out that Hindu historians like M. Roychoudhury, S. R. Sharma, and Tara Chand who have argued for Hindu-Muslim coexistence in India regard Akbar "as a good Muslim with some heretical views."

<sup>18</sup> See for example I. H. Qureshi's treatment of Akbar's attempt to gain the power to choose, in the interests of the state, between conflicting schools of Islamic law, *Muslim Community*, 139-141; and compare the defense of Akbar in S. R. Sharma, *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors* (2nd ed., Bombay, 1962), 31-34.

<sup>19</sup> A polemic statement of this latter view, by the head of the history department at Shantiniketan University, can be seen in N. N. Qanungo, "Akbar and his Message to Modern India," *The Vishwabharati Quarterly* 29:4 (1963-64), 352-360. Among other assertions of doubtful validity Qanungo considers Kabir, Shri Chaitanya, and Nanak to all have worked for toleration and mutual understanding, despite Chaitanya's aggressive revivalism.

even held, with some qualification, by the distinguished Indian nationalist Muslim historian Muhammad Mujeeb.<sup>20</sup> But neither interpretation is based on a careful assessment of the success or failure of Akbar's policies. The Pakistan school does not demonstrate that Akbar's liberality undermined the Mughal dynasty or significantly added to the divisions already existing between the different Muslim sects and cliques of nobles. The Indian school does not show any long-term gain to the emperor or state from these policies, save the faithful service of some Rajput officers — which might well have been forthcoming in any event. It is significant that Akbar failed to gain Hindu allegiance to offset Muslim displeasure at his tolerance; only one Hindu courtier joined his *Din-i-Allahi*, and his Rajput officers explicitly refused.<sup>21</sup> The fact that Hindu Jat rebels against Aurangzib in 1687 desecrated Akbar's tomb as an expression of militant Hindu resistance to Islam shows how little impression Akbar's liberality had left on the common people in the succeeding generations.<sup>22</sup>

Historians in India and Pakistan have found Aurangzib to be an even more controversial figure, and the gulf between the two national views of this tragic king appears to be unbridgeable. Srivastava expresses a widely accepted Indian nationalist judgment in writing :

No individual in the history of this country, barring Muhammad Ali Jinnah in the thirties and forties of the present century, ever did so much to widen the gulf between the two principal communities in her population than did Aurangzib. Whether seen as a private individual or as a king one is struck by two basic qualities in Aurangzib's character : wordly (*sic*) ambition and religious fanaticism.<sup>23</sup>

The contrasting extreme statement of the Pakistani nationalist view, on the other hand, finds Aurangzib a wholly admirable figure :

Judged by the purity of character and sublimity of his ideals no ruler of Hind-Pakistan can claim comparison with Aurangzib. The simple and pious habits of Aurangzib shine forth as a pleasant contrast to the luxury of his environment. His courage and perseverance were remarkable . . . To these qualities were added a brilliant intellect, a strong sense of duty and regularity in habits. He was exceedingly industrious and took all possible pains in supervising every depart-

<sup>20</sup> M. Mujeeb, *The Indian Muslims* (London, 1967), 258, 263-264.

<sup>21</sup> S. R. Sharma, *Religious Policy*, 45; Srivastava, *Akbar*, I, 307.

<sup>22</sup> Srivastava, *Mughul Empire*, 354.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 383. Similar judgments can be seen in Bihar Text Book Committee, *Itihas*, 61; R. K. Chaudhari, *Itihas*, 238-239; K. M. Panikkar, *Survey*, 157-159. See also the pre-Independence views of the influential amateur historian, Jawaharlal Nehru, who described Aurangzib as a throw-back and bigot, *The Discovery of India* (London, 1946), 268.



ment of administration. Aurangzib hated tyranny and took effective steps to ensure justice for the poorest of his subjects.<sup>24</sup>

Some of the less thoughtful Pakistani writers fall into obvious contradictions, especially in dealing with Aurangzib's seizure of the throne. It is hard to overlook their hero's personal ambition, since he was the third son, his father was still alive and reigning (and lived another six years as Aurangzib's prisoner), and his eldest brother Dara Shukoh was the designated heir apparent. Yet A. Aziz can write of Aurangzib's "reluctant decision to play a part in the war of succession" and of Dara's "usurpation."<sup>25</sup> Hindu historians, however, make too much of this episode<sup>26</sup> — since the Mughals had no fixed principle of succession, the crown was contested at almost every change of regime. The most reasonable Pakistani view on the war of succession is that Aurangzib acted not only for himself but for the orthodox Muslim party, and that had he stood by and allowed the liberal eclectic Dara Shukoh to inherit the throne, there would have been serious danger of the disappearance of Islam as a separate force in South Asia.<sup>27</sup>

Space precludes extended analysis here, but students of Indian history are all too familiar with the problem. Modern nationalists apply the simple-minded test: pro-Muslim or pro-Hindu? to every policy of the great emperors and to the other major political figures of their times. Patronage of literature, charitable endowments for education, taxation, recruitment of officers, and foreign policy are all judged in this context. Abu'l Fazl is summed up as being pro-Hindu; Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi as anti-Hindu; Shivaji as anti-Muslim; and this is enough for most nationalist historians to evaluate these men's careers and influence. The Indian nationalist Muslim, Professor Majeed, is aware of this when he writes:

The Indian Muslims are judged by the non-Muslims and, vice versa, the non-Muslims by the Muslims, as if the historical record of one party could be separated from the record of the other, and each party was answerable only for itself. That Aurangzib was a Muslim and Shivaji a Hindu is at the back of every historian's mind when he writes of them, and no criterion has been evolved by which they could both be judged.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Pakistan History Board, *Short History*, 252-253.

<sup>25</sup> A. Aziz, *Discovery of Pakistan*, 58, 61.

<sup>26</sup> A. L. Srivastava, *Mughul Empire*, 331 ff; *Bharat ka Itihas Baccon ke lie*, 79; Bihar Text Book Committee, *Itihas*, 48-51; R. K. Chaudhari, *Itihas*, 233-235; Ishwari Prasad, *A Short History of Muslim Rule in India* (rev. ed., Allahabad, 1965), 549 ff. especially 558-563.

<sup>27</sup> Sh. A. Rashid, *Short History*, III, 96-99; I. H. Qureshi, *Muslim Community*, 160-161.

<sup>28</sup> M. Majeed, *Indian Muslims*, 555-556.

The distinguished Hindu historian R. C. Majumdar has also shown an awareness of the dangers of nationalist exuberance in historical writing,<sup>29</sup> and indeed felt constrained to produce what his publisher called a "private sector" history of Indian nationalism to balance some of the extravagant interpretations in the Government of India's official version. Unfortunately in South Asia today, as Peter Hardy has written, "interest in the past is not really academic."<sup>30</sup> Historians work in India and Pakistan today with a clear sense of duty and purpose, in the service of their national states. Some of these men find time to criticize Western historians, particularly American and British ones, for emphasizing un-national factors in the South Asian past.<sup>31</sup>

The attempt by the South Asian historians to force their interpretation of the past into the preconceptions of the present not only distorts their own history but fails its avowed purpose. Indian historians, for example, are concerned with the modern problems of the Republic of India's integrity and unity, and its effort to maintain a strong centralized government. This means that in examining the Mughal period they seize upon what they consider precedents for the present ideal of a secular, centralized democratic state. Hence Akbar is seen as good because his religious toleration approached modern Indian ideals. There is no serious examination of the revolts and rebellions during his long rule to see if this policy actually contributed to the consolidation and expansion of his kingdom, nor has there been any attempt at structural analysis to see how far major Hindu elite groups became active supporters of the Mughal government. If they were not so won over, then the policy must be considered a political mistake on Akbar's part. But the judgments expressed today are put forth not on the basis of sixteenth century realities but on the basis of twentieth century expectations. Pakistani historians, concerned to justify the "two-nation" theory, rely heavily on the bitterly partisan contemporary evidence of Bada'uni and Sirhindi to support their judgment that Akbar injured Islam by removing the orthodox Muslim theologians from their privileged position in the state. What can this mean since Islam has so obviously

<sup>29</sup> R. C. Majumdar, "Nationalist Historians," in C. H. Philips, ed., *Historians of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon* (London, 1961), 416-428. Majumdar briefly notes one tendency among Hindu nationalists to glorify the anti-Muslim activities of Marathas, Sikhs, and Rajputs while at the same time ignoring or explaining away their harmful effects on other Hindus. *Ibid.*, 423.

<sup>30</sup> P. Hardy, "Modern Muslim Historical Writing on Medieval Muslim India," in Philips, *Historians*, 307.

<sup>31</sup> Damodar P. Singhal, "Rewriting Indian History," *Modern Review* (reprinted in his *Nationalism in India and other Historical Essays*) and Satish Chandra, "History Writing in Pakistan and the Two-Nation Theory," *South Asian Studies* 2:1 (January, 1967), 23.

survived? In fact they might well consider that Akbar did Islam a service by attempting to free it from the anti-rational and doctrinaire control of the orthodox ulema, and that by seeking to separate – in an extremely modest and cautious way – state policy-making and authority from Islam, Akbar made it possible for Islam to survive the collapse of the Mughal state. Might not Akbar more fruitfully be examined as a centralizing monarch whose policies were not conceived in terms of twentieth century concepts like secular nationalism but in terms of dynastic political aggrandizement?

Aurangzib's reign is clearly associated with a re-assertion of Islamic orthodoxy and is judged accordingly in India and Pakistan. However, all such analyses which fail to take into account the contemporary rise of Hindu revivalism must clearly be hopelessly one-sided. In judging the fratricidal contest to succeed Shah Jahan, Aurangzib is seen as the champion of Islam and Dara Shukoh as the potential benefactor of Hinduism. Yet since Dara is generally admitted to have been politically inept and militarily incompetent, what real benefit would have resulted from his success? His victory would clearly have been incompatible with that other major interest of the Indian historians, the maintenance of the unified national state. Did Aurangzib's policies really save Islam? They certainly did not save the Mughal dynasty nor the empire that dynasty had built up in India. If his achievement was to maintain unblemished the doctrinal purity of a static body of orthodox Muslims in India then we are left with serious questions as to the vitality of Islam itself. Could it not compete, then, in India? But the medieval record is replete with examples of peaceful conversion to Islam, in many documented cases beyond the borders of any then existing Muslim states. The Pakistani view here implies a retreat into a purely defensive and negative posture.

The nationalist historians thus make a serious error in trying to create symbols for the present out of the men and events of the past. Aside from the obvious fallacy, that in falsifying history their own credibility and the cause they seek to serve is undermined, this leads them into a paradoxical position. Neither India nor Pakistan is a mono-cultural society. In making Akbar or Aurangzib a stock figure of nationalist mythology the historian may help the majority group in his society acquire a sense of national identity and purpose. But if Akbar becomes a champion of tolerance, a patron of Hinduism and a foe of Islamic orthodoxy, what are India's forty million Muslims to think of him and of his enthusiastic Hindu interpreters? How closely can East Pakistan's ten million Hindus identify themselves with a nationalism which makes a national hero out of a sternly anti-Hindu Aurangzib? Is nationalism really served by this kind of

oversimplification? One suspects, on the example of Western experience, that in the long run such attempts at purposeful history produce only cynicism and a feeling that history must be irrelevant to modern society. The problems of national integration are complex problems, and the effort to develop a sense of national identity in new states with such heterogeneous populations is not going to be an easy task. The historian who wishes to be pragmatic would better serve the present by tackling the complexity and contradictions of the past than by wishing away patterns that do not fit his preconceptions. However, even such a realistic approach is unlikely to produce a universally acceptable synthesis of Mughal history. Can we expect the French-speaking Canadians to glow with pride on studying the British conquest? People will necessarily continue to have different values and emotional reactions, but this does not excuse the historian for ignoring some special viewpoints and pandering to others. The great eighteenth-century historian Ghulam Husayn (b. 1727/8), in refusing to make some atrocity stories the occasion for partisan polemics, wrote that "the sufferers have suffered, and what is past is past."<sup>32</sup> This disinterested acceptance of reality is essential. The fact that some excellent recent historical works have dispensed with the emotive nationalist symbols is encouraging, and we may hope that others will follow Irfan Habib and D. D. Kosambi in a fresh examination of the past combined with a search for new information to help answer substantive questions such as the nature of medieval Indian social structure.<sup>33</sup> A realistic, even though unflattering, awareness of the national past may lead to a better-considered and more stable sense of national identity and purpose in the present.

<sup>32</sup> Mir Gholam Hossein Khan, tr. Nota Manus (pseud.), *The Seir Mutaqherin or View of Modern Times: being an History of India from the year 1118 to the year 1194 of the Hedrah* (Calcutta, 4 vols, 1902), IV, 35 and III, 335.

<sup>33</sup> D. D. Kosambi, *Introduction to the Study of Indian History* (Bombay, 1956), and *Ancient India* (New York, 1966); Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556-1707)* (Bombay, 1963).