

Lal Qila from a Sikh History Perspective and India's Imperative to Unite the Nation

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ABSTRACT

Lal Qila, Delhi, symbolizing the long-gone Mughal power, generates even today feelings of hurt and rage in the minds of Sikhs and Hindus. Of the two communities, Sikhs carry, perhaps more than Hindus, unresolved grievances against Mughal rulers. To them, Lal Qila is a frequent reminder of the atrocities that Mughal Emperors committed against Sikh Gurus and their followers as described in Part I of the article. Over the years, since Prime Minister Nehru chose it as a venue for his Independence Day address, Lal Qila's political prominence has grown, prompting the Sikh community's unresolved grievances against the Mughals. Further, over the decades, it has enraged Sikhs against Indian governments for failing to appreciate their sentiments and history. Those grievances are confronting India today, crying for their resolution. In part II, the discussion and recommendations section, the authors point out that since Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and others are integral parts of India, with religious and community histories of their own, molded by their intertwining and intersecting with each other, the Sikh grievances cannot be addressed in isolation from those of other communities. Therefore, the article makes several recommendations as to how India may address the unresolved grievances of Sikhs, as well as those of Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and others embedded in their histories, thus ensuring a peaceful, secular, and democratic India. The article uses a combination of historical research methods, such as documentary, archival sources, and a literature review involving a critical interpretation of various historical and religious texts on Sikhs and Sikhism.

Keywords: Lal Qila, Red Fort, Mughals, Sikhs, Hindus, Grievances

Introduction

Rarely would any tourist visiting India want to miss these three destinations: the Taj Mahal in Agra, Agra Fort (aka Lal Qila or the Red Fort) in Agra, and Lal Qila or the Red Fort in Delhi. Ever since they were built, they have enthralled and enchanted countless visitors. Writers, historians, and architects never tire of applauding them as magnificent expressions of the great Indian Mughal art

and architecture. To describe them in Nehru's words, "These are building of a noble simplicity; some of them enormous and yet graceful and elegant, and fairy-like in their beauty." (Nehru, 1989, p. 314)

The Taj Mahal, the greatest monument of love, built by Emperor Shah Jahan, memorializes his undying attachment to his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. A unique place for lovers, newlyweds, and artists, it arouses universal

admiration. On the other hand, the two Red Forts – Delhi succeeding Agra in 1638 as the seat of the Mughal Empire – engender mixed reactions among many folks because they adversely affected countless millions of people.

Of the two, Agra Fort, built by Akbar, does not provoke as much controversy as the Red Fort in Delhi, built by Shah Jahan. The reason is that the latter had a highly turbulent history under Emperor Aurangzeb and his successors, irrevocably affecting Sikh and Hindu communities. Moreover, since the day India gained independence in 1947, the latter Lal Qila being in the capital has become a prestigious venue for variegated political activities, resulting in Mughal history staring in the face of Sikhs and Hindus – as if mocking them about the atrocities Mughals had committed against their ancestors.

As a consequence, Lal Qila, Delhi stays on the minds of Sikhs and Hindus stirring them to action, despite the fact that its owner now is no more a Mughal emperor or the British government, but the Government of India flying the Indian national flag, *Tiranga* (Tricolor), high on it. In our opinion, however, Sikhs think of Lal Qila and Mughal history more intently than Hindus, since they continuously remind themselves of, lest they should forget, what the Mughals did to their ancestors.

Lal Qila, or what it represents, continues to be a source of anguish particularly in the Sikh psyche – a source of unresolved grievances for the Sikh community. Anytime Sikhs see or think of these red sandstone castles, they are reminded of their long history of Mughal violence. Each of the two Red Forts was, first Agra and then Delhi, the residence and throne of Mughal Emperors – a throne, called The Peacock Throne, to wield their imperial power over India; a seat of power that altered the country's culture and religion for good. No other fort in the world has shaped as much the history of a country the size of India as Lal Qila.

The article uses a combination of historical research methods, such as documentary, archival sources, and a literature review involving a critical interpretation of various historical and religious texts on Sikhs and Sikhism. It owes its origin to the January 26, 2021 farmers' protest march, visibly led by Sikhs, to Lal Qila.

Lal Qila, Delhi drew worldwide attention when various Indian farmers' groups stormed it to protest against India's new agricultural laws. With numerous Sikhs leading the charge, the Red Fort became a battle ground between the police and the protesters. The scene was overtly an expression of Sikh rage against the Indian

government, but it also was a manifestation of Sikhs' unresolved grievances against the Mughals. The culmination of the protest march was, as the following picture shows, a young Sikh farmer climbing up a pole and defiantly hoisting the Nishan Sahib, the Sikh flag, on the monument, next to the Indian national flag, with a crowd of Sikhs and Hindus cheering him on – as if to declare their symbolic victory over the mighty Mughals of the past. The article interprets a modern political protest against the present Indian government in terms of Sikhs' history with the Mughals and recommends a solution that India needs to apply to address the nationwide grievances of not only Sikhs but also of other communities.

This is an article in two parts. In part I it explores why Sikhs galvanize against Lal Qila. It locates the roots of Sikh rage in the community's unresolved grievances against the Mughals' mistreatment of Sikhs and the Indian government's failure to understand their history. We are citing events from Sikh history that are indelibly etched in the collective Sikh memory and remain unresolved to this day. We refer to those events to educate the world about the sacrifices Sikh Gurus and their followers made for the sake of their religion and the religious freedom of all people. We dedicate this article to Guru Teg Bahadur on his 400th birth anniversary for sacrificing his life on the altar of religious freedom.

In part II, we recommend measures that India ought to take in response to the challenges posed by what Lal Qila, or rather the Mughals, did to the Sikh Gurus and community, thereby mitigating the Sikh community's unresolved grievances that are embedded in the history of the Red Fort. Since the Sikh community is inevitably part of other Indian communities, its history can't be separated from their histories. Therefore, the recommendations we make are for India to work on and apply as feasible, with the willingness and cooperation of all communities, since all communities in the country function within the Indian context, within its cultural, legal, and geographical boundaries, and are likely to have their own unresolved grievances. This is what India must do to keep itself united as a secular and democratic nation.

Part I. Lal Qila's History with Sikhs

Most Indians may not know the Sikh connection with Lal Qila, the Mughal emperors' principal residence, court, and seat of power. The first one in Agra was superseded by the second in Delhi, with the change of Mughal capital in 1638. Both affected the course of Sikh history immeasurably.



Protesters hoisting the Sikh flag on Lal Qila, Delhi (Khanna, 2021)

Lal Qila as Muslim Legacy

Lal Qila, Delhi and Agra Fort are a significant part of Muslim legacy in India. They have been designated national monuments and UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Lal Qila Delhi also enjoys its status as Indian prime minister's venue for the Independence Day celebration. In the process of getting Indianized, Muslim culture, as represented by Mughals, has contributed much to India in terms of etiquette, dress, food, music, architecture, art, craft, language, literature, and religion. And that is what has normally been emphasized in school and college textbooks under the British Indian education system and subsequently in independent India.

However, Muslim legacy often overlooks the consequences and collective memories that most non-Muslims associate with these great monuments. Textbooks have generally de-emphasized the negative aspects. It is from Lal Qila, Sikh history tells us, that Mughal emperors deployed their might to subjugate the Indian subcontinent, and from there emanated the power wielded by their dominions. Hundreds of years later, Sikhs, Hindus, Parsees, and many others, while visiting Lal Qila, are reminded of the cruel oppression of their cultures and religions, violent takeovers of their lands, enslavement, genocide, and mass proselytization.

Why Lal Qila Still Upsets Sikhs

Below we describe, cite, or refer to a selection of major tragic events from Sikh history to illustrate how Lal Qila as the seat of Mughals became a site of cruelty for the Sikh Gurus and Sikh community. Those events trigger frightful memories for Sikhs even today. Their memories and experiences, as well as their beliefs, have molded them, setting them apart from others.

Even though it is getting close to two centuries since the Mughals went into oblivion, Sikhs have not yet reconciled themselves to their troublesome past, the ordeals their ancestors suffered. They have kept their painful memories alive. To illustrate, they conclude every religious service at the Gurdwara or home with the *Ardas* (prayer) commemorating the Sikhs – the Gurus and their followers – who sacrificed their lives, were tortured to death, and became martyrs for the sake of their *dharma*, their faith, and the protection of religious freedom of all people (G. G. Singh, n.d.). It is, then, in their collective memory of Mughal atrocities that we might locate the Sikh community's grievances confronting India today.

Before going further, we want to acknowledge that, though in part I our focus is Sikhs' unresolved grievances resulting from their history with the Mughals, there may also be other communities, such as Hindus, Muslims, and

Christians, who much like Sikhs have their own grievances stemming from their diverse histories.

The following instances provide context to better understand how Lal Qila and Mughals continue to dwell in the minds of Sikhs with respect to their Gurus' and other Sikhs' martyrdom.

Emperor Babar, First Mughal vs. Guru Nanak, First Sikh

Indians visiting Lal Qila, Delhi and Agra Fort, while admiring their grandeur, hark back to the Mughals decreeing and exercising their power over Indians – hark far back to Babar, the first Mughal emperor, much before there was a Lal Qila. Babar or Babur, a descendant of Timur or Tamerlane, invaded India and established his dynasty in 1526. Sikhs then had just started their spiritual and secular journey as a new religious community in the Sindh valley or pre-partition Punjab under Guru Nanak.

In the following verses, Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, refers critically and prophetically to the frightening acts committed by the first Mughal emperor, who ruthlessly massacred and pillaged Indians, causing endless suffering in the subcontinent:

ਜੈਸੀ ਮੈ ਆਵੈ ਖਸਮ ਕੀ ਬਾਣੀ ਤੈਸੜਾ ਕਰੀ ਗਿਆਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ ॥
ਜੈਸੀ ਮੈ ਆਵੈ ਖਸਮ ਕੀ ਬਾਠੀ ਤੈਸੜਾ ਕਰੀ ਗਿਆਨੁ
ਵੇ ਲਾਲੋ ॥

Jaisī mai āvai kḥasam kī baṇī t̄aisṛā karī giān ve lālo.
As the Word of the Forgiving Lord comes to me, so do I
express it, O Lalo.

ਪਾਪ ਕੀ ਜੰਝ ਲੈ ਕਾਬਲਹੁ ਧਾਇਆ ਜੋਰੀ ਮੰਗੈ ਦਾਨੁ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ ॥
ਪਾਪ ਕੀ ਜੰਝ ਲੈ ਕਾਬਲਹੁ ਧਾਇਆ ਜੋਰੀ ਮੰਗੈ ਦਾਨੁ ਵੇ
ਲਾਲੋ ॥

Pāp kī jañ lai kāblahu ḡhāiā jorī mangle dān ve lālo.
Bringing the marriage party of sin, Babar has invaded from
Kabul, demanding our land as his wedding gift, O Lalo.

ਖੂਨ ਕੇ ਸੋਹਲੇ ਗਾਵੀਅਹਿਨਿਨਕਰਤੁ ਕਾ ਕੂ ਪਾਏ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੇ ॥੧॥
ਖੂਨ ਕੇ ਸੋਹਲੇ ਗਾਵੀਅਹਿਨਿਨਕਰਤੁ ਕਾ ਕੂ ਪਾਏ ਵੇ ਲਾਲੋ ॥੧॥
Khūn ke sohile gavīah Nānak raṭ kā kungū pāe ve lālo. ||1||
The wedding songs of murder are sung, O Nanak, and
blood is sprinkled instead of saffron, O Lalo. ||1||

ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕੇ ਗੁਣ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਗਾਵੈ ਮਾਸ ਪੁਰੀ ਵਚਿਆਖੁ ਮਸੋਲਾ ॥
ਸਾਹਿਬ ਕੇ ਗੁਣ ਨਾਨਕੁ ਗਾਵੈ ਮਾਸ ਪੁਰੀ ਵਚਿਆਖੁ ਮਸੋਲਾ ॥
Sāhib ke guṇ Nānak gāvai mās purī vich ākh masolā.
Nanak sings the Glorious Praises of the Lord and Master in
the city of corpses, and voices this account.
(Sri Guru Granth Sahib, pp 722–723)

Emperor Jahangir vs. Guru Arjan Dev, Fifth Sikh Guru Agra Fort – Mughal Court, Agra

Guru Arjan Dev – a prolific poet, philosopher, messenger of hope and justice, and compiler of the *Guru Granth Sahib* – was summoned to appear in Lahore court before one of Emperor Jahangir's representatives. He was accused of promoting a belief system contrary to Islam – the sacred Sikh scripture he had compiled did not conform to the Holy Quran. In addition, to make things worse, the Guru had refused to pay the land tax levied on non-Muslim property owners and was friends with the emperor's rebellious son Khusrau; moreover, the Sikh religion was attracting many Muslims. Since the Guru was accused, he was assumed to be guilty, pursuant to the imperial prudence and zealotry. He was arrested at Lahore Fort and interrogated. If he wanted his freedom, he was told, he had to deny his faith and accept Islam. Guru Arjan Dev chose his faith, so for non-compliance, he was executed on May 30, 1606. (Singh H. , 1976, pp. 113–118)

This tragic event was bound to be a turning point in the relations between Sikhs and Mughals. As Rizvi puts it, "Jahangir's treatment of their fifth Guru had turned the Sikhs into inveterate enemies of the Mughals." (Rizvi, 2003, p. 135)

Emperor Aurangzeb vs. Guru Teg Bahadur, Ninth Sikh Guru Lal Qila – Mughal Court, Delhi

Aurangzeb ruled India for almost half a century (1659–1707). He levied the *jizya* tax on Hindus and Sikhs. He enforced Islam as the law and religion of his empire. His goal was to make India an Islamic state, meaning, according to Sir Jadunath Sarkar, "the conversion of the entire population to Islam and extinction of every form of dissent." He galvanized all his religious and secular powers to convert Hindus and Sikhs. (Lal, 2022)

Aurangzeb's policies and actions of bigotry and cruelty affected India permanently. From Lal Qila, he enforced his religious law by giving capital punishment to the Ninth Sikh Guru and his devotees as described below:

- November 5, 1675. Within walking distance from Lal Qila, the following three devotees of the Ninth Guru were executed in Chandni Chowk, Delhi because they refused to give up their faith: Bhai Mati Das, "sawn

alive," Bhai Sati Das, "burnt alive," and Bhai Dyala, "boiled to death." (G. Singh, A History of the Sikh People, 1995, p. 260)

- November 11, 1675. Six days later, the Ninth Sikh Guru was beheaded publicly in Chandni Chowk, Delhi. Reasons: He had petitioned to Aurangzeb on behalf of Kashmiri Brahmins, Satnamis, and other Hindus that their forced conversion to Islam, "the Quran or the sword" policy, be stopped, and that they be allowed to live by their faiths. The emperor rejected the Guru's petition and instead asked him to accept Islam, "the only true religion." The Guru responded, "For me, there is only one religion – of God – and whoever belongs to it, be he a Hindu or a Muslim, him I own and he owns me. I neither convert others by force, nor submit to force, to change my faith" (G. Singh, A History of the Sikh People, 1995, p. 259). Clearly, the Guru sacrificed his life for his faith as well as for others' freedom to live by their faith – indeed he became a martyr for the religious freedom of all people.

Emperor Aurangzeb vs. Guru Gobind Singh, Tenth Sikh Guru, and Sons

Lal Qila – Mughal Court, Delhi

Subsequently, Aurangzeb deployed his vast administrative machinery to go after Guru Gobind Singh, the Tenth and last Sikh Guru, and his four sons as described below:

- December 22, 1704. To protect their faith, the Guru's two older sons, Ajit Singh, 17 years old, and Jujhar Singh, 14 years old, died fighting the vast Mughal army in Chamkaur. Witnessing their death, the Tenth Guru offered his prayer, "O God, I have surrendered to Thee what belonged to Thee." (G. Singh, A History of the Sikh People, 1995, p. 308)
- December 27, 1704. Five days later, the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh were bricked alive and executed for their adherence to their faith, when in the custody of Aurangzeb's Governor of Sirhind, Punjab: Zoravar Singh, seven years old, and Fateh Singh, five years old. And there, separated from them, their grandmother, Mata Gujri, died, too. (G. Singh, A History of the Sikh People, 1995, p. 306)

Aurangzeb, the last Great Mughal, died on March 3, 1707, but his laws and edicts were continued by his successors and those who derived power from the imperial throne. The culture and tradition of Mughal violence remained unbroken for a long time. Bigotry, religion-based policies, and

reckless persecution of Hindus and Sikhs weakened India, eventually causing the downfall of the Mughal dynasty, and making it convenient for the British to take over.

Emperor Bahadur Shah I vs. Banda Bahadur and Sikhs

Lal Qila – Mughal Court, Delhi

On December 10, 1710, Bahadur Shah, the eighth Mughal emperor and Aurangzeb's third son, proclaimed a Sikh genocide. He gave orders "to kill the Sikhs wherever found." Reason: The Emperor had earlier issued an order that Sikh general Banda Bahadur be brought to him "dead or alive," who had disappeared despite all the Mughal forces hunting for him. The great Sikh, earlier a Hindu recluse, had pledged to fight against the Mughal rule on being anointed a Sikh warrior by Guru Gobind Singh. (G. Singh, A History of the Sikh People, 1995, pp. 346-347)

Emperor Farrukhsiyar vs. Banda Bahadur, his family, and 714 Sikhs

Lal Qila – Mughal Court, Delhi

On February 29, 1716, Banda Bahadur was captured by the Mughal army and brought to Lal Qila, Delhi, along with his wife Sushila Devi (Princess of Chamba) and their four-year-old son Ajay Singh. Sushila committed suicide when forced to separate from her son and ordered to submit to the emperor's harem. The Mughal cruelties further intensify. The following details, however surreal they are, should be brought to light:

- The same day, February 29, 1716, a large number of Sikhs were captured. On their refusal to give up their faith, as many as 714 Sikhs were beheaded publicly. Their heads were arranged in pyramids at the gates of Lal Qila. Also, Sikh heads were hung up on Lal Qila walls, trees, and buildings leading to Chandni Chowk, Delhi. (Jawandha, 2010, p. 89)
- On June 9, 1716, the Mughal ruler brought Banda Bahadur to the Qutab Minar area. His little boy, Ajay Singh, was slain in front of him. Then Banda Bahadur was executed. Here is an excerpt from a witness account letter describing Banda's execution. C. R. Wilson, an East India Company representative and guest of the court, wrote to the British Viceroy:

First with a dagger his right eye was removed.
Then his left eye was turned out with a dagger.
Then both his feet were cut.

Both arms were chopped off.
Then with pincers, his flesh was cut off bit by bit.
Then his legs, nose, and ears were cut one by one.
Then his brain was blown out with a sledgehammer.
Last of all his body was cut to pieces.

(K. Singh, 2006, p. 415)

- Convert or Die 1716. Emperor Farrukhsiyar ordered Sikhs to convert to Islam or die. He offered a reward for each head. Many Sikhs retreated to jungles; many embraced Hinduism; and many others gave up “the outward signs of their belief.” The Mughal government declared the Sikhs extinct. (Cunningham, 1985, p. 80)

This culture of cruelties, once firmly established, continued its course, with Lal Qila as the ruling throne.

Mughals’ Loss of Lal Qila to Marathas in 1757 and to Sikhs in 1783

It would be pertinent to add also that, during the long Mughal rule, 1526-1857, the Mughal emperors lost Lal Qila two times, first to Hindus and then to Sikhs. A brief account of both is as follows:

Saffron Hindu flag hoisted on Lal Qila: The Maratha Victory, 1757

The great Maratha King Shivaji posed the only notable resistance to Aurangzeb’s rule. He fought and won many wars against the Mughals. The Mughal-Maratha Wars, also known as the Deccan Wars, were fought from 1680 to 1707.

After Shivaji’s death, his son Sambaji also stood up bravely against the Mughals until he was captured at Sangameshwar in February 1689. Sambhaji and his prime minister Kavi Kalash (a Brahmin) were tortured to death. It took over a fortnight to kill them.

But after Aurangzeb’s death, the Marathas rose again and started their expansion toward the north. They conquered the land up to Punjab and beyond as far up as the Khyber Pass. In 1757 they hoisted their Hindu saffron flag on Lal Qila, Delhi. (Mehta, 2005, p. 229)

Nishan Sahib hoisted on Lal Qila: The Sikh Victory, March 11, 1783

In 1783, Baghel Singh, Jassa Singh Ahluwalia, and Jassa Singh Ramgariah united their forces into a joint Sikh army,

defeated the Mughal army, conquered Delhi, and hoisted the Sikh flag on Lal Qila. Once Delhi was under their control, they built seven historical Sikh Gurdwaras in Delhi. The most important of them are Gurdwara Bangla Sahib, commemorating Guru Har Krishan; Gurdwara Sis Ganj and Gurdwara Rakab Ganj commemorating Guru Teg Bahadur. (Gandhi, 1999, pp. 559-560).

Lal Qila, Delhi 1857 Onwards

In 1857 Lal Qila saw an end of all its glory and an end of the Mughal dynasty. The British East India Company military – the de facto British colonial army – defeated the revolutionary Indian soldiers and took the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar prisoner for his role in the rebellion. The British declared India as part of the British Empire, and they took the precious jewels and crowns from the Red Fort Delhi and destroyed much of its art.

In 1947 when the British colonial rule ended, Lal Qila – rather than being relegated to the status of a mere Mughal history museum – was reincarnated as the appointed venue for the prime minister of India’s Independence Day address to the nation. Jawaharlal Nehru chose it as the setting for his August 15, 1947 “Tryst with Destiny” speech and subsequent Independence Day speeches, thus creating a tradition for future prime ministers.

As Sikh history indicates, Lal Qila represents the Mughal dynasty’s adversarial relationship with India, particularly with Hindus and Sikhs. Many of them, especially Sikhs, have not yet reconciled themselves to what Mughals did to their ancestors and India. Today it is not the brick-and-mortar structure known as the Red Fort that troubles them, but what it represents – the history enshrined in it, call it the haunting ghosts of the past.

Lal Qila arouses diverse sentiments and emotions in diverse people depending on their religion, ethnicity, and history. The countless millions of Indians and other tourists visiting Lal Qila are reminded of the gory past associated with Mughal emperors who, enthroned in this splendid monument, adversely affected the course of Indian history, especially for Hindus and Sikhs.

Nishan Sahib vis-à-vis Lal Qila

The above portraits of Lal Qila and the Mughals raise many questions concerning the truthfulness of Indian history. Like many other histories, Indian history has mostly

been written from the conqueror, winner, or imperialist's point of view. That viewpoint has continued to prevail in India to this day through Indians themselves. If the Red Fort still becomes a rallying cry for many Sikhs, there is the Sikh history behind it, which most Indians may not know or understand.

Unmistakably, the above portrait of the Mughals should propel Indians to think over and seek answers to the following questions:

- How could a monument that reminds Indians of centuries of oppression, forced conversions, and destruction of their temples, people, religions, and cultures be so respect-worthy as writers, scholars, and politicians would have us believe?
- How does Lal Qila represent Indian culture and its values?
- And why should it be the venue for the prime minister's address on India's Independence Day?

And, finally, to refer back to the young Sikh farmer's act of hoisting the Sikh flag on the Red Fort on the 2021 Republic Day: it was a symbolic attempt at cleansing the Indian psyche, particularly the Sikh, of the violent past that haunts it. It was his protest against the nightmares of Sikh history in particular, and Indian history in general, associated with this national monument and Mughals.

This unfortunate history brings us to the second part of the article.

Part II. Recommendations for Dealing with the Intercommunal Baggage of History

The Intercommunal Baggage of History

India is perhaps the world's most diverse country. It is more like a continent in diversity – ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and religiously. That Indians share a common history is true, but their ethnicities or communities, known or defined by their religion, language, or state, have their separate pasts (histories), too. And those histories – often shaped by self-centered/communal interacting, intersecting, and relating to one another – have primarily contributed to the numerous challenges facing modern India. Presently the most severe challenge that India must contend with is religion and history as a combined force affecting intercommunal relations.

As individuals, we all have to come to terms with our past – with what we have done and what has happened to us. Much in the same sense, India as one nation has to come to terms with its past, that is, its cumulative history. India's past is a mammoth story of its achievements and failures. It includes, too, what has happened to its communities and what the communities have done to one another, resulting in countless grievances against one another. In other words, India has to deal with its histories of various communities, especially the conflicting communal histories. Let us call it the intercommunal baggage of the past.

We believe that religion and history have shaped India's intercommunal relations over the centuries and are an essential part of Indian life. While Indian democracy is secular by and large, the practice of secularism is often at odds with people's religious sentiments and politics. Unless one religious community is willing to respect another religious community with a divergent view of history, India will continue to be confronted – as it has been until this day – with challenges from any society based on their grievances. This confrontation will impede India's progress as a country and democracy.

Recommendations

Therefore, we would like to make the following recommendations to India: i.e., the government, political leaders and reformers, civic and religious organizations, historians, academics, literati, and the media. If practiced, these recommendations will significantly lower socio-religious tensions and increase mutual understanding among religious communities, e.g., Hindu vs. Muslim, Muslim vs. Sikh, and Sikh vs. Hindu. And their practice, evolving continually, will create greater cohesiveness and harmony in Indian society and, on the whole, make the country a better and more prosperous democracy:

1. *Provide an unbiased and updated version of India's cumulative history.* Ensure that it is free from the imperialistic biases traditionally built into it and in the Indian education system. Incorporate the content/themes/areas previously neglected, disparaged, or understated in it.
2. *Educate all Indians about India's cumulative history,* as far back as feasible. Include in it the social, political, and religious history of each religious community. Thus, each community will know its history and also other communities' histories. As a result, they will likely develop a new and positive understanding of one another.

3. *Create awareness among people about the unsavory aspects of imperialism, Mughal and British.* At the same time, enlighten people about all the heroes who fought for freedom from imperialism.
4. *Teach students to critically examine Indian histories written from the imperialistic point of view – which extoll the oppressors' cultures, arts, literature, philosophies, judgments, and other contributions, and de-emphasize their atrocities; and, on the contrary, ignore or minimize the culture, humanity, and contributions of the subjugated people.*
5. *Help minimize communal conflicts between Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and others by spreading awareness that they, almost all, share the same common ancestry, that the ancestors of almost all Indian Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians were Hindus.* Simultaneously, create awareness that most of the Muslim-convert ancestors were victims of the Mughal power as other Hindus were, and that today's Indian Muslims should not be blamed for what the Mughals did to Hindus, Sikhs, and others.
6. *Create consciousness that all Indians are equal before the law, irrespective of their religion or community, and must be treated equally and held responsible for their conduct, not that of their ancestors.*
7. *Launch a new tradition in schools to celebrate and learn community histories.* Start with the Sikh History Month, for example, in which every year students will learn about Sikhs and Sikhism. Develop this tradition by choosing another month for another community. Thus, students will learn about other communities and religions in a positive spirit.

Conclusion

Most Indians carry the baggage of their history. Their baggage depends on who they are, what community, ethnicity, and religion they belong to. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists, Parsees, Jews, and others have all their unique histories, which have shaped their communities. They tend to believe that they are significantly different from others because they belong to diverse communities. But the truth is that they all being Indian have so much more in common to connect them than the differences to divide them.

We sincerely hope that India – i.e., the Indian government and its opposition; political leaders, writers, and media of the right, left, and center; all diverse religious organizations; and Indian society – will find our suggestions helpful. We trust that they will use these ideas to devise new ways to deal with the divisive issues of history and religion.

And we believe that an updated cumulative history of India will enlighten Indians about themselves and, more importantly, result in alleviating the social and religious tensions between communities. Eventually, this will help India become a more progressive and prosperous nation and a more secular and pluralistic democracy.

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