

Weaving India's MAHAKATHA (Grand Narrative) for the 21st Century

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What is a Grand Narrative?

Just as an individual or an organization has a name, character, a calling card, in short, an identity by which s/he/it is known, similarly a collective entity also has some characteristics that define it in very fundamental ways. Businesses use the term “brand” to refer to such a narrative that represents who they are. Political parties identify themselves in terms of distinct ideology or a manifesto. Families have their histories of forefathers, cherish their heirlooms, and pass on memories captured in pictures and videos. Such self-defining narratives tend to combine hard facts with wishful thinking, exaggeration and even outright fantasy. Narratives are useful for securing a group’s sense of cohesiveness and purpose.

In a similar manner, the narrative of a nation is the overall story of its people: who they are, where they came from, what their thoughts are, what their philosophy and way of life is, what makes them one people, what was their past story and what is their future trajectory, what were their contributions to the world, and so on. Like all self-developed narratives, the narrative of a nation’s collective identity is made up of a selective use of genuine facts, many exaggerations as well as outright fabrications. It is a self-image consisting of facts and fiction that has been passed down from generation to generation. The term “grand narrative” has often been used to discuss the narratives that a given people have of themselves.

It is an interesting fact that strong and powerful countries invariably have a robust grand narrative which is extremely positive in the way the country is projected. This encompasses the histories and accomplishments of all its people and serves to instill great pride for their shared heritage. Stories of valor and bravery, of conquests and founding fathers, of the beauty of their language, their culture - all this and more make up the grand narrative. There is pride in the geography, even a sense of sacredness of the geography as the site where extraordinary events happened in the hoary past. Countries invest heavily to inculcate patriotism, respect and pride for their national symbols such as flags, national anthem, dress and other symbolism.

China is a very interesting case. When all countries are rushing to westernize laboring under the delusion that they are modernizing (since the West has been so successful in pushing its worldview that I call Western Universalism), China has shown that a country can be extremely modern without westernizing. Confucius was their most celebrated thinker and China has decided that they are going to adopt Confucian modernity. What does this entail? It entails giving pride of place to Mandarin as the language of communication. It also entails employing Confucian philosophy and worldview to the development paradigm. Hence adoption of science, technology, modernity is all on their own terms and not a blind copying of the paradigms of the

West. This has ensured that China has remained uncolonized. Similar grand narratives exist for the French, British, Japanese and many others.

A brief overview of some Grand Narratives

The United States of America

One of the things I learned about the United States of America ever since I arrived here in 1971 is the remarkable way every child is taught about the founding fathers and the greatness of America. There are great national monuments, national holidays and festivals, and impressive parades that take place with pomp and splendor. All this instills in the people that they are an exceptional people. In fact, the term *American Exceptionalism* is commonly used to refer to the American grand narrative. It is an important part of the conscious and unconscious collective psyche of most Americans.

The American grand narrative was not suddenly composed one day, nor was it the work of any single individual. It evolved from the struggles of the European settlers over many centuries as an attempt to define who constitute the American people. In the early 1600s, it was mainly English colonizers of what they called the “new land”. They referred to themselves as English and to the natives of America as Indians.

But gradually, Europeans from other countries besides England also joined them, and it was no longer correct to refer themselves as English. There were also Germans, French, Dutch, among others. The common narrative became Christianity. The natives were now referred to as Heathens. Hence the us/them differentiation was based on Christian/Heathen.

Over time, many of the native Americans got converted to Christianity, and they could no longer be called Heathens. A new nomenclature was needed with new markers for identity. At the same time, Africans had arrived in America, mostly (not all) as slaves. Therefore, the us/them vocabulary shifted to White/Black. It is interesting to note that this self-definition as Whites was a very American invention, and people back in Europe did not refer to themselves this way. The Europeans described themselves as English or French or Germans or Dutch, etc. The notion of having a common identity based on skin color was thus developed in America for the first time.

Once being White became the criteria for someone to be classified as a proper American, the fight was over who is considered White and who is not. All Europeans were not considered White at that time. The Irish are a good example of Europeans officially classified as non-White in America. Ireland was a colony of England, and the Irish were ill-treated in their own country – openly stereotyped as drunkards, dirty, lazy and criminals. As a result, when an Irish person migrated to America, the English ruling elite did not accept him as a fellow White. The same

was true of Jews, Italians and many other ethnicities from Europe. They all had to negotiate their space until they also became a part of the White community.

More recently, the narrative of being American has broadened and become more eclectic, with people from many non-European continents rapidly increasing their populations and economic and political clout in America. This has led to the creation of hyphenated American identities where one finds Irish-American, Jewish-American, Polish-American, Indian-American, Black-American and many others proudly wearing the badge of their country of origin as a legitimate part of being American.

But throughout this long and complex journey and conflict over who is American and on what criteria, what has remained constant is that those claiming to be Americans must buy into the doctrine of American Exceptionalism, the narrative that Americans are an exceptional people, the best in the world at virtually everything. Every schoolchild is taught about America's founding fathers and the greatness of their land. Sports events start with the mandatory singing of the national anthem and patriotism for the flag is inculcated at a very young age. Elaborate parades and marches are organized on days of national importance to underline the grandness of the American nation. The greatness of American history is taught not only in schools but also in museums, libraries, and through public spectacles and art. American Exceptionalism is widely accepted by both the left and the right.

China

The Chinese have had a massive program to define and propagate their grand narrative as an ancient civilization that is rapidly becoming the world's greatest country once again. This narrative is based on ancient Confucian thought combined with Taoism, Buddhism and its own kind of modernity.

Every Chinese grows up learning that his or her heritage was always the world's greatest in every respect. They talk about how China progressed through the ages in science and technology, art and culture, and how it has now become a modern society with a seamless and continuous link to its past. China claims that its modernization is not Westernization. It has modernized within the framework of its own Confucian ideals. This means that Chinese do not see a mutually exclusive choice between tradition and modernity. The modern Chinese sees himself as the product of his own distinct tradition.

The standardization of Mandarin as the national language has played a significant role in the development of national unity and sense of pride. Though China is rapidly introducing English

to all its citizens, this is as a second language and not at the expense of Mandarin. Technical and professional education is imparted in Mandarin. Foreign brands find it necessary to offer their products in China in Mandarin. The message is clear: If you want to be successful in China, you must learn their language and their ways, rather than vice versa.

The Chinese government in alliance with its industrialists have started a network of Confucius Institutes worldwide. These teach the official ideology and curriculum established for this purpose – in other words, the grand narrative that China wants to propagate globally. The plan is to have 1,000 such institutes worldwide by 2020. Most of them are located on campuses in various countries, thereby exerting powerful influence on the minds of young students.

Besides teaching Mandarin, the institutes teach the official Chinese version of its history, world affairs, the great contributions of China in science, technology, arts and culture. Through such institutional mechanisms, the Chinese control that their views dominate around the world. They control most of the prestigious journals and study programs on China across the universities in many countries. They ensure that Chinese businessmen and students going to other countries carry with them a positive and strong image of China, without the baggage of shame or guilt. Hence, their grand narrative is also an important part of foreign relations.

China defends its reputation fiercely. For instance, when the Western human rights or religious freedom organizations publish reports critical of its human rights violations, China gives a strong rebuttal including its own reports documenting the atrocities in the USA. The confidence stemming from their grand narrative makes them defiant and it is not easy for anyone to brow beat them.

Pan-Islam

Though there is important overlap, the grand narratives of Islam and of the Arab countries are not the same. The Islamic grand narrative claims to be a successor to the Jewish and then the Christian narratives. While acknowledging the prior two Abrahamic religions, including their holy books and prophets, Islam interprets their history in a way that is fundamentally and radically different than what Jews and Christians are taught. Islam claims to supersede them, and to be the final religion as per Allah's authority. The Qu-ran, revealed to Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, is the last and final word on everything.

A detailed theological discussion of their serious differences is beyond the scope of this writing. However, it is important to note that the Islamic grand narrative has serious and irreconcilable conflicts with its two Abrahamic predecessors.

Like it's two Abrahamic family members, Islam has a literalist account of history. I have termed this approach to truth as history-centric. History-centrism has made it difficult to re-interpret these religions in non-trivial ways, especially since Islam considers it blasphemous to question the dogma because it is the word of Allah.

The Islamic narrative prescribes drastically different treatments for its insiders (i.e. Muslims) and outsiders (i.e. *kafirs* or infidels), respectively. *Dar-ul-Islam* (Nation-of-Islam) transcends and supersedes all boundaries of man-made countries, and every Muslim is required to be ultimately loyal to this Islamic nation which is meant to expand to cover all humanity. The non-Muslim peoples are called *Dar-ul-Harb*, the Nation of Infidels. The grand narrative demands Muslims to wage a holy war called *jihad*, in which *Dar-ul-Islam* must defeat *Dar-ul-Harb*. Islamic society is formally programmed towards achieving this mandate from Allah to establish Islam worldwide as the only religion. Muslim children are indoctrinated in this dogma in schools called madrassas.

Here is what Ambedkar wrote on Islam's built in hatred for infidels:

...Islam divides as inexorably as it binds. Islam is a close corporation and the distinction that it makes between Muslims and non-Muslims is a very real, very positive and very alienating distinction. The brotherhood of Islam is not the universal brotherhood of man. It is brotherhood of Muslims for Muslims only. There is a fraternity, but its benefit is confined to those within that corporation. For those who are outside the corporation, there is nothing but contempt and enmity. In other words, Islam can never allow a true Muslim to adopt India as his motherland and regard a Hindu as his kith and kin.¹

And he also wrote:

This must make anyone wishing for a stable government very apprehensive. But this is nothing to the Muslim tenets which prescribe when a country is a motherland to the Muslim and when it is not...According to Muslim Canon Law the world is divided into two camps, *Dar-ul-Islam* (abode of Islam), and *Dar-ul-Harb* (abode of war). A country is *Dar-ul-Islam* when it is ruled by Muslims. A country is *Dar-ul-Harb* when Muslims only reside in it but are not rulers of it. That being the Canon Law of the Muslims, India cannot be the common motherland of the Hindus and the Musalmans. It can be the land of the Musalmans—but it cannot be the land of the 'Hindus and the Musalmans living as equals.'¹ Further, it can be the land of the Musalmans only when it is governed by the Muslims. The moment the land becomes subject to the authority of a non-Muslim power, it ceases to be the land of the Muslims. Instead of being *Dar-ul-Islam* it becomes *Dar-ul-Harb*.²

... It might also be mentioned that *Hijrat* [emigration] is not the only way of escape to Muslims who find themselves in a *Dar-ul-Harb*. There is another injunction of Muslim

Canon Law called *Jihad* (crusade) by which it becomes "incumbent on a Muslim ruler to extend the rule of Islam until the whole world shall have been brought under its sway. The world, being divided into two camps, *Dar-ul-Islam* (abode of Islam), *Dar-ul-Harb* (abode of war), all countries come under one category or the other. Technically, it is the duty of the Muslim ruler, who is capable of doing so, to transform *Dar-ul-Harb* into *Dar-ul-Islam*." And just as there are instances of the Muslims in India resorting to *Hijrat*, there are instances showing that they have not hesitated to proclaim *Jihad*.³

Despite the global mandate for Islamic expansion, the narrative is not a monolith. There are various versions of it – mainly the Saudi Sunni version and Iranian Shiite version.

Muslim countries and wealthy leaders invest heavily to plant Islam's grand narrative worldwide through strategic institutions, such as academic chairs at places like Harvard. An amazing accomplishment of this movement is that the Islamic grand narrative gets the benefit of doubt in liberal circles worldwide. Serious critiques of it are branded as Islamophobia, by the very same intellectuals who also champion intellectual freedom.

Despite Islam's claim of being egalitarian, in practice there is a 4-tier hierarchy of privileges that operates as a kind of unofficial caste system. These are:

1. Ashraf – those of foreign origins who invaded India. This is further stratified into four tiers:
 - a. Sayyid – those who claim to be direct descendants of the prophet.
 - b. Sheikh – those of elite Arab origin
 - c. Turk/Mughal – those of Turkish origin
 - d. Pathan – those of Afghan origin.
2. Ajlaf – those of Indian origin who got converted to Islam
3. Arzal – untouchables

In Pakistan, different castes are referred to as *quoms*. These are ethnic groupings that serve as criteria for social stratification. Ambedkar explains the Islamic caste system as follows:

Islam speaks of brotherhood. Everybody infers that Islam must be free from slavery and caste. Regarding slavery nothing needs to be said. It stands abolished now by law. But while it existed much of its support was derived from Islam and Islamic countries. ...But if slavery has gone, caste among Musalmans has remained. ...There can thus be no manner of doubt that the Muslim Society in India is afflicted by the same social evils as afflict the Hindu Society. Indeed, the Muslims have all the social evils of the Hindus and something more. That something more is the compulsory system of *purdah* for Muslim women.⁴

Other countries such as Japan, France and Britain

I remember watching an interview with Akio Morita, Sony's co-founder, in which he was asked the reason for Japanese businesses becoming world leaders. He responded that Japanese culture treats guests with great respect, and this is reflected in the love and care they invest when creating products. The customer is seen as a guest being invited to enjoy the product. He went on to say that young Japanese girls learn the art of flower arrangement to acquire the inner sense of beauty, balance and precision in all the work they will later do in factories. The Japanese became the first modern country to excel in modern industrial competition without losing their traditions.

The Japanese have built their grand narrative based on a common language, race, Buddhist value system and culture. This foundation from the past is combined with their modern scientific mindset and work ethic, into a narrative combining the best from their past and present.

The Japanese penchant for attention to detail and perfection are a key part of their narrative which is reflected even in their work ethic and products. This is not an accidental achievement and it stems from their core narrative and values.

The French grand narrative sees them as the successors and inheritors of the Renaissance movement in medieval Europe. They consider their great achievements in the arts and sciences as a continuation of their legacy from the Renaissance. The French Revolution is projected as the movement that gave the world the hallowed words that describe a progressive and liberal nation today, viz "liberty", "equality" and "fraternity". The French language is a central part of their narrative and is promoted as a highly refined and cultured language. It is mandatory for anyone migrating to France to learn French. Alliance Française is a global institution that works closely with the External Affairs Ministry in France to promote their grand narrative in many cities around the world.

The British pride themselves as the ones who pioneered the development of modern democracy and created the Industrial Revolution. Their grand narrative sees them as the innovators of modern governance and capitalism. Even while the horrors of their colonial empire played out in the colonies, the narrative being spun was that colonization was a great gift to civilize backward people with the "rule of law"; and that English was the best link language for everyone. The British are proud of their royal family and showcase their pomp and splendor on numerous occasions. They project Shakespeare as the greatest writer who profoundly influenced literary discourse around the world.

The British have been so successful in promoting and exporting their grand narrative to their former colonies that it is the dominant worldview of the elites there even after their independence. The Commonwealth of nations which is an association of all former British colonies promotes British academics, culture, technology and models of governance. In fact, a large part of what continues to give Britain an important place in world affairs is the skill with which they have crafted and spread their grand narrative worldwide

Pakistan

In the absence of a cohesive grand narrative, a country can easily slip into disintegration. Pakistan is an interesting case of such a crisis. Its very creation was based on the artificial idea of Islam as a robust framework for creating a country out of multiple peoples with very diverse grand narratives. Unlike the Vedic open architecture which has a long history of nurturing harmony across very diverse ideas, there is no equivalent open system in Islam that could serve as a matrix to hold pluralism together within one country. Some of the conflicting and competing approaches to build Pakistan's narrative are summarized below.

A major attempt at nation-building has been the imposition of Urdu. However, Urdu is itself a foreign invader's language imposed during the Mughal rule. Therefore, it has not been successful in replacing the native languages even in what was West Pakistan. Furthermore, this Urdu imposition became the basis for the civil war that led to the creation of Bangladesh as a separate country. This is very different than the case of Sanskrit or Hindi in India, because Sanskrit and Hindi are *native* to India. They do not bring a foreign nexus into the picture the way Urdu drags with it the Persian and Arabic emotional alignment and fantasy. Secondly, the open architecture of Sanskrit has made it a powerful substratum for a large majority of Indian native languages.

Unlike secularism that tries to hold diverse identities of rational actors, and unlike Vedic dharma that uses mutual respect to hold a pluralistic rubric together, Islam is heavily dogmatic. Therefore, it has held complex societies together only with the use of heavy-handed force and violence. This has been the normal condition in Pakistan.

Many Pakistanis like to imagine they are of Arab, Turkish, Iranian or Afghani descent. This boosts their identity by giving them a claim of Ashraf status. This brings a superiority complex with respect to their fellow Muslims who are identified as Indians that converted to Islam. The Pakistani popular imagination of being the descendants of migrants/invaders from the Middle East is nonsensical. The public goes through considerable investment in hypocrisy just to deny

their true Indian ancestral history. As a result, many Pakistanis are obsessed with denying their Indian origins, and hence Hindu ancestry.

Competing against this fetish to appear from the Middle east, there is much to be proud in pre-Islamic cultures located in Pakistan's geography. Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa and Takshashila are merely a few of the examples of the great Vedic civilization that once thrived in what is today Pakistan's territory. This raises a crisis of narrative: Should Pakistanis welcome their great pre-Islamic history or not? If they include these in their grand narrative, they admit the Indian and specifically Vedic foundations of who they are. This demolishes their fabricated narrative as a Middle Eastern people. It depicts them as Indians who succumbed to Islam and rejected their own ancestors. This presents a serious emotional crisis of identity.

The identity crisis of Pakistan has worsened in recent times. Many well-educated Pakistanis are now trying to publicly distance themselves from radical Islam. At the same time, many Indians are now very influential on the world stage as successful entrepreneurs and business magnates and they are becoming even more successful in successive generations. Hence, it has become fashionable for Pakistanis to blur their Pakistani branding under vague identities like "desi" or "South Asian". Affluent Pakistanis in the West are therefore torn between projecting their Indian (hence Hindu) background and their Islamic (hence Arabic/Persian) affiliation.

The only way Pakistan has managed to hold itself together in the face of such identity crises has been its engineered hatred against India. Pakistani school textbooks are loaded with Hinduphobia and India phobia. This seems to be the temporary cement holding them together.

Does India presently have a Grand Narrative?

India's present debates, conflicts and confusions can be seen in terms of the state of its grand narrative. There are multiple contenders for grand narrative competing against each other, often in intense (and violent) fights. These include:

1. Bharat: An ancient nation based on Vedic principles, and modern India based on the open architecture of Hindu dharma.
2. Secular nation: Based on modern Western ideals.
3. South Asia: Should merge with Pakistan, Bangladesh, etc. and discover its grand narrative from the Mughal era. In effect this amounts to slipping into a Mughalstan project.
4. Artificial country: Did not exist until the British put it together for their own agenda. Any grand narrative would prevent the separate subaltern nations from claiming own narratives and countries.

Many of these, especially the last two above, are centrifugal in nature. Indian leftist intellectuals tend to oppose option 1 by accusing it of a litany of charges such as: saffron, chauvinistic, nationalistic, etc. They tend to use human rights arguments to debunk the unity of India. At best they will settle for option 2. But in an increasing number of cases, they promote 3 or 4. For instance, people from the northeast are being brainwashed to think they are not Indians, Tamilians are being educated that they are Dravidians fighting foreign Aryans. Dalits and minorities in India are being taught narratives of social oppression and exploitation.

There is an outright civil war of divisive narratives based on minorityism, casteism, religion and racism. This in turn fuels unrest and gives rise to Breaking India tendencies.

Such negative narratives deny Indians of a history in which they had agency and used it in positive and responsible ways. Progress and development are claimed to have always come from foreign sources. We are told that it was the foreign Aryans who brought Sanskrit to India. Then it was the Greeks who brought philosophy and mathematics, Muslims who gave us tabla and tandoor, and the English who brought railways along with cricket and modernity. Finally, it is the Americans who are now bringing us human rights. India is perpetually beholden to someone else for her very existence.

Equally harmful are those Indians who are escapists and overconfident. They do not want to face this situation, much less deal with it. Such overconfident persons need to be told that in the last 2000 years, the territory of India has shrunk by about 80% from the time when

Afghanistan to Bali were part of our civilization, as was the region from Tibet to Sri Lanka. Even the country with its present boundaries is threatened with separatism. The fact we must face is that atrocity literature is driving social wedges between communities at various levels, and Breaking India forces are threatening our unity and integrity.

A serious confusion is the assumption that modernizing requires Westernizing and abandoning Indian heritage. The deep belief among many is that Indian culture is backward and this results in guilt and shame of our past.

India urgently requires a positive grand narrative, one that will help Indians understand the benefits of being together. The challenge I am accepting is to show that India *does* indeed have a unifying narrative which is continuous and organic, and which does not need to be made up synthetically to keep the nation together. Our grand narrative is a civilizational one and it is imperative for us to re-discover it, for ourselves and for a role we can play on the world stage. A robust, unifying and strong national narrative must strengthen the nation militarily and help its institutions grow economically, culturally and politically.

In the pages that follow, I will deal with the multifaceted and multidimensional qualities of the Indian grand narrative. This means exploring several centripetal (unifying) forces, such as: worldviews, history, sacred geography, rituals (as traditional customs and as re-enactment of cosmic *rtam*), dance, festivals, etc. These foundations need to be overlaid with pragmatic collective interests such as future security, economic development and overall betterment of society.

I will discuss the earliest grand narratives we have that are enshrined in our *shastras*. Then I will discuss the various disruptions we have faced that destroyed our narrative in many ways, and the modern attempts to re-constitute our narrative. This will position me to discuss the present situation in the clashes and battles over the narratives. I will present my ideas on the road ahead that we must travel.

Our Shastras' view of who we are

The stories and teachings from our *shastras* that have been passed down give a good idea of our self-image that has been robust for several millennia. Ever since the *Rigvedic* times, narrative has evolved as the viable mode of knowledge dispersion. Each genre of Indian writing contributes to the story of who we are.

A variety of narratives are utilized to promote the four *purusarthas* - the four purposes of life: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. The merit of a literary composition is determined to a large extent by its effectiveness in explaining one or more of these four.

Vedas and Upanishads

Vedas and Upanishads form the *shruti* part of our literature which is considered eternal. How do the Vedas and Upanishads deal with some fundamental building blocks of our worldview?

Infinite cycles of emanation and dissolution

In the Vedic worldview, Brahman is the eternal non-transient truth while all else is in a perpetual state of flux being created and dissolved repeatedly. The theories expounded by the Vedas are free from authorship, history, ownership and exclusivity. There is a prominent view that at the beginning of each cycle of the universe, Brahma comes into existence and he creates the entire universe. Who or what creates Brahma has been a matter of intense debate. When *Mahapralaya* (great dissolution) occurs, everything vanishes into nothingness. A new Brahma thereupon appears, and the cycle continues. There is no beginning or end of these cycles and they have been continuing infinitely and they will continue infinitely.

Vedic History

The *Rig Veda* talks about Manu's son (Ikshvaku) whose descendants were called *Suryavanshis*, while the descendants of Manu's daughter (Ila) were called *Chandravanshis*. The *Ramayana* is the story of a *Suryavanshi* king, while the Mahabharata is that of a *Chandravanshi* dynasty. A king with his subjects was collectively called *Jana*. The story goes that the Purus, a branch of the *Chandravanshi* king Yayati's dynasty became the most powerful among the 5 branches of his family. One of the descendants of the Puru clan was the son of Shakuntala, Bharata, after whom India or Bharat is named. The people of this geography thus came to be known as Bharatiya and this is a name by which India is referred to even today.

The *Bhumi Sukta* in the *Atharva Veda* advises all the people living on this earth (*prithvī*) to respect and love it as their mother. This text presents the foundations of society, ecology, and human civilization. It defines the citizen's charter in ways that are relevant even today, making it one of the important meta-narratives of 'Indian-ness.' It further clarifies that a nation is secure and prosperous only when her citizens possess such desirable qualities.

Vedic Universalism

One of the mantras in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* states:

*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah
Sarve Santu Niraamayah,
Sarve Bhadraani Pashyant,
Maa Kaschid Dukha Mapnuyat.
Om Shanthi Shanthi Shanthi.*

This is a *Shanti mantra* that encompasses everyone in its fold. The *mantra* prays for the happiness and well-being of everyone and exhorts everyone to look out for one another. We are asked to possess a universal spirit in which we look out for the universal wellbeing of every entity in creation. From this follows many things that are natural to Indians and valued greatly, such as: vegetarianism, eco-friendly way of living, mutual respect, non-harming (*ahimsa*). It naturally promotes respect and acceptance for diversity, be it bio-diversity, cultural diversity, religious or spiritual diversity.

While the above is for the universal *collective* spirit, *Aham Brahmasmi* is for the universal *individual* spirit. *Aham Brahmasmi* essentially means that each one is a divine and complete being. The potential for realizing the divine exists in everyone and therefore is a universal quality. Hence even as individuals, Indian thought has always advocated universalism.

What is noteworthy in the foregoing is the absence of notions like "evil" or "infidels" or "devil".

Itihasa

Our *Itihasa* consists of two main epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, and the *Puranas*. While these epics and *Puranas* are stories at the simplest level, they are to be interpreted in accordance with the *shruti* texts. All *itihasa* combines *paramarthika-satya* (absolute truth) with *vyavaharika-satya* (worldly truth) and provide narratives with teachings on all aspects of life. They combine history and metaphor, and offer multiple perspectives making them more open than history. Truth is not dependent on history; rather, history is a manifestation of it.

The ability to integrate multiple perspectives without sacrificing the whole has meant that the *Ramayana* is a widely travelled story being retold in every corner across Asia. The embellishments and local adaptations have allowed the narrative to be enriched without compromising the core teachings. The *Ramayana* lore has been transmitted in seamless unbroken continuity for millennia, and it may be called The Asian grand narrative. The central personage of Rama is the very embodiment of all the good things in a human being and in a ruler. Even today, the ideal State that Indians aspire to is called *Rama Rajya*.

The *Mahabharata*, like the *Ramayana*, appears in multiple layers of story-telling in which each layer serves as a context to a new layer, which further opens another layer in a new context. A new set of characters are introduced in each layer. The *Mahabharata* contains an exhaustive set of permutations and combinations of situations about family, society, state and conflicts. For each of these dimensions, it provides multiple perspectives of dharma through powerfully portrayed characters. It summarizes various meta-narratives about the origin of India and its people, society, politics, ethics and philosophical systems. Thus, it provides a non-exclusivist framework including multiplicity of beliefs, concepts and ideas. This is so deeply ingrained that it makes Indians psychologically comfortable with relative truths, uncertainty, ambiguity, disorder and pluralism of all kinds.

Like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata* has hundreds of local adaptations, each serving certain contexts, and all of them collectively assisting us in understanding *dharma* in our own contexts. The *Mahabharata's* total narrative is so large that many of its sub-narratives have become very popular in their own right. Many of these sub-narratives permeate Indian life and culture. Among them, the *Bhagvad Gita* is the most popular, and is considered a summary of various streams of *darshanas* that is easily accessible for personal, professional and political applications.

Arthashastra and Dharmashastras

These two treatises have shaped the Indian psyche in major ways. Like all the other genre of literature, both these *shastras* are framed to facilitate the achievement of the four *purusharthas*, namely *artha*, *kama*, *dharma* and *moksha*. The *Arthashastra* provides the guiding principles for successful statecraft. The *Dharmashastras*, on the other hand, provide the guiding principles for a person in his/her context as an individual, a householder and as a member of society. As in the case of the other genres, these texts are completely anchored in the *shruti* tradition, and only serve to simplify the tenets for a particular time, place and context.

Sacred Geography

Since time immemorial, India has been united as a *sanskriti* or meta-civilization through various threads. The concept of its geography being treated as our mother (*Bharat Mata*) is as old as our earliest memories. Various texts, especially the *itihisas*, reflect this idea very explicitly. The *Mahabharata*, for example, chronicles participation by communities all across India in the Kurukshetra war.

Rivers are another strong link in our grand narrative. There are several *suktas* for the Saraswati river of the Sindhu Saraswati civilization. Later, as the civilization advanced into the plains with its new rivers, the *Nadi stuti* in the *Rig Veda* expresses the divinity of all of them. The river Ganga is revered and considered the most sacred river. It is said that when the Chola kings of present day Tamil Nadu defeated the kings of the Ganga river valley in a war, they forced them to send water from the Ganga which was then poured into a big lake created in the south. Thus, rivers have been a unifying thread in weaving the grand narrative of India.

Pilgrimages also have made their contribution to the grand narrative. We have Shankaracharya establishing the four *matthas* in the four corners of our geography, and the *char-dham* yatras (pilgrimages to four sacred sites). The *shakti peethas* are a network of *shakti* centers spread across the vast geography of India. Similarly, the *dyotirlingas* cover a geography from times immemorial that encompasses the land we call India today. The Kumbh Mela is the world's oldest and largest gathering which has been repeated at predefined times since thousands of years. Kailash in Tibet, Kashi (Varanasi) in the north and Rameshwaram in the south are prominent examples that illustrate how the sacred geography has unified India and given its people a sense of unity as a nation with a shared identity.

Hindu Rashtra

Hard power and physical borders alone are not sufficient to form a nation. A nation must be forged with a grand narrative that fosters unity, continuity and social cohesiveness. However, India today, is besieged by Breaking India forces which cannot be defeated simply by importing the Western ideas of a nation state. Our conception of a nation state should evolve organically from our own ethos.

Should Hinduism be the basis for India's grand narrative, given that all the texts and traditions discussed above belong to the Vedic framework? Before we can answer this question, we must examine what a Hindu *rashtra* (or nation) would look like. In other words, what are the

philosophical principles based on which a Hindu *rashtra* would function, and would such a *rashtra* be good for the diverse peoples of India?

A Hindu *rashtra* would be based on *dharma*, which refers to the natural order of things, or “that which holds or sustains”. Embedded in the philosophical concept of the *rashtra* is a deep appreciation of the ultimate interdependence and interconnectedness of all living beings. This is reflected in the *panch maha yajna* (five great offerings) that Hindus are asked to observe.⁵ These are:

1. *Brahma-yajna*, which consists of education, self-development and teaching.
2. *Deva-yajna*, which consists of worshipping the divine, through consecration of temples, worship, and meditation.
3. *Pitri-yajna*, which involves service to parents, forefathers, and ancestors. There are many dimensions to this and all of them emphasize that we must strengthen family ties in order to strengthen the character of society.
4. *Bhuta-yajna*, which is service to the plant and animal kingdoms and to the natural environment in general.
5. *Manusha-yajna*, which consists of service to humanity and society at large.

This five-level framework reflects the fact that we are not islands unto ourselves; rather our wellbeing depends on the wellbeing of others and vice versa. This notion of interdependence is perhaps most beautifully captured in the metaphor of Indra’s net.

There is a famous passage in the *Mahabharata* that proclaims that for the sake of a family, an individual member may be sacrificed; for the sake of a village, a family may be sacrificed; for the sake of a province, a village may be sacrificed and for the sake of one's own atman, the whole earth may be sacrificed.⁶ While this sounds paradoxical, it reflects a balance of individualism and collectivism that is at the heart of Hindu dharma. At its core, the Vedic tradition is to uphold the cosmic order and provide for *loka sangraha* (the wellbeing of the entire cosmos or the universal good). The *shanti* (peace) *mantras* of the Vedas that are chanted at the end of every *puja* ask for the peace and wellbeing of *all* life in *all* the worlds and realms of existence, not only human beings but all sentient and non-sentient beings and manifestations of life.

We are also compelled to focus on the spiritual wellbeing of the individual, not only for the sake of the individual but also for the sake of the universe. This reflects the unique Hindu concept of *sva-dharma* (literally “the *dharma* of the individual self”), which is the *dharmic* pursuit that is most appropriate for a given individual based on his or her innate qualities and conditioning.

That which is best for the spiritual evolution of the individual is ultimately that which is best for upholding the *rtam* or cosmic order.

Western approaches to nation-building tend to rely heavily on the political levers of power. However, political and institutional changes alone cannot achieve the evolution of human consciousness. For example, no amount of top-down government enforcement would be successful in causing people to subscribe to truthfulness as a genuine ideal and not out of fear of the rulers. The *dharmic* approach to social development is to reform society from within the individuals – by inculcating the values and traditions for the establishment of that ideal vision of a *dharmic* society. The focus would be on human development at individual and collective levels in accordance with *dharma*. It would not be on the top-down imposition of compliance by a strong government.

Some of the ideal characteristics of such a *rashtra* would be as follows:

- **Economy:** The economy would be one where the pursuit of *artha* or material wealth is always aligned with *dharma*. This means that *artha* should be accumulated only using righteous means. This entails banning exorbitant interest rates, supporting the free flow of capital and preventing the extortion of the vulnerable. The model should be one of inter-dependence based on a true decentralization of capital.
- **Education:** Hindu *dharma* operates on the 4 *ashrama* basis where *brahmacharya* is the phase when one acquires education. India had an extensive system of schools and universities which followed the *gurukula* system of education where students learnt under the able guidance of gurus. They were taught a variety of subjects which contributed to great scientific and intellectual advances in mathematics, medicine, astronomy and so forth. Education was free in these *gurukulas* and the emphasis was on empirical learning which meant that there was never any conflict with science, rationality or reason in India. These were places not only for the acquisition of secular sciences but also character building. Brutal Islamic invasion followed by British colonialism sounded the death knell of this decentralized system of education which got obliterated. A Hindu *rashtra* would revive this model with adaptation for our times.
- **Foreign policy:** *Dharma* does not give anyone the mandate to rule or colonize the world. Since India has never had any expansionist plans, she can take the lead in promoting and preserving the indigenous peoples and cultures worldwide which are in many cases nearing extinction due to the predatory nature of expansionist ideologies. Thus, India can be at the forefront of creating a truly multicultural and diverse world in contrast to the various mono cultures that are competing to expand.

- **Role of women:** Women in ancient India have been considered the complementary half of men. Hinduism is the only faith that views the feminine as a manifestation of the sacred and divine. In the pantheon of deities that we have, the three main portfolios of finance, defense and education are in the hands of women Lakshmi, Durga and Saraswati, respectively. It is time to draw on our ethos once more and bring back women to centerstage while also adapting to the times.
- **Religious minorities:** Hinduism is a decentralized system which is inherently diverse and plural. A *dharmic rashtra* would not be a theocratic state imposing any dogma. It would promote individual spiritual freedom and encourage that one must follow one's *sva-dharma*. The open architecture ethos would nurture mutual respect of all faiths. There would be no conflict with science or rationality, and therefore there is no need to import the western notion of secularism.

In the pages that follow, I will argue that such a *rashtra* would be more beneficial to the citizens of India, including the minorities that practice a religion other than Hinduism. Furthermore, it would also be a good role model for the rest of humanity.

The Big Banyan Tree Metaphor

While the Vedas travelled from the north of India to the south; *Bhakti* started in the south and gradually spread toward the north, thereby inspiring Hindus across India. The Buddha and Jaina thought started in the eastern areas of present-day India and reached the remotest parts of India and later across Asia. These examples are a glimpse of various *dharma* traditions which have originated in different corners of the country and spread throughout the subcontinent. Indian civilization and the grand narrative based on it is like a big banyan tree nurturing the people of Bharat!

The banyan tree is beloved in myths and stories across Asia. It is unique among trees in that the branches sprout first and eventually bow down to the ground and become the roots of a new tree, each providing nourishment and stability to the entire tree. The tree is a single structure but functions like a complex, decentralized organization, providing shelter and nourishment to birds, beasts and humans. Its multiple roots and branches represent multiple origins and sources – all part of the same living organism, even if the whole cannot be comprehended at one glance. Each of the separate roots feeds every trunk, and hence every leaf is connected to the entire root system. There is no center of the tree, because its multiple roots, trunks and branches are all interlocked and inseparable. It is polycentric.

I have used this metaphor in my work to convey that the Indian grand narrative is a network of narratives with no single history or dogma, but an open architecture weaving many narratives intertwined intricately. It is naturally assimilative to new narratives, and this makes it highly adaptive and rich in diversity.

Colonial Disruptions to India's Grand Narrative

The overall narrative of India has been continuous as testified by the existence of names of ancient places and continuation of ancient traditions. This gives us the basis to claim that such an entity as India has existed with a unified grand narrative.

So how do we account for the fact that today there is dispute among intellectuals over what such a narrative ought to be, or even whether such a unified entity existed prior to British colonialism?

I will now answer this question by showing the massive destructions to the nation that have taken place for at least the past thousand years. These have taken their toll on the self-image of Indians today, and caused confusion over our history and the narratives by which we understand ourselves. Our lack of a widely accepted grand narrative is largely due to the disruptions, and not because of the absence of such a narrative in ancient times. In other words, before we move forward to reconstitute our narrative for the 21st century, we must examine what happened to our narrative in the past thousand years.

We must understand how we lost our own *drishti* to see the world, and how we adopted the worldview, values, languages and cultures of those who invaded us. Colonialism is not simply foreign control over our territory, but foreign lenses being internalized by us and used by us to see ourselves and the others.

Change and evolution from within has always been welcome. Major advancements have also come from the import of peaceful immigrants and ideas. The open architecture of Vedic systems has encouraged the flowering of new forms of spiritual, social and political formations. I have explained in my book, *Being Different*, how the deepest structures of Hinduism are conducive to its evolution and fluidity, and how the Abrahamic religions are radically different in this respect in their very structure. Because of this quality of the Vedas, India is the birthplace of the largest number of very ancient world religions that are still practiced today. For example, Jainism and Buddhism were born organically as offshoots within Indian thought, without violent revolutions, civil wars or the like which the Abrahamic religions have been plagued with.

Though many derivative or revolutionary systems challenged the prevailing interpretations of the Vedas, the relations remained symbiotic and mutually respectful. It is accurate to say that internal rivalry and competition was mostly peaceful. The very rare instances of violence were not systemic, i.e. not mandated in the dogma as anti-infidel injunctions from God; they were individual actions and lasted for brief periods only.

But things changed dramatically with the violent Islamic invasions starting about twelve centuries ago. India had suffered invasions and violence before, but they had been localized. It had never suffered a large-scale invasion driven by a history-centric mandate from God. Waves of violent Islamic invasions eroded and weakened India's wealth, military security, governance by its own kings, and social havoc that was nothing short of a holocaust. This dismantling of *dharmic* structures paved the way for the establishment of Mughal rule, which further introduced Arabic-Persian-Turkish grand narratives, often by force. I refer to the Islamic period of plunder and rule as the first wave of colonialism.

The second wave of colonialism was under the Europeans, especially the British. It is a common mistake in India to refer only to the second wave as colonialism and to exempt the first wave on the basis that the Mughals had settled in India. The criteria for evaluating colonialism must be based on its disruptive impact on the grand narrative. The past thousand years or more have witnessed numerous ruptures of India's grand narrative from foreign narratives being violently imposed.

A major cause of this devastation of India's narrative is due to the history-centric and aggressive nature of Christianity and Islam. The following excerpts from *Being Different* explain the idea of history-centrism:

In the Abrahamic religions, the list of the most authoritative prophets is closed, as is the canon of their writings. No newer prophet may update prior ones, and the last word has been spoken, whether it be the Old Testament, the New Testament or the Qur'an.⁷

...Western thought acknowledges that there are human limits to knowing, ...In the Bible, God imposes limits on human knowing as symbolized by the divine injunction not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. ...The reasons for this resistance lie deep within the Christian psyche. In the Middle Ages, many leading European thinkers believed that extraordinary mental capacities and reliance on empirical verification stemmed from the pagan elevation of reason, as in Greek thought, and thus ultimately from Satan.⁸ ... In the Judeo-Christian religions, man is born with original sin and therefore lacks the potential to achieve union with God through yoga and other practices right here on earth.⁹ ...the Church regards yogic self-realization as a threat, or worse, as heresy punishable by censure, excommunication, denunciation and even death.¹⁰ ...Unfortunately, because of these hostile attitudes toward mystical or embodied experiences, there are virtually no sampradayas (traditions or lineages) of Adhyatma-vidya or inner science in the West.¹¹

...In these traditions, the human is always subordinate to God, and while unusual individuals or prophets can attain direct contact with the divine, it is always initiated

by the divine from without and not through a person's own spiritual practice or discipline. For Christians, the incarnation of Christ is a unique and unrepeatable historical event; so, for Jews, is the giving of the Torah, and so for Muslims, it is the dictation of the Qur'an to the Prophet. Since the prophets are the only channel for knowing God's will, human beings would live in darkness if they do not study the history of the prophets.¹²

...Most of the Abrahamic religious conflicts and wars of today stem from disputes over what exactly God said and how he said it and what exactly it means.¹³ ...No amount of commonality among Abrahamic religions can resolve the conflicts caused by the non-negotiable and proprietary grand narratives of history. Even if the rituals of different religions become common, houses of worship look similar, dress codes become the same, and so forth, there will inevitably be a clash. ...Hence, in interfaith dialogue, each side merely tolerates the other, with subtle changes in interpretation which give each side the ability to claim itself as the final religion.¹⁴

...Many important canons are not about *individual* spirituality but about collective salvation, calling for the organizing of society and politics in order to defeat non-believers.¹⁵ ...The dharmic traditions are at a disadvantage in the political and psychological contest for souls and territory, because they do not proselytize. The Christian and Islamic fixation on historical revelation, schemata of salvation and damnation, and formal institutions as the exclusive bearers of divine truth has often fueled imperialistic designs for expansion and control.¹⁶ ... Nonetheless, this sense of mission has been the *raison d'être* of many aggressive regimes and programmes of expansion worldwide. The result has been violence and a destruction of local and native cultures.¹⁷

While history-centrism is one of the major differences between dharma traditions and Abrahamic ones, the metaphysics underlying the understanding of self in both the traditions reveals the deep and irreconcilable differences between *dharmic* and Abrahamic religion. *Being Different* also explains this deep metaphysical difference. In the Abrahamic traditions:

The human condition stems from an act of disobedience or 'sin', beginning with the 'original sin' of Adam and Eve, the forbears of all humanity. Every individual is born a sinner. For this reason, humans are unable to achieve union with the divine (at least not in the dharmic sense); the spiritual goal instead is salvation that can be achieved only through obedience to God's will as understood through a particular set of prophets and historical events.¹⁸

In the Judeo-Christian traditions, revelation comes 'from above.' It is initiated by God, and its content is strictly God-given. Human receptiveness is required, but this alone is insufficient. God is transcendent and must personally intervene in history from without in order for human beings to discern the truth. The bedrock of such religions is this historical event. This leads to an obsession with compiling and studying the historical details of such interventions and makes them what I call *history-centric*.¹⁹

Such an absolute status of history weakens the authority of individual spiritual explorations (hence, mystics have been regarded with suspicion in these traditions) and becomes the basis for competing claims to truth that cannot be reconciled. Furthermore, those without access to these historical revelations must remain, by definition, in the dark, lacking the most elementary means to make contact with God.²⁰

On the other hand, in *dharmic* traditions:

The dharmic traditions posit that truth is not located 'out there' in a heaven, accessible only through the rare intervention of prophets, but resides as the indivisible Self within each person, animal, plant, and indeed each tiniest particle.²¹

The dharma family (including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism) has developed an extensive range of inner sciences and experiential technologies called 'adhyatma-vidya' to access divinity and higher states of consciousness. Adhyatma-vidya is a body of wisdom and techniques culled from centuries of first-person empirical inquiry into the nature of consciousness and undertaken by advanced practitioners. These accounts and the individuals who have embarked on these quests are highly regarded, but they are not reified into canons, messiahs or absolute statements of an exclusive nature. They are neither a code of laws nor a history of past revelations but guides for replicating and retransmitting the experience and its transformational powers. Their truth must be rediscovered and directly experienced by each person.²²

Endowed with the potential for achieving, in this very life, the state of sat-chit-ananda – blissful knowledge of, and unity with, God – anyone may explore and discover autonomously the meaning of our existence. An array of *embodied* approaches such as yoga, shorn of any historical grand narratives or institutional authority, is available to aid the seeker. The path of embodied knowing begins with the sublime idea that humankind is divine, and this is one of India's greatest gifts to humanity.²³

Islamic Destruction of India's Grand Narrative

The Islamic grand narrative is history-centric, being based on the *exclusive and absolute* nature of the revelations said to be received by the prophet Mohammad. These historical details of Allah's instructions as recorded in the Qur'an are considered literally true and perfect and supersede the Bible. While Judaism and Christianity, being from the Abrahamic family of religions, are at least meant to be tolerated as "religions of the Book", the non-Abrahamic religions are considered unlawful, and people who follow them are pejoratively referred to as *kafirs*/heathens. Islam has serious injunctions and prescriptions against *kafirs*. No amendment of the Qur'an is permitted. Hence, no Islamic authority may update the doctrine in accordance with the needs of the present epoch.

Though all Abrahamic dogmas also started out as radical and hostile to others, redeeming factors are that the Judaic dogma does not advocate expansion or imposition on outsiders, and Christianity was reformed in Europe in a process that involved two centuries of internal violence. Unfortunately, the Islamic orthodox narrative has not yet been reformed and remains radical by modern standards. Its mandates are broad and encompass not only things like the methods of worship, but also dictate social, cultural and political systems that must be adopted exactly in accordance with the written word.

A detailed analysis of the internal aspects of Islam is not relevant to my work here. What concerns my analysis is Islam's policy towards outsiders, i.e. *kafirs* like Hindus. The Islamic grand narrative divides all of humanity into two nations, both of which supersede man-made countries: All Muslims in the world are deemed to be part of one single nation called *Dar-ul-Islam* (Nation-of-Islam). All non-Muslims are deemed to belong to *Dar-ul-Harb* (Nation-of-Infidels). This bifurcation cuts across all sovereignty, because sovereignty is man-made and hence inferior and subservient to God's bifurcation. Islamic doctrine demands loyalty *only* to Islamic Law and *not* to the man-made laws of any nations and states.

Among the consequences of this doctrine is that a Muslim is *required* to fight on the side of another Muslim when there is a dispute with any non-Muslim. This has often been invoked by Muslims to supersede the merits of a given dispute between various parties. Orthodox Islam calls for a worldwide "network" of economic, political, social and other alliances amongst all the Muslims of the world. When Islam is in a minority and brute force is not practical, the *Al-taqiyah* doctrine advocates deception as a tactical approach until Muslims can consolidate enough power.

A central tenet of Islam is that God's "nation" (the *Dar-ul-Islam*) must take over the world. Given this divine mandate, Islam's expansion is glorified and celebrated, and this encourages chauvinism, aggressiveness and predatory behaviour. In Islamic education, all history is adapted and written to fit the requirement that pre-Islamic cultures must be false, or at least inferior. There is also hatred for modernity, seeing it as a threat to Islamic orthodoxy. When non-Muslims start to win economically or politically, the orthodoxy preaches that Islamic people are not doing a good enough job on behalf of Allah, and Muslims must get re-energized to fight the *Dar-ul-Harb*. Such a powder keg blows up under stress.

This is the grand narrative the orthodox madrassa education system tries to inculcate. It supplies the ideological absolutes that shape all thinking about society, politics, ethics and even militancy. A closed mental universe develops, rigidifies and assumes a life of its own, reinforced by its internal logic and legitimacy. This is how a strong identity is programmed from childhood.

Such an education system brainwashes a young boy into adopting a conceptual framework that can easily be turned into hatred. This denies the boys job skills for the modern era and expands the available pool of *jihad* mercenaries for hire.

Starting from the 7th century, the Indian subcontinent was subjected to wave upon wave of Islamic invasions. The brutality of invasions began to get more severe by the 10th century with the invasions into the Indian heartland by Mahmud of Ghazni. He plundered and looted India mercilessly and slaughtered the Hindus on a large scale. The news of India's vast wealth travelled back to Islamic countries, and this brought many other Islamic invaders from Ghori to Aurangzeb. The initial waves of invaders were not too interested in staying back in India and came on expeditions to plunder and take back slaves. Millions of Hindus were slaughtered, raped and forced into slavery in what was arguably the largest holocaust in world history.

With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate and then the Mughal dynasty, Islam had finally come to stay in India. The domestication of Islamic rule under the Mughals worsened the disruption to the native grand narrative of India. Presenting themselves as Indian settlers, the Mughals were very successful in imposing Islamic language, literature, ideologies, values, etc. This kind of stealth invasion is far more dangerous because it is less visible. Eventually, a growing number of Indians started to accept such "soft Islam" as native to India, even feeling proud of the invader's presence in the form of architecture. Monuments built to honor those who killed Hindu infidels became a celebrated part of the grand narrative in the minds of many Indians.

As a part of this "soft Islam" strategy, Muslims also developed Sufism as a comparatively peaceful method to increase the adherents to their faith. Sufism plays this "Good Cop" role for Islam, softening up Hindus with its syncretism, music, art and mysticism. The non-Muslims are encouraged to receive this in the garb of "tolerance" and the sameness of all spirituality.

During the past centuries of genocide, some of the slaves sold in Central Asia and Middle East managed to reach Central Europe where they are today called Roma people (popularly called the 'gypsies', a pejorative term). These are people of Indian origin and have survived as wanderers in Europe for nearly a thousand years.

There are several serious conflicts between Islam's grand narrative and the Indian narratives that have continued since ancient times. For example, India has always visualized her geography as a mother and *Bharat Mata* is a deity representing her. Muslims cannot accept this since Islam prohibits any worship of a deity other than Allah. *Vande Mataram* is a song sung in praise of *Bharat Mata*. This is taboo for Muslims and they are told by their authorities not to

sing it. India's national anthem is another song they are uncomfortable with because it defines the boundaries of the nation state of India and sings its praise. This is all considered *haram* or taboo and often brings Islam into conflict with the rest of India.

Another conflict in narratives is over the cow, an animal that is revered by Hindus and is also worshipped. This also raises the heckles of Muslims as it is considered as worship of something other than Allah. Hence it is *haram*, and the communal tensions get exacerbated by slaughtering cows especially in front of temples and sacred places.

Islam is governed by *Sharia* law and every orthodox Muslim is demanded to abide by it. It is not enforced in places where Muslims are not the majority but once the percentage of Muslims in an area crosses a certain threshold, the demand for imposing *Sharia* law arises. While in India Muslims are not demanding *Sharia* law, they still have the Muslim Personal law which supports polygamy and other aspects of *Sharia*.

Muslims, as also Christians, enjoy various privileges under the Indian law that are not extended to Hindus. This special treatment of minorities is problematic as it is at the expense of the majority. It causes unnecessary conflicts between communities and prevents the development of a successful grand narrative acceptable to all Indians.

European Destruction of India's grand narrative

Islamic colonization was immediately followed by European colonization. The Portuguese were the first in this European race to India. They started a very aggressive Catholic invasion and colonization of Goa in the early 1500s. A century later, there was a flurry of activity from northern European rivals to enter India. Starting in 1600, the British, Dutch, Danish and French each formed their own "East India Companies". This started an intense rivalry in which their battles against one another within Europe got exported as a clash for India's wealth. Like all foreign invasions we suffered, each of these was driven by a mixture of three forces: mercantile greed, political ambition and religious expansion.

The most powerful institutions at that time in Europe were the churches, both Catholic and Protestant. This is the period of major civil wars within Europe accompanying the Catholic vs Protestant schism. It is important for us to understand that the Catholic and Protestant rivals are both founded on a very strong history-centric premise. The Christian grand narrative is popularly summarized as a dogmatic statement known as the Nicene Creed. There are variations in the way it is adopted by different denominations of Christianity, but the following

is a reasonably standard version. The other variations imply almost the same thing in slightly different terms:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son, he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.²⁴

In the 4th century after Jesus, when Christianity's history-centric narrative was institutionalized by the Roman Emperor Constantine, what emerged was the Catholic Church as the world's first multinational corporation. Its grand narrative contains claims that it was received top-down from God through his only Son, Jesus. Therefore, it is impossible for humans to amend it. The military expansion of Christian nations was fueled by this history-centric doctrine.

Christianity's expansionism has been driven by the deadly combination of the following elements in its core narrative:

1. The horrors of Original Sin that inflict every human from birth.
2. The exclusivist nature of the solution available through Jesus only.
3. The impending "end of time" which will witness the Apocalypse - a world war between Christ and Antichrist (Devil), involving every human being on one side or the other, and the final Day of Judgment.

From the above formulations of Christianity, it is implied that all those who have not attained Salvation available exclusively through Christianity by the time of the Apocalypse, will suffer in the eternal hellfire, and not be part of the chosen few who will start the new world. The grand narrative thus makes a call to action to expand the believer base, using a variety of means to achieve the result.

When you combine such a doctrine with the human ego, the result has been brutality and violence to subjugate and convert “heathens” around the world and India was no exception. To this day, evangelical Christianity believes that all the peoples of the world must be converted so that the Kingdom of God can be established in Heaven following the Apocalypse.

The means to proselytize have included promoting conflicts within non-Christian societies. In India, this has led to the exploitation of the faultlines in the diverse Indian society by using Western race theories and fancy secular social theories. Another process of expansionism has been through inculturation and digestion which seem benign and even friendly to the naïve observer.

The Portuguese arrival and colonization of India unleashed considerable bloodshed. One of the results was the Goan Inquisition which produced the violent subjugation and conversion of a large population of Indians who were considered heathens, and therefore impure. There was wanton destruction of temples, and non-Christian activities were declared unlawful. Taxes were imposed on Hindus.

Later, with the establishment of the British East India Company, the Protestant form of Christianity began to compete for market share. The East India Company started as a trading company eventually morphing into the British Empire. The crude violence of Catholic expansion gave way to the more strategic and deep-rooted expansion of the Protestant variety. Divisions were introduced between Indian communities; faultlines were exploited; traditional education systems were uprooted and replaced with colonial ones; and punitive taxes were imposed on the colonized people.

Some of the effects of this period, which we live with today, are as follows:

- The caste system was created and formalized into the law.
- Dravidian race identity was created and turned into a divisive narrative.
- Separatist movements started in the northeast parts of India where the Church was especially successful in conversions.

Christianity combined with colonialism thus facilitated the alienation of many people from the traditional unified grand narrative of India. This has empowered the Breaking India forces. The intellectual violence done to our grand narrative precedes the physical violence and catastrophe.

For example, Christianity's mandate to convert and proselytize has changed the demographics of the country. Often, conversion is accompanied by virulent hatred towards Hinduism. The ideologies driving such campaigns have much of their funding arriving from outside India and this gets mixed with political agendas of intervention in India's domestic matters.

Indian Christians are being encouraged to imagine that they are in perpetual persecution by Hindus. This alienation leads them to separatist tendencies in parts of India. This has already happened in the northeast of India. The proselytization by Christian missionaries started in the 19th century, gathered momentum and speed in the first half of the 20th century. Unbridled after independence, it has resulted in many of the states of the northeast having become almost 100% Christian. Christian movements in tandem with violent leftist movements are creating and fomenting terror and violence in these states where there are movements to secede from the Indian union.

The root of such actions, lies in the Western ego, whether religious or secular, individual or collective. This ego believes that it has a mission: as the chief agent of history that marches all humanity toward a common grand future. Alien cultures and their spiritual traditions are problems which somehow need to be solved, usually through destruction or annexation.

The Christian grand narrative is based on a linear theory of history in which humanity collectively moves from Evil/Sin to Salvation/Heaven. This must necessarily take place under the management of the Church as the sole agent designated for this purpose. In the European Enlightenment movement in Europe, this narrative was replaced by a different history-centric grand narrative in which such Biblical terms and references to God were eliminated. The new narrative used an equally exclusivist and absolute linear theory of history. It replaced the crude and irrational forms of Christianity with secular equivalents and race theories. These supposedly "enlightened" ideologies continued Europe's civilizing mission in the new clothes of "reason" and "science". The Enlightenment Movement during which "enlightened" ideologies were framed gave rise to a whole lot of philosophers, prime among them being Hegel.

Hegel's linear theory of history claimed that non-Western civilizations lacked the West's "Spirit", and posited hence, that the West must rescue them through colonialism. His theory of the world spirit is racist because he privileges the Europeans over Africans, Asians, Native Americans and so on. He places the Westerner at the center of the cosmos vis-à-vis other cultures. Conveniently ignoring whatever facts do not support the thesis, he constructs a lopsided chronology of events to show Europe and White America as the twin pinnacles of human evolution. He declares this template of chronologies to be "universal history".

He postulates a stage called 'Prehistory' into which he lumps all those nations which are not among the chosen ones. Hegel dismisses the Native Americans as 'obviously unintelligent' and speaks of them as 'unenlightened children' distinguished only by 'inferiority in all respects'. He also proclaims that India 'has no history', which means that the process of historical development has not yet begun. Hegel's linear theory of history was used to justify Western colonial exploitation in the name of facilitating the progress of world history.

Hegel argued forcefully that for world history to proceed, any act committed by the Europeans, no matter how reprehensible, is justifiable in the name of human evolution. He writes:

Because history is the configuration of the Spirit in the form of events, the people which receives the Spirit as its natural principle [i.e. Europeans] ... is the one that dominates in that epoch of world history ... Against the absolute right of that people who actually are the carriers of the world Spirit, the spirit of other peoples has no other right.²⁵

Colonialization was thus the teleological imperative by which consciousness in the form of the superior Europeans must appropriate the others. Later, Karl Marx turned Hegel's theory of history into a theory of class struggle and proffered a solution in the form of a messianic proletarian struggle against the dominant capitalist class.

Even later, in the "scientific age" of Europe, the sweeping Eurocentric account of history and destiny was further extrapolated and culminated in the development of the Aryan identity. The term 'arya' in traditional Sanskrit usage connotes an ethical or spiritual quality, not any race. The construction and invention of an Aryan race started out in Germany as the theory of the mythic Indian Aryans who were Germany's ancestors; but this was revised to say that the Germans were the Aryans themselves. This Aryan identity was assumed by Europeans more broadly by using a field known as comparative philology in distorted ways. The importance of this academic fabrication cannot be overstated given that it led to Nazism in Europe and to Dravidianism in colonial India.

Race science was born in 19th century Europe and served as the lens to classify India's diverse communities. Herbert Risley, a race scientist who created the first census of India, did unimaginable harm by collapsing *jati* and *varna* into the rigid hierarchical caste system. This superimposition of racism on Indian society has left its mark in India in dangerous ways.

This 19th century rigid classification has been the basis on which independent India framed many of its social and political policies. The extremely flawed classification is worsening the fissures and tensions in India among various communities and is being exploited by politicians.

The caste construct is also a weapon used by foreign funded NGOs to further their Breaking India agenda. There are major projects to forge Afro-Dalit, Dalit-Muslim and Maoist-Islamist/Evangelical alliances.

19th century Enlightened Europe and its civilizing mission via secular theories has done nearly irreparable damage to the Indian grand narrative. In present times, the West's projects to export human rights, animal rights and environmentalism have become the rationale for all sort of foreign interventions in our narrative.

Digestion

By assuming the mantle of the originators and bearers of universal truths – both sacred and secular – the West has often embarked on and justified programs, missions and schemes to bring the rest of mankind around to its own worldview. This leads to the process of what I call the “digestion” of one culture by another, whose net effect is to consolidate cultures in an asymmetric manner. The key point is that the digested culture disappears. This digestion is analogous to the food consumed by a host, in that what is useful gets re-formulated into the host's body, while that which doesn't quite fit the host's structure is eliminated as waste.

Just as a predator would, the West, a dominant and aggressive culture dismembers the weaker one into parts from which it picks and chooses pieces that it wants to appropriate. The appropriated elements get mapped onto the language and social structures of the dominant civilization's own history and paradigms, leaving little if any trace of the source tradition. The civilization that was thus consumed and digested gets depleted of its cultural and social capital, because the appropriated elements are then shown to be disconnected from and even in conflict with the source civilization. Finally, the vanquished prey enters the proverbial museum as a dead culture, ceasing to pose a threat to the dominant one.

Such cultural appropriation may at first appear as the happy meeting of equal cultures. However, while at the level of popular culture it may be so, at the deeper levels, where the core structures of a civilization live, the playing field is tilted. After being digested, what is left of a civilization is waste material to be removed and trashed. While the host (the West) is strengthened, the living identity of the prey disappears forever, its generative capacities gone. Eventually, to take the metaphor further, the entire species of a prey gets rendered extinct, thereby diminishing the diversity of our world.

There are several examples of civilizations becoming digested by some other civilization. Many symbols, rituals and ideas came to Christianity from the so-called pagans (pre-Christian

Europeans), but these pagan faiths were demonized and destroyed in the process. Digestion has often started off as a “romance” for the prey, sometimes with good intentions. Therefore, one must develop a long-term and wide-angle view of history and not limit oneself to a small slice of it.

While there is a combination of romance and frenzy to appropriate the “useful” and saleable elements from the prey, what causes the erasure of the source can be a combination of the following factors:

- The source tradition is simply neglected, while resources to research its knowledge are allocated to spread the Westernized version of the digested knowledge. Here, the destruction is a passive process, by atrophy and not by hostility.
- The appropriation results in the claim that the new digested version in the Western framework is superior, and supersedes the source version, thereby making the source seem redundant and obsolete.
- The next generation of students and scholars gets mis-educated through textbooks and coursework that privileges the new dominant view.
- There can be the explicit rejection of the Indian source as flawed. Common flaws that are cited include: that *dharma* is world-negating and other-worldly, making it incapable of progress and advancement; that the *dharma* is characterized by abuses like caste, male domination, and other social ills.
- Repeated negative “branding” is used systematically to instil a fear of guilt by association with such a damned culture. Consequently, Indian youth want to shun any links with such an identity. This further causes a reduction in funding of research on Indian traditions, and in the quality/quantity of students available to pursue careers in such a classical tradition.

Destruction of Traditional Structures and Narratives

In ancient India, Sanskrit was the language of the literati and the language of choice for their ideas and works of art. Sanskrit served as the spiritual, artistic, scientific and ritual lingua franca across vast regions of Asia and as a useful vehicle of communication among speakers of local languages, much as English is today. Additionally, Sanskrit was interconnected with local languages in a two-way process. The meta-structure of Sanskrit was transmitted top-down into local languages. Simultaneously, there was a bottom-up assimilation of local culture and language into Sanskrit’s flexible, open architecture.

Sanskriti (culture) flourished through the exchange between these two cultural streams, sometimes called the 'great' and 'little' traditions, respectively. While the high culture of the sophisticated urbane population (known as the 'great tradition' in anthropology) provided *sanskriti* with refinement and comprehensiveness, cultural contributions from the rural masses (the 'little tradition') gave it popularity, vitality and a diverse outlook. There is a rich symbiosis between the *shastric-parampara* (classical formal knowledge) and *loka-parampara* (popular and informal knowledge). Indeed, the latter is acknowledged beautifully and respectfully in classical texts, such as the *Natya Shastra* and literature on Ayurveda. All these cultures and knowledge systems comprise a continuum.

The web of interconnectedness was woven by festivals and rituals, and scholars have used these tracers to understand the reciprocal influence of Sanskrit and local languages. Sanskrit served as a meta-language and framework of categories for the vast range of languages across Asia.

With the coming of the colonizers, Europeans imposed their texts and theories on those they conquered. Worse, they completely liquidated indigenous peoples' rich and valuable traditions of knowledge. Today's scholars have superimposed the same structural dichotomy in the hope of understanding India through divisive and conflict-ridden categories, and there has been a concerted effort to show that learned *dharmic* traditions are hegemonic and oppressive to the 'real' natives of India. But in India, the so-called "tribals" (characterized by rural life and informal knowledge systems) have always coexisted in harmony with formalized *dharma* systems.

History was the other discipline that was used to destroy traditional narratives. History has never been an objective reporting of a set of empirical facts. It's a present day (re)conception and filtering of data pertaining to the past, to build a narrative that is consistent with the agendas of the dominant culture. History writing has also been used to dismantle conquered nations.

Powerful civilizations control their own discourse and emphasize its cohesiveness, continuity and positive qualities. But because of the thousand years of foreign interventions, Indians have lost control of their own discourse. Many Indian intellectuals have adopted the colonial views according to which there was no such entity as India or Hinduism prior to colonial interventions. Under such scenarios, most positive aspects of Indian culture were imported, while the indigenous aspects were abusive and primitive. This negative view has led to a robust intellectual ecosystem that promotes separatist narratives and actively opposes a unifying grand narrative, especially any narrative that is based on our ancient *shastras*. While the focus

by many scholars has been on the negative stereotypes of Indian traditions, they have failed to adequately treat their many positive contributions, especially those that have been appropriated by the West.

The field of post-colonial studies is incorrectly named. Though it claims to dismantle colonial structures, it has done the exact opposite. The problems with this field include the following:

- Though British rule is criticized for its economic and political exploitation, not enough blame is placed on the Christian evangelism that often went in conjunction with the rule. The Hinduphobia of the rulers and the devastation of the *dharmic* structures has not been adequately accounted for.
- The Muslim rule is given a free pass and not criticized the way British rule is, even though in many ways the Muslims destroyed India and its narratives in far worse ways.
- Many post-colonial scholars have turned into sepoys serving international institutions with Hinduphobic tendencies and Breaking India agendas. This includes their role as suppliers of atrocity literature that undermines India's legitimacy in global arenas.

Impact of Imported Racism and Distorted Historiography

The Aryan Dravidian divide that was fabricated by colonial Indologists in the 18th century has resulted in the creation of a Dravidian identity in the southern part of India especially in the state of Tamil Nadu, which did not exist before the 19th century. This identity is built on the foundational thesis that the dark Dravidians are the original settlers of the oldest civilization, the Sindhu Saraswati civilization and that the white Aryans came and displaced them from there driving them to the south. These Aryans allegedly brought along with them the hierarchical and oppressive caste system and Sanskrit, and thus made *shudras* out of the Tamil speaking Dravidians. This construct has been the source of so much of hatred and division between communities in Tamil Nadu in that it has fueled the demand for a separate Tamil country.

Similar theories of oppression and repression have given rise to Dalit and caste movements. However, while the genuine grouses need to be corrected, the theories being spun are intended to divide Indians with mutual hatred. Special privileges and exemptions for minorities and oppressed classes are being misused now by more and more castes and communities. They either pronounce themselves as minorities (linguistic or religious) or as oppressed castes to avail of the benefits of affirmative action.

Impact on Education

With the collapse of the *jati-varna* system into the monochromatic caste system, the richness of skillsets of the various *jatis* began to get affected. The replacement of the traditional *gurukula* system of education with the Macaulay form where learning was in antiseptic classrooms far removed from the real world, the educational robustness of Indians also began to disappear.

The imposition of English as the medium of instruction dealt a death blow to our educational excellence. English trained children began to land clerical jobs during the colonial period which continued post-independence. A workforce of babus mainly derived from the upper castes sprung up post-independence and these people began to be looked upon as role models. Aspirations began to rise in every stratum of society for an English education as an English education opened doors to upward mobility. The attitude of looking down upon anyone who didn't know English created a sense of shame in people who didn't know the language. Vocational skills, professional skills, manufacturing skills were all sacrificed at the altar of the mirage of an English education.

However, today, the condition of education, even English education is so pathetic that most educated people are practically unemployable. Having become cut off from their traditional professions and not attained competence in English, many youths from the lower classes turn to drugs, alcohol and other activities that bring ruin to themselves and their country.

Indian Constitution as a Muddled Grand Narrative

The drafting of a new constitution for nearly 300 million Indians provided a great opportunity to revive Indian civilization which was under foreign slavery for several centuries. But instead of doing so, we created a constitution which has profoundly harmed the Indian civilization and its grand narrative in several ways. The Constituent Assembly, which drafted the constitution, was different from what was initially demanded by the leaders of Indian National Congress and other organizations. As a result, it is largely based on European philosophical framework and treats our society and our traditions with the same framework. Therefore, it has continued the caste-system developed by colonial administrators; assumed *dharma* to be the same as religion; given unlimited power to the state to intervene in the social and cultural lives of people; allowed Abrahamic religions to proselytize; and undermined the *dharma* traditions to provide the overriding narrative for nation-building. The constitution has badly handled the situation of the state of Jammu and Kashmir by giving it an un-Indian status which threatens India's social, cultural and territorial integrity. A detailed analysis of our constitution is beyond the scope of this monograph; however, some of the issues have been listed in the following table:²⁶

Articles of the Indian Constitution	Why/How it undermines or differs from the Indian Grand Narrative
Preamble	Based on structures from the West. Ignores the ideals of <i>dharma</i> , <i>swadeshi</i> , <i>swarajya</i> , etc.
Articles 25-30	Assumes <i>dharma</i> = religion and applies the lens of secularism. Denies role to <i>dharmic</i> traditions in nation-building.
Articles 25-30, 21A	Creates a dual system of citizenship. Denies Hindus same educational and cultural rights as given to followers of other faiths.
Article 19	Allows laws to put “reasonable” restrictions on the freedom of expression.
Articles 341, 342	Caste politicized rather than considered as individual criteria for special privileges. Disregards the varna-jati fluidity.
Article 25 (1)	Allows propagation of religion without safeguards

	against foreign nexuses & Breaking India forces.
Article 370, 35A	Gives J&K an un-Indian status, Threatens India's social, cultural, territorial integrity

Where are today's Pandavas?

The clash of civilizations is becoming ever more complex, and the playing field has certainly not been frozen for the past fifty years. I will argue in the coming pages that we must improve our game in the intellectual *kurukshetra* to be able to develop a world-class grand narrative for our epoch. Unfortunately, we suffer from a deficiency of competent scholars and institutional mechanisms. We are often being represented by substandard voices. Emotional bombast and political patronage are depleting *prana* and overshadowing rigor and originality. Our tradition was built on very high standards of intellectual excellence. But today there is a cacophony of voices of individuals who barely read serious material – forget about original writing.

Frankly, the political leaders who claim to speak for Bharat have just not had adequate vision; they are too obsessed with immediate politics which is always reactive and short sighted. I have also heard some senior Hindu leaders flippantly dismiss the need for fresh research and intellectualism. The task at hand is far more challenging than any one person could be expected to achieve. It demands an intellectual ecosystem that needs to be created in India.

But first I will discuss my favorite intellectual exemplar of the post-independence era, whose works and mine have a close alignment. This will illustrate the kind of thinking we need to do fresh for today. This individual was Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay who made an iconic contribution in 1965 when he proposed his *Integral Humanism* thesis that later became one of the main guiding principles of the BJP. It was a four-part lecture series he delivered in Bombay, where he begins by asking, what ought to be the face of the new Bharat after independence. Though he did not use the term “grand narrative” the substance of his ideas fit into my notion of what a grand narrative should contain.

Integral Humanism: India's Grand Narrative proposed by Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay²⁷

Pandit Deendayal starts out by acknowledging that Gandhi, Tilak and other prior thinkers had long before him addressed the issue of our grand narrative but felt troubled that there was no fresh thinking about this fundamental question during his time. He criticizes the leaders of his time from all parties for being only opportunistic, tactical and shortsighted in formulating the immediate policies while ignoring the big picture issues.

In fact, he starts his lectures by giving examples of leaders within the same political party having opposite and mutually conflicting ideologies, and yet being unconcerned about

developing any mechanisms to resolve their issues. He says that people in the Congress and other parties had made slogans for all sorts of ideologies including “Welfare State, Socialism, Liberalism etc. as their aims.” When he asked for ideological clarity among the opponents of Congress, they responded: “Do not worry about it. Whatever you like you can adopt. We are ready to support, anything from extreme Marxist to downright capitalist program.” Their only goal was to somehow defeat Congress, and they lacked any coherent ideology, principles and aims.

Similarly, Congress was also a mishmash with “no definite principles, no single direction” and he compares it to “a magic box which contains a cobra and a mongoose living together...” The current state of politics across the spectrum was unacceptable, and he concluded that “that the confusion about our goal and the direction is mainly responsible for the chaos.”

He argues firmly that the core issue to be resolved in any nation-building is a deep understanding of ourselves as a nation:

It is essential that we think about our national identity. Without this identity there is no meaning of independence, nor can independence become the instrument of progress and happiness. As long as we are unaware of our national identity, we cannot recognize and develop all our potentialities. Under alien rule this identity is suppressed. ... The basic cause of the problems facing Bharat is the neglect of its national identity.²⁸

A majority of those who lead the nation today as well as those who take active interest in the affairs of the country are not sufficiently aware of this root cause. Consequently, opportunists with no principles reign in politics of our country. Parties and politicians have neither principles nor aims nor a standard code of conduct.²⁹

He rejects the narratives that reverse the events of the past thousand years and try to take us back to some ancient times. “The task of turning the waters of Ganga back to some previous point would not be wise.”

He wants to incorporate the scientific advancements made by the West. His concern is that Indians have also adopted the Western social, economic and political doctrines and made them the ideals for India to follow. He wants to decouple Western science from its culture: “Whereas Western science is universal and must be absorbed by us if we wish to go forward, the same is not true about the Western way of life and values.”

Pandit Deendayal had studied Western history and thought and gave his critical analysis of each major system. He concludes that “these ideologies have arisen in certain special situations and

time. These are not necessarily universal. They cannot be free from the limitations of the particular people and their culture, which gave birth to these isms.”

He criticizes the Western idea of nation and the nationalism built on it, pointing out that Western nationalism prevents world unity and creates conflicts among nations. Likewise, he finds Western socialism and democracy to be in mutual conflict.

In his presentation of Bharatiya culture, one of the most important principles that I fully resonate with is that “life is an integrated whole”. The West follows a model that I have called “synthetic unity” in my own writings. He describes it as follows:

The confusion in the West arises primarily from its tendency to think of life in sections and then to attempt to put them together by patch work. We do admit that there is diversity and plurality in life, but we have always attempted to discover the unity behind them.³⁰

Just as science seeks to discover unified principles of the cosmos beneath all the diversity, so also “the expression of unity in various forms has remained the central thought of Bharatiya culture.”

Turning his attention to social theory, he characterizes Western notions of society as built on atomic individuals who come together to form society: “society is a group of individuals brought into being by the individuals by an agreement among themselves.” This Western view is known as “Social Contract Theory”. This results in inherent conflicts between individuals and society, and among various individuals.

The Bharatiya view is entirely different. I am in complete agreement when he says:

In our view society is self-born. Like an individual, society comes into existence in an organic way. People do not produce society. ... In reality, society is an entity with its own “SELF”, its own life; it is a sovereign being like an individual; it is an organic entity. We have not accepted the view that society is some arbitrary association. It has its own life. Society too has its body, mind, intellect and soul.³¹

A social group is not merely the sum of the individuals in it. A society’s selfhood has its own feelings, its own strengths and intellect. Just like a person has a soul, he says, so also a nation has a soul. He says the *Jana Sangh* party (later succeeded by the BJP) has adopted a formal name for the soul of India, and this term is “*Chiti*”.

He explains that an individual’s personality is shaped by the cumulative effect of all his actions, thoughts and impressions, but his soul is unaffected by this history. Similarly, a nation’s culture

is continuously modified and enlarged by its history. But a nation's *Chiti* is its unchanging essence from its very beginning, and this *Chiti* determines the direction in which the nation is to advance culturally.

At the individual level, he maintains, the soul uses *prana* to construct various organs of the body. In a similar manner, at the collective level of nation-building various institutions are created:

Just as the soul produced these different organs in the body, so also in the nation many different organs are produced as instruments to achieve national goals. Like various departments in a factory, building, machinery, sales, production, maintenance etc., nations also produce different departments, which are called institutions. These institutions are created to fulfill the needs of a nation. Family, castes, guilds, (which are now known as trade unions) etc., are such institutions. Property, marriage are also institutions. Similarly, *Gurukul* and *Rishikul* were institutions. In the same way, the state is also an institution.³²

So, institutions are to a nation what organs are to a person's body. The state/king is a certain kind of institution (organ) serving the nation (body). The state is formed by a social contract in Indian social theory. But in Western theory, it is the nation that is a social contract among individuals. In Indian theory, "The society as a nation is considered self-born. State is only an institution."

Just as a healthy body's organs are in mutual harmony and not conflict, so also the individuals in a society and the institutions serving a nation are meant to be in natural harmony. Pandit Deendayal rejects the idea that there is any inherent conflict among the organs of an individual, or the different institutions of society. He explains the conflict-free nature of castes in an ideal society:

... there were castes, but we had never accepted, conflict between one caste and another as fundamental concept behind it. In our concept of four castes, they are thought of as analogous to the different limbs of *Virat-purusha*. ... If we analyze this concept we are faced with the question whether there can arise any conflict among the head, arms, stomach and legs of the same *Virat Purusha*. If conflict is fundamental, the body cannot be maintained.³³

Just as the death of a body does not kill the soul, because it gets another body, so also:

Our national life continued uninterruptedly even after the state went in the hands of foreigners. The Persian nation came to an end with their loss of independence. In our country, there were foreign rules now and then in various parts of the country. At the same time the Pathans seized the throne of Delhi, and then the Turks; the

Mughals and the British too established their rules. Despite all this, our national life went on, because the state was not its center. If we had considered state as the center, we would have been finished as a nation long time ago.³⁴

Given this decentralized model of a nation and its various institutions working in mutual harmony, he *does* acknowledge the potential vulnerability when our people get focused solely on the local panchayat level and leave the state exposed to foreigners.

Chiti consists of the ideals and *tattva* of the nation, analogous to the soul of a person. The laws that help manifest and maintain *Chiti* of a nation are its *Dharma*. He is clear that *Dharma* and Religion are different concepts.

The fundamental principles of *Dharma* are eternal and universal, but their implementation is based according to the context of time, place and circumstances. If our nation's constitution goes contrary to its traditions, it is not *dharmic*. The constitution must be in tune with *Dharma*. All other entities, institutions or authorities derive their power from *Dharma* and are subordinate to it.

A unitary state does not mean concentration of all powers in the Centre; just as the head of the family does not have all the powers with him even though all the transactions are carried out in his name. The provinces and the various entities below the provincial level, such as the *Jana Padas* and *panchayats*, must also have suitable powers.

In summary, Pandit Deendayal explains the organic and unified nature of Bharat:

According to the Bharatiya traditions, a nation is an organic living entity which has come into existence on its own and has not been made up or created by any group of persons. A nation brings forth a variety of institutions to fulfill its needs, as well as to give concrete shape to its inner fundamental nature. The State is one of these institutions which though being an important institution, is not supreme. ... It is true that the king (state) wielded a great deal of influence. And that he was the protector of *Dharma* in society, but the king could not decide what constitutes *Dharma*. He only saw to it that people led their lives according to *Dharma*. In a way he was equivalent to present day executive.³⁵

And his grand narrative emphasizes the principles of *Swadeshi* and decentralization:

"*Swadeshi*" and "Decentralization" are the two words which can briefly summarize the economic policy suitable for the present circumstances. Centralization and monopolization have been the order of the day for all these years, knowingly or unknowingly. The planners have become prisoners of a belief that only large-scale centralized industry is economic and hence without worrying about its ill-effects, or

knowingly but helplessly, they have continued in that direction. The same has been the fate of "*Swadeshi*". The concept of "*Swadeshi*" is ridiculed as old fashioned and reactionary. We proudly use foreign articles. We have grown over dependent upon foreign aid in everything from thinking, management, capital, methods of production, technology, etc. to even the standards and forms of consumption. This is not the road to progress and development. We shall forget our individuality and become virtual slaves once again. The positive content of "*Swadeshi*" should be used as the cornerstone of reconstruction of our economy.³⁶

The last serious conception of India's grand narrative that I can relate to is the one mentioned above proposed by Deendayal Upadhyay more than fifty years ago. Our circumstances have changed since then, and this demands a rewriting of the grand narrative of India as a new *smriti* for this epoch. Just as he was dissatisfied by his peers parroting slogans of prior narratives by Gandhi and others, and wanted fresh thinking for policymaking, so also, we need to do a similar rethinking for our epoch today. The best way to respect our past great thinkers is not by worshipping their old books, but by continuing their *parampara* with fresh research outputs in response to today's kurukshetra.

But there is no such *smriti* development project in place. One finds many persons with slogans and speeches, conclaves of supposed "intellectuals" and various kinds of forums. But where is the serious scholarship being developed? Where are India's think tanks on such subjects?

In fact, things have worsened since Pandit Deendayal complained about a vacuum of grand narrative in his time which could serve as a strategic blueprint for policymaking. We are worse off now because the vacuum of narrative has been filled by multiple conflicting grand narratives, each competing for India's policies. This conflict among them is growing increasingly more intense and global forces are participating in it actively and directly. It is no longer a domestic matter. The control over India's grand narrative is not secure in the hands of patriotic *and* competent Indian intellectuals. Those that have competence lack the resources, while those commanding control over resources lack adequate competence.

Below is a summary of three of the main contenders for India's grand narrative today. In this context, I will later address the issue: where are the leader like the *Pandavas* in ancient times and Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay from the recent past?

Three Competing Grand Narratives: Westernized India, Breaking India Forces, and Bharat

To understand India's present dynamics, it is helpful to think of three competing narratives, each with its distinct support base and strategic ambition. Of these, Westernized India and Bharat are pro-nation even though they fight each other, while Breaking India forces oppose the unity of India.

Westernized India refers to the Western-style economy and lifestyle. (In some writings, I have referred to this as "Sensex India".) This includes most of the corporate sector as investors and producers. The major metros and second-tier towns are now largely taken over by this segment and belonging to it is considered synonymous with being "modern". The proportion of Indians in this category during colonial rule was tiny, but has mushroomed after independence, and especially in the past decade of India's "globalization". Westernization is being assumed as the same thing as developed. (Note that in China's case, they are very explicit in differentiating that China has its own non-Western approach to modernity and development.) Western models are founded on a history of centralized governance, extreme materialism, greed and short-term thinking in matters of environment and sustainability. This trajectory continues the legacy of cultural disruption that was started by European colonialists, even though now it is brown-skinned Indians performing the white man's roles.

The Indians leading in this often (but not always) tend to be directly or indirectly integrated with their fellow Western elitists, not only in business transactions but also in media, lifestyle, literature, fashions, brands, etc. What is being touted as globalization is largely the Westernization of the globe. All too often, cricket, Bollywood and a few traditional symbols carried forward from Bharat (discussed below) comprise the shallow sense of Indian identity among this class. They crave mimicry of the West. A person's Westernized identity has become a signifier of superiority over his fellow Indians.

While Westernized India seeks to unify India using top-down development, there are opposing centrifugal forces tearing it apart. These fissiparous forces include regional ethnic identities, foreign religious nexuses, caste divisiveness and so forth. I refer to many of these forces as Breaking India forces, the rebellious insurrections that confront approximately one-third of India's districts, according to government sources.

There are many revolts against Westernized India, being provoked on the grounds of feeling exploited and marginalized. Breaking India forces often allege that they are victims of cultural genocide which is being carried out behind the smokescreen of "progress". While Westernized

India is run top-down with centralized structures and mostly elitist English-speaking governance, Breaking India forces are grassroots and organized in a bottom-up manner. Here the local languages predominate, and the support base is very grounded and bonded with the native soil of a given geographical locality. This means that Breaking India is not one unified movement, but several disparate movements spread across the country, each fighting a local war against local authorities. Often the local police or some symbolic presence of “India” is a target to unleash their frustrations.

There are growing alliances emerging among Breaking India forces across the different geographies, including cells of revolt in neighboring countries. Some of the leaders of these movements include well-educated modern (Westernized) Indians who have turned into revolutionaries, drawing inspiration from similar leftist movements in other parts of the world. China’s Chairman Mao is commonly used as the mascot and political ideologue; hence the term Maoism is sometimes used to refer to all such movements.

Their prime enemy is Westernized India and the Indian government seen as its guardian. Many local battles have erupted over the appropriation of lands and natural resources by Westernized India and its foreign collaborators.

The origin of this clash between Western-style “civilization” and the natives of the soil had its origins long ago. It crystallized in legal terms when the British classified many local *jatis* (traditional communities) that resisted colonial presence as “criminal tribes”. The notorious Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 was later extended and further consolidated in 1876, 1911 and 1924. Even though India repealed it after independence, many structures that it produced have endured, such as the category called “tribe” which is a derogatory Western term. In the terminology of Bharat, all these so-called tribes are *jatis*. The only difference is that these *jatis* were too different from Western norms and resisted (often with violence) the attempts to encroach into their territories and sacred spaces. Tribes are those *jatis* the West could not digest into its own structures of “civilization”.

The Thugs were one such *jati* that became infamous. They were especially dangerous for the British rulers of India, because they organized attacks against colonialists wherever they found them vulnerable. For instance, the Thugs were opposed to the very large-scale deforestation of their lands which the British carried out to supply wood to Britain and to their own projects in India. The criminalization of this *jati* was so successful that their name has entered the global lexicon as synonymous with crookedness and criminality in general. It is analogous to a pejorative racist term like “nigger” except that there is virtually no resistance against its use because the Thugs got exterminated by British genocide.

This pejorative mindset is prevalent in the attitude of Westernized Indians towards “tribals”; it is a view through their colonized lenses. It sees the native *jatis* as “occupiers” of valuable lands that need to be exploited in the name of progress and civilization. This is the exact same story as the whites who called themselves “settlers” of the American landscape, after making it “empty” of the Native Americans by various means of genocide.

“Bharat” is a term that refers to traditional India. Whether one thinks of pre-colonial Indian native society as good or bad, there is no doubt that such a society has survived for a very long time, and that many pockets of India still live in accordance with its traditional lifestyles.

Today, Bharat has been invaded by both Westernized India and Breaking India forces, albeit using different reasons and different methods. The Westernized Indians are following imported right-wing capitalist models that are said to have emerged from the Protestant Ethic in the West, and they are frantically “developing” the civilization of Bharat by westernizing it. The Breaking India forces are following imported left-wing models to redress their grievances. Each attacks Bharat with its own imported theories, and each offers its own kind of promise for a better society.

The important thing is that both are ideologies based on foreign nexuses, and both are tearing Bharat apart. I predict that neither Westernized India nor Breaking India forces will score an absolute victory near term, but that this war will continue to break up India’s unified grand narrative. Westernized India and Breaking India forces are like competing predators that each prey on Bharat, while at the same time they are ultimately determined to fight each other to the end.

The idea of Bharat is not some sort of perfect past. There is no such thing as a perfect past according to Bharat’s traditions; *smritis* are meant to be rewritten for each era and context, rather than being declared “final and closed” and parroted as fossilized dogma. The old Bharat would not be a viable lifestyle today even if one could return to it. For one thing, the population today is over 50 times what it might have been during the classical era of Bharat, and I have never seen a convincing analysis that the old ways are sufficiently elastic to be viable on a 50-fold increase of scale. Add to this that modern technology and globalization make isolation impossible, and any isolationist approach would merely weaken India and invite re-colonization by forces in India’s neighborhood and beyond.

What I do suggest is that civilization models from Bharat must be put on the discussion table alongside all other models, and all options considered on a case by case basis as the building blocks for a *Navya Bharat* (New Bharat) grand narrative. Good ideas from all sources, including

from Westernized India and Breaking India forces, ought to be evaluated as part of this exercise, which should be the development of new *smritis* and adaptation of old ones.

This would not be the first time that Indians have modernized their own traditions. It surprises me that such approaches to nation building have not been started on a large scale in the past quarter century, at least not with enough competence and resource allocation.

Today's blatant corruption is a result of the breakdown of the ethos of Bharat, replaced by materialistic greed that cannot be satisfied within the Westernized India model. The media has propagated Western-style desires among the masses which the system cannot deliver on such a large scale. This leads to selfish frenzy to get ahead at any cost, using any means. I do not think that Westernized India could deliver the American middle-class lifestyle on which it is premised. Given that India's population density is 10 times as large as USA's, India simply lacks the natural resources (e.g. water) to sustain the same level of per capita consumption as the USA. It would have to be based on huge importation of resources. This would bankrupt the country, while Westernized India's billionaires would be cheered as heroes flying in their private jets to enjoy their foreign assets and fame.

If the US social security system cannot afford to pay for its old people's retirement, why should India dismantle the traditional family and *jati* structure of Bharat that has looked after the aged, all in the wild hope of "becoming like Americans"? Even if the dream based on Westernized India's development model were achievable, where would so much capital come from and who would pay the debt? Where are the foreign lands India would have to conquer and colonize to develop itself, in the same way as the West plundered others to develop itself? My point is that the Westernized India model needs to be augmented with a good dose of ideas from Bharat.

What would happen if the Breaking India forces start to shift their target from attacking low-level government officials to attacking the core infrastructure of Westernized India? What would happen if the news headlines suddenly mentioned attacks on oil pipelines, telecom networks and other infrastructure.? As infrastructures expand, which it must, this vulnerability increases. Westernized India needs to address the sustainability of its models.

I often wonder: What might have Gandhi's India been like? I feel it would have been closer to Bharat than the other two models. Sadly, it was the Nehruvian turn after independence that went away from Gandhi and Bharat and this was the watershed event leading to the present crisis. Nehru saw himself as the last White man to rule India.

At the same time, I cannot accept the *old* Gandhian model for today, because it is past its lifecycle and needs to be updated. Gandhi being a great creative re-thinker would probably have revised it for today's circumstances.

What I propose is a healthy integration of Bharat and Westernized India to take us forward, with lessons learned from the Breaking India forces brought into the discussion as well. The exact nature of this confluence would require innovative thinking. Such new *smritis* must be written by us. Otherwise, new *smritis* for India will be written by scholars with a Breaking India *drishti* once again.

Lack of a Grand Narrative Development Program

Sadly, the Indian government is conspicuous by its absence as a competent player in the civilization discourse. Nor is there strategic coherence across its byzantine maze of departments in areas related to civilization: such as Culture, Human Resource, External Affairs, etc.

There is a growing display of patriotic emotional activity in social and mass media, as well as the emergence of many conclaves featuring certain Hindu voices. This powerful emotion needs to be harnessed and redirected to create an intellectual ecosystem that is globally competitive.

Our paucity of internationally competitive fresh research has many causes. Some of these are discussed below.

Who is doing the heavy lifting?

While mainstream media and pop culture tend to depict things superficially, there lies a deep level of knowledge that must be engaged with more specialized expertise. This is where the long-term intellectual debates reside. One must drill down to this level to really know what is going on, that matters. Our civilizational opponents have worked hard at the deep level for the past several generations. They have systematically established their ideologies, assumptions, loyal teams and the institutions of knowledge production and distribution.

They have often become allies at the superficial level, which disarms us, makes us happy and complicit. But very few among us are aware of the machinations going on at the deep level, and fewer still are concerned about this with enough competence and fearlessness to make any impact. Many of our intellectuals are glad to negotiate their place with the deep establishment which is controlled by others.

We are micro-optimizing our position in the sense of short sighted improvements and superficial benefits. We are sacrificing the macro situation as a result. We have been doing this for many centuries. First it was the Muslims in control over our discourse, then the Europeans, and now the Americans.

Over the past twenty-five years, I have witnessed a groundswell of public awareness of this predicament. However, not much has been achieved to disrupt the deep structures hostile to our civilization. We are fighting superficial battles even after becoming aware of the serious predicament. The deep structures cannot be disrupted by using superficial methods and superficially trained minds. This is where the crux of my issue lies. The work required at the

deep level is very tough, multi-disciplinary, risky, and there is no quick victory or personal gratification in the conventional sense. In other words, it is thankless work demanding high sacrifice.

Given the enormity of the challenges, we need multiple experts specializing in different kinds of issues. There is room for plenty of leadership without tripping over each other or trying to bring each other down. However, there is too much opportunism because the easy superficial levels are more enticing, and because too often we reward the superficial work. It is a quick way ahead for many. This means there is neglect of the deeper levels, and too much glorification and limelight for superficial work. Who will do the heavy lifting then?

Resource allocations and appointments should be merit based and not driven by loyalty to leaders. Anyone appointed to lead a “think tank” should have already excelled in thinking, which means having a track record of high impact outputs.

My advice to individuals wanting to be genuinely involved is to pick a movement and dedicate yourself to it. Match your work with your *sva-dharma* and turn that into your *yajna*. Do not try to launch one more new movement just to appoint yourself as the leader.

Death of *purva-paksha*

In earlier times, *dharmic* systems had a tradition of respectful debate with many *acharyas* building their own lineage as a legacy of their thinking. This seems to have stopped. After the era of the Vedantins, Indians forgot to update their debating skills. No more *purva-paksha* and *uttara-paksha* debates with opposing ideologies have happened. There are many theories on why this decline took place, but the fact remains that we ignored disciplined study and debates. We have lost our *kshatriyata*.

Why is it that during the Islamic invasions period, there wasn't a real solid Hindu rebuttal to Islam from an intellectual standpoint? There were military responses and many wars were waged. But no one took on the ideology of Islam intellectually. No one wondered why they had a different *siddhanta* from ours and in what ways it is incompatible with ours. There was no one to do comparative study of that religion and no one was being groomed to take on Islam intellectually from the *dharmic* side. Students were not being taught in *pathshalas* on how to counter Muslims.

Again, when the Dutch, the Portuguese, the French and the British came, not much thought was given to studying them and their ideologies. India paid a huge price for this intellectual ineptitude. There were sporadic attempts to do *purva-paksha* of foreign ideologies entering

India. But there was no institutionalized system to deal with alien ideologies. It was the case of an isolated individual somewhere, attempting to reverse the gaze, and the knowledge died with the individual.

For example, Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of *Arya Samaj*, systematically critiqued Western thought and Indology. But he was mainly critiquing Christianity, for Marxism had not made any impact in India during his time. In fact, Indians well into the 20th century who responded to Western thought did not take Marxism as a serious topic of study. When other Western ideologies emerged, the Hindu intellectuals did not carry our systematic *purva-paksha* on them, at least not for a long time. Since the time of Pandit Deendayal, we have suffered from the arrival of many specialized doctrines that our scholars have failed to respond to adequately. These include: Orientalism, Postcolonial Studies, Subaltern Studies, Postmodern Studies, Neo-Orientalism, to name a few of the major ones.

We must revive the tradition of *purva-paksha* methods for debating opponents in a respectful manner. We must re-educate the so-called “educated class”, on the game-changing discourse. We must encourage self-critiques rather than wasting time at the “feel good” gatherings of “like-minded people”.

Moron Smriti

Because of centuries of slavery, Indians emerged at independence as a nation that was deeply ashamed of its past. Its people forgot their past achievements. The guilt ridden Indian is very gullible and easily laps up stories that effectively steals credit from them. Often, this inferiority complex finds expression in what I have termed “*moron smriti*”.

My definition of *moron smriti* is any excuse for being unconcerned about the challenges I have raised in this writing concerning our grand narrative. This includes citing *shlokas* out of context or incorrect/partial facts of history or absolving oneself from responsibility to protect *dharma* under some other excuse.

A common moronic idea I often hear regarding India’s geographic security is the refrain that India has survived for 5000 years and will continue to survive, and therefore there is no need for any concern. What these people forget is that the civilizational entity called India or Bharat once spread from Afghanistan to Bali and Kazakhstan to Sri Lanka. Today we have ceded so much of that territory and are confined to what we geographically call India. 80% area has been lost and yet people say that there is nothing to worry. And even within this geography we are threatened by so much secessionism.

Another escapist route to avoid assertive action is to cite Vedanta that since everything is *mithya* or illusory, there is no need to be concerned.

Another lofty idea commonly used to “feel good” about the outlook is to assume very high level abstract ideals like a world without borders, a global humanism that is just around the corner, or some futurist technology that will render all our concerns obsolete.

A serious problem among many of our thinkers today is the belief that “everything has already been written”. Such persons hide their incompetence behind one-liner wisdom and cronyism, instead of pursuing merit and professionalism.

The other sides are not static. They are continually changing, and we must advance our scholarship about them dynamically. For every advancement of an opponent ideology, we need a corresponding response from our side. One can't rest on old laurels. One can't abdicate responsibility by claiming that somebody has already done it before. There is no finality to opponents' theories and there can be no finality to our *smritis*.

There are also morons who seek refuge in blaming our civilization for misdeeds like caste oppression, violence against women, Hindu chauvinism against religious minorities, and so forth.

Moron Gurus

Soon after independence, elite Indians were keen to disown their roots and craved to replace the British and become the new *sahibs*. Hence, the yoga teachers went to America to teach. These Indian gurus who exported yoga movements to the West were very naïve about the modern *kurukshetra* and their own strategic positioning. They propagated yoga from a position of civilizational weakness. They were over-awed by Western superiority in the material plane and swept off their feet by the huge devotional support they received from white Americans.

Our pioneering gurus taught yoga as a generic practice which did not need any roots at all. With the first wave of gurus being too open and liberal in their sharing, yoga slowly became a free for all and began to be distorted with Western ideas and practices. This encouraged the tendency that is common among white disciples to do a Uturn back to their parent traditions after a brief or even long romance with Hinduism. Indian gurus facilitated this downfall of yoga's dharmic roots by reducing the entry barriers for anyone to adopt their tradition. They never insisted on any rules like *yama/niyama* for a person to be initiated into yoga. Thus, they couldn't retain control over it.

In most cases, the guru did not leave behind an authentic successor. They were unconcerned about such institution building and did not have the skills to do so. What we see now is that almost all the Indian gurus in America have been replaced by white gurus in their place. Not only is the leadership white, the content of the yoga is also getting digested rapidly into Western and Judeo-Christian frameworks. Indian gurus did not develop any home team that would maintain the authenticity of their style of yoga. The new Western gurus have taken over yoga in the West. In some cases, the Indian gurus were totally unprepared when they got literally “thrown out” or sidelined by their own disciples from the movements they started.

Indian gurus have promoted another false notion, that all religions are the same and that it does not matter whether one chanted “*Aum*” or “*Amen*” or “*Ameen*” when doing yoga. This has opened the door for many distortions to creep into yoga.

The gurus failed to do a *purva-paksha* of the Abrahamic religions before engaging them and teaching students from those backgrounds. Gurus do teach the importance of transcending the ego in their practice. But they fail to understand that besides the individual level ego as one individual, their students also have a second and more complex collective ego as members of a certain religion. Gurus have ignored teaching about the trappings of this second level religious ego of their students. Therefore, gurus did not address the importance of group identity, and failed to initiate western students into a new collective identity. Sri Prabhupada’s ISKCON was a rare exception because he placed heavy emphasis on group identity and on exiting the prior religious identity.

When a Western student starts loosening the individual ego identity, but the collective identity as a Jew or Christian is intact in the unconscious, there is an unstable equilibrium. Eventually, under stress or some life event or when some new opportunity comes up, such an individual is likely to Uturn.

Varna Depletion

Varna is a system of classifying social capital, not by birth but individual propensities. The *varna* categories are still applicable - of intellectual capital, political/governance capital, financial capital and labor. India’s colonizers took away India’s political, intellectual and financial capital, and reduced us to labor serving their interests.

In other words, we collectively became the *shudras* while the colonizers became owners of the world of ideas and knowledge, intellectual property, wealth, political clout, and military clout. The colonizers became nexus for the *brahmin*, *kshatriya* and *vaishya varnas*.

Even when the independence in 1947 returned to us our political *varna*, we didn't get back our financial and intellectual clout. In the last two decades we have restored some of our *vaishya*/financial *varna* as well. But we still lack intellectual *Swarajya*, and the other *varnas* are still too dependent on the West.

If you take a look at the United States, the Rockefellers, Fords and Carnegies exemplified the role played by the super-rich, their *vaishya varna*, in nation building. They invested heavily in building the American grand narrative. They brought vision and implemented it into a network of libraries, world-class universities, intellectual discourse, national policies, etc.

But Indian billionaires are rarely committed in a similar way to build India's grand narrative. They are more concerned about personal wealth accumulation. They live a glamorous jet setting life with one foot outside India and a lot of assets stashed in foreign accounts. If India were to fall apart, they would not be affected as they have nest eggs elsewhere. The bright side is that the rising middle class is far more committed, and this is generating wealth in the broader layers of society.

When India has political and financial autonomy, the next step is to develop a robust intellectual class. So far India has failed to bring back control of the discourse about our civilization in the humanities and social sciences. We also need high standards of institutions and mechanisms to disseminate the discourse. This is not an easy or quick battle.

Disconnected Assets

The Indian grand narrative project requires bringing together three kinds of resources: intellectual property, human resource and institutions.

The work on intellectual property for the grand narrative project has two parts:

- The disruptive part where one dismantles the flawed narratives from our colonial past.
- The constructive part where we re-discover the various threads of our story and adds new knowledge to develop the positive narrative.

It is troubling that there are very large institutions promoting *dharma* that have excess capacity in infrastructure and lots of financial capital, but lack the intellectual resources to produce quality output for the grand narrative. In other words, they have a lot of idle capacity. At the same time, there are fledgling organizations with excellent intellectual capabilities but deficient in funds and infrastructure assets. These two need to be brought together. But this has not been done and there are serious blockages coming in the way. I will explain this below.

The large Hindu guru organizations and the large Hindu political organizations suffer many problems that have kept them from developing our grand narrative during all these years. These problems include the following:

1. Their large armies of people are unsuited for this work because they are simply not qualified and experienced enough. Either their training is too inbred for the specific internal chores of their own organization, or they did not study the outside world with sufficient *purva-paksha* to be able to figure out the issues and what needs to be done. In other words, they are a repository of human resource but lack the training required for the modern *kurukshetra*.
2. They lack the competent leaders needed for such work, because their leaders have spent most of their energies in climbing the institution's career ladder and playing petty politics. Their knowledge that could be relevant for the grand narrative project is obsolete; nor are they monitoring the *kurukshetra* beyond a narrow perspective.
3. Furthermore, such groups of the old guard mentalities are not attracting the best young students today in the same manner as our great institutions did in the days of Takshashila and Nalanda. In fact, it is common to find individuals in positions of power in such stodgy organizations that would be unable to find a senior executive post in a major multinational corporation. The cream of society has gone elsewhere and the massive assets under such organizations are under-utilized.
4. Such organizations like to deny my insights into the problems we face and solutions we need. They will use such ploys as the following:
 - a. Hide behind "moron *smriti*" statements described earlier.
 - b. Claim that "it has all been done before by some person X".
 - c. Chant lofty *shlokas* from *shastras* out of context and try to show their superior knowledge.
 - d. Explain their lineage pedigree which gives them the *adhikar* which they feel I lack.
5. These organizations tend to be ultra-sensitive to criticism, and likely to blacklist those like me who point out their shortcomings even with good intentions. Hence, they become places where "like-minded people" but otherwise incompetent, close ranks for mutual protection. They are very threatened by innovation from the outside. The success of an individual in such places depends on cronyism and petty politics. Professionals with a track record of merit are unwelcome. They keep persons like me outside their fortresses.
6. In the free market of commercial competition, similar giants from the past go out of business, or are acquired by newer, more vibrant companies, or are broken up and their assets sold. This recycling is how the marketplace constantly upgrades its asset

utilization. Sadly, the same is not true of our *dharma* institutions because these are protected by blind faith.

India was once the knowledge hub of the world with its intellectually productive universities like Nalanda and Takshashila. Today, we are reduced to being mere consumers of knowledge that is produced elsewhere, and often produced by regurgitating or adapting our old traditional knowledge.

Intellectual Sepoys

Another issue we face is that when we sent our people to understand the West, many of them have returned as sepoys of the West. In contrast, when the West sends missionaries to India for proselytization, it is very rare for them to convert and become Hindus and desert their own faith. The West has sent its anthropologists and they have exported the whole Marxist ideology to the Indian left.

It is important to note that the Indian Left is not ideologically homegrown because Marxism started in Europe and was sent to India from USSR and Europe. The whole Postcolonial studies that is fashionable among Indians came from Europe. This morphed into Subaltern studies to feed ideologies to the Breaking India forces. Postmodernism also came from Europe. Europeans have been very successful in exporting such schools of thought which grow permanent roots in India.

However, we have been woefully inadequate in keeping our youth aligned with us when sending them out to learn Western thought and critique it from our point of view. Almost always, they get co-opted into their narrative.

The theatre of India studies has moved from Europe to the US. Now the field of human rights is the new framework for the West's civilizing mission; it is very convenient to have Indians trained by the West at the forefront of this movement. For this reason, many US trained academicians of Indian origin have been planted for the role of speaking on behalf of Hinduism.

These *pseudo-Pandavas* speak as insiders of Indian culture but are in fact intellectually colonized and sold out to Western institutions.

They interpret Sanskrit texts according to their Western mentor's lens. They caricature Hinduism using a Eurocentric lens. Western ideas are propagated as universal and as the path to the liberation of India.

American universities have co-opted Indian billionaires and exhorted them to donate large sums of money in setting up chairs to ostensibly study India. People like Narayana Murthy, influential Tamilian diaspora and even the Tamil Nadu government have funded projects at Ivy League universities without controlling the decision-making. This will only support the Breaking India forces.

Traditional Gurukulas and Scholars

Before the Macaulay system of education entered India, students lived in the teacher's home to study for ten or more years. The student was formally initiated as a *shishya* of the guru and lived with his guru until the guru decided he was ready to re-enter the world. The students were usually taught in Sanskrit and the subjects covered philosophy, mathematics, science, aesthetics, and various practical aspects in life - all in an integrated manner. Despite the colonial disruption, some *gurukulas* have managed to survive in small pockets. These produce scholars well versed in various Sanskrit domains.

The strengths of these scholars trained in traditional Sanskrit include the following:

- They have access to the largest corpus of surviving Sanskrit texts at their disposal.
- They are well educated in the rich meaning of traditional texts. Knowledge of *Purva Mimamsa* helps remove ambiguities regarding meanings and helps understand the correct meaning in a given context.
- India's large number of such *gurukulas* produced families who retain some rare and unique knowledge systems.

The weaknesses of students being produced by the *gurukulas* today are:

- The curriculum does not include any *purva-paksha* of Western Sanskrit scholarship or indeed any Western Scholarship. They only learn the old *purva-paksha* debates of the past eras and are unable to carry out fresh debates with today's opponents on today's issues.
- Traditional Indian Sanskrit scholars lack funds to take up research in inter-civilization issues. Hence, all the comparative studies being done are by Westerners and Indians under Western tutelage.
- Western Social Sciences and Philosophical works are in heavy, complex and jargon-ridden English. This makes it extremely difficult for even the well-educated Indian scholars in English medium to dissect. This type of analysis of the West is almost an impossible hurdle for the Sanskrit scholar. Indians attempting to decode Western

thought are likely to get lost in the mountain of systematic work of the past several centuries that they have compiled. It is easier to believe that it is all true.

- Western theories emerged because of their study of the different situations and issues the West has encountered. Indian scholars do not have the benefit of doing anthropology of the West, of being able to immerse into Western culture and of studying their histories. Hence, they are ill-prepared to study the West.
- Because the intellectual apparatus is being controlled by West, they pick Indian students from the elite English medium institutions in India and indoctrinate them to serve as their sepoy. The traditional Sanskrit scholar educated in a *gurukula* on the other hand is used only as a native informant to supply information to the Western scholar or his Indian sepoy.
- When traditional Indian scholars are offered Western patronage, they take it at face value. They become overwhelmed by the warm gestures and believe it is their good fortune to be recognized by the Westerners. They are also awed by the reputation of Western Indologists and have an inferiority complex in front of white skin. Such Indian scholars aspire to a pat on the back by the West seeing it as the hallmark of success.
- Many believe that despite the Westerners' incorrect understanding of their culture, they can package and sell their traditional knowledge in a manner better than traditional scholars themselves.
- Many Indian scholars arrogantly believe that their own scholarship's superiority is enough to win on merit without any special effort required to argue in the global discourse.
- Many Indian scholars believe that this work of *purva-paksha* of others has been done by our great thinkers in the past, and hence there is no need to put fresh efforts. They are utterly ignorant of new developments and don't upgrade themselves on the marketplace of ideas.

The opportunities available for traditional scholars are:

- Many Indians are now exposed to Western theories. They can read and write dense English and some of them want to join this battle of grand narrative. However, they lack even rudimentary knowledge of Sanskrit or its intellectual traditions. If traditional knowledge is presented appropriately to this audience, they will contribute to the defense and further propagation of *dharma*. This presents a great opportunity for collaboration among Indians with complementary backgrounds.
- Indians love *dharma* and have retained it despite the many hardships that they have faced. Even great critics of Hinduism like Ambedkar opted for Buddhism rather than any

Abrahamic religion. Buddhist scholars from East Asia and Southeast Asia look to Sanskrit as the original source of ideas but they end up going to the West for help because Indian scholars have not seen this as an opportunity for the spread of Sanskrit and *sanskriti*.

- The global spread and popularity of yoga presents an opening to teach those audiences Sanskrit and *sanskriti*. Some experienced yoga practitioners are ready to advance to the next level in their engagement with *dharma*. Indian scholars could implement such strategies to become authentic exporters.
- The growth of technology presents an opportunity to spread knowledge with less dependence on memorizing. The internet has made it very economical for the dissemination of information. Therefore, Indian ideas can be spread through the internet very efficiently.

The threats facing our traditional approaches are as follows:

- Traditional scholars have been systematically sidelined and impoverished and they struggle for a basic livelihood. This means they are prone to inducements from wealthy, deep pocket Western scholars to play the role of passive native informants.
- Traditional scholars are simple-minded and get easily trapped by Westerners sharing their knowledge freely. They are ignorant of the field of intellectual property rights. The Western scholar can easily mine the knowledge of the Indian scholar and exploit him. Indian scholars are often unaware that their work has been appropriated.
- Traditional scholars lack institutional support. Meanwhile, their opponents are heavily funded, have global networks of support and support from government, media, academia, intelligentsia and industry funding sources. They have declared themselves as the authorities and experts.
- Practicing Hindus are often at a disadvantage and not allowed to represent the knowledge traditions.

Government Irresponsibility

Various organs of the government, such as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR), Indian Council for Social Sciences research (ICSSR) and the various ministries for Culture, HRD and External Affairs, have never done a *purva-paksha* of the West to counter its narratives on India. They have been largely ineffectual organs to develop India's own grand narrative.

Even worse is that the Indian state and central governments support the establishment of many chairs on India studies in foreign universities and spend a lot of money doing this. This money

could be better spent setting up departments to study India in Indian universities. In fact, Indian universities should also set up chairs to study South and Southeast Asia so that the whole region can be drawn into the Indian sphere of influence once again.

The Indian government is often opting for the politically correct or pseudo-secular positions on civilizational issues.

Indian ambassadors to the West are often being apologetic about their own identity and would rather be self-effacing and retreat into their own little corners than fearlessly assert their civilizational identity.

Resources for building India's Grand Narrative for Today

Re-imagining dharma

Dharma is defined as 'that which upholds' and it has been the foundation of the Indian civilization. Its seminal texts consist of two categories: *shruti* and *smriti*. The *shruti* texts are eternal and timeless truths whereas the *smritis* are contextual truths, ever changing according to place and time. This is different from other traditions where both are collapsed into one holy book or canon that becomes frozen in time.

An updated narrative of India must re-imagine *dharma* for our epoch. We need to develop new *smritis* and re-interpret the old ones for today's circumstances. In many instances, the texts have become misunderstood and need a fresh clarification.

After about a thousand years of colonization, we have forgotten our home-grown knowledge and theories concerning so many domains. For instance, how we now think of time, aesthetics, language, and so on today, are products of a deeply colonized mind. Indians have adopted the metaphysics and cosmology of the West and we need to re-discover the deeper, richer and varied alternatives that have been articulated before with our traditional *drishti*. This entails an enormous decolonization of our minds.

Modern Hinduism movements seem to have diluted the core tenets of *dharma* and made compromises to accommodate the West. We should be able to stand our ground and assert certain ways of being that we are proud of. The opportunity exists for deep authentic paradigms that demand adherence to *dharma*.

One important innovation would be that though we have adopted English, it needs to be energized with powerful Sanskrit non-translatable words. Simplistic translations of deeply meaningful Sanskrit words rob it of the profound metaphysics underlying such words. By infusing Sanskrit non-translatables into English, we would reclaim our metaphysical narrative.

Another issue is the way Vedanta is being often misused to "negate the world" and abandon one's duties. This is a common ploy to abdicate social responsibility in the *laukika* (worldly) realm by citing teachings describing the *paramarthika* (transcendental) realm. The teachings are being cited out of context and this serious error needs to be corrected.

We should take back yoga and reintegrate it as a total metaphysics and lifestyle and not just the exercise regimen that it has been reduced to in many places.

Another issue is the traditional *varna* system in which one belonged to one specific *varna* only. But today we find exemplars like Baba Ramdev and Yogi Adityanath playing active roles in the social, political and business realms. In these times when the worldly domains are so heavily tainted, it has become necessary for such individuals to take up roles that were traditionally not meant for renunciants. We need such innovations for the re-establishment of *dharma*.

Another very maligned and misunderstood concept is the 'caste system'. India strictly speaking did not have the present style of caste system. The word 'caste' is derived from the Spanish and Portuguese word 'casta' which means 'race, lineage or breed'. It is the Portuguese who applied 'caste' to the system of social organization they encountered in India. This was a way to separate the Indian communities and defeat them separately.

India's social organization system had nothing to do with race or breed. The *jati-varna* system of social organization which the Portuguese encountered in India was based on skill sets, competences and attitudes of individuals. One was classified as a *brahmin*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya* or *shudra* based on merit. Also, the distinctions between them were quite fluid with crossovers from one category to another being quite common until the 18th century. It was the British under Herbert Risley who ossified the caste system with his first census in the late 19th century. This complex *varna-jati* system must be re-imagined for the 21st century where people must again organize themselves as per their aptitude.

We must revive the tradition of *purva-paksha* and *uttara-paksha* that fostered vibrant debates in ancient India. Unfortunately, it died along the way and as a result we have failed to do *purva-paksha* of foreign ideologies that have ruled over us for the past thousand years. We need to train our people to do *purva-paksha* of any new ideology that emerges. This makes us more vigilant in defending who we are in intellectual terms and thus be prepared better in physical terms for any war or debate. It also allows us to selectively borrow what we find useful and manageable under our own control.

Re-writing India's History

India's long and complex history was traditionally transmitted orally through the genre of *itihasa* and *puranas*. These narratives were always interpreted in the framework of *shruti*.

History writing of the modern kind was a colonial project which was undertaken with the explicit intent of legitimizing colonialism and mis-educating Indians to accept the supremacy of the West.

Therefore, to reclaim our selfhood we must go back to original sources and reconstruct the truthful history of our past. We must not only excavate the facts about what happened in India but also discover the role played by our ancestors in other parts of the world. For instance, few people know the extent to which Indian thought helped the civilizations across the world in so many disciplines, and that Indian soldiers in World War I and II comprised the largest number of soldiers of any country, and that we lost many tens of thousands of soldiers' lives fighting these wars for the sake of Europe's future. Few British persons appreciate that had it not been for Indian soldiers, Britain might have ended up as a colony of Germany in World War I.

This defeatist and slavish mindset of Indians must be changed and the way to change it is to compile the great history of Indian science and technology.

Hindu guilt needs to be eradicated with the affirmation in them that dharma and modernity can go hand in hand. They need to understand that dharmic traditions are not in any way inferior to the West and in fact often provide for more harmonious alternatives than the West has to offer.

Learn about the deep structures of your civilization. Only then can you truly defend it.

There have been three main types of theories that have dominated the field of history writing about India.

Invasion Theory of India

One model is what might be called the "invasion theory" of Indian history. It assumes that India is a passive, unchanging entity and has only undergone historical change when motivated by outside forces, namely active aggressors. Hegel appears to have played an important role in this model of India, while he conveniently ignored and indeed discredited the extensive influence India had on other Eurasian civilizations. He wrote the following in his *Philosophy of History*:

On the whole, the diffusion of Indian culture is only a dumb, deedless expansion; that is, it presents no political action. The people of India have achieved no foreign conquests, but have been on every occasion vanquished themselves. And as in this silent way, Northern India has been a center of emigration, productive of merely physical diffusion, India as a Land of Desire forms an essential element in General history ... From the most ancient times downwards, all nations have directed their wishes and longings to gain access to the treasures of this land of marvels, the most costly which the earth presents; treasures of nature – pearls, diamonds, perfumes, rose-essences, elephants, lions, etc. – as also treasures of wisdom. The ways by which these treasures have passed to the

West, has at all times been a matter of World-historical importance, bound up with the fate of nations. Those wishes have been realized; this Land of Desire has been attained; there is scarcely any great nation of the East, nor of the Modern European West, that has not gained for itself a smaller or larger portion of it.³⁷

Indian history is typically framed in terms of a long series of invasions:

- The so-called Aryans brought Sanskrit and its texts into India.
- The ancient Greeks brought philosophy, astronomy, art, etc.
- The Muslims brought us tabla, tandoor, sitar.
- The British brought us science, railways, cricket and English language.
- Now the Americans are teaching us human rights.

Thus, India is denied any agency in her own development, being a passive recipient of “developmental gifts” from invading conquerors.

Most of the time, this model is implicit in the narratives although not explicitly stated.

Marxist view of History

Post-independence, Marxist scholars took over the history writing. Their narrative of India shows a meaningless list of Hindu kings and dynasties with irrelevant dates and names to memorize. The design of this rewriting was to obfuscate the brutal genocide of Hindus by the Muslim armies and the subsequent genocides by the colonialists. In fact, the Mughal era came to be projected as the culmination of peace, prosperity, arts and harmony.

The glorious history of India’s own Hindu kings became mere footnotes. For instance, the great Vijayanagar kingdom and the magnificent Chola empire of the south get only half a page in history books. Indians are depicted as weak and defeated into little kingdoms fighting each other. India’s contributions across so many fields are barely mentioned.

Marxism studies Indian society in terms of upper castes oppressing lower castes. The independence movement highlights some leaders and downplays those who believed in the civilizational Indian entity. The Marxist history of India is blatantly false and Hinduphobic.

Ronald Inden explains how postcolonial Indian scholars have fallen into this trap:

With the rise of identity politics, ‘postcolonial’ historians have shifted away from imagining class and national unities in India’s past and have started pointing to diversities, but many of these studies have a tendency to recuperate the older colonialist imaginings of India. Representations of the systematic mistreatment of

women (patriarchy), the exploitation of the young (child labour), domination by a parasitic Brahman caste of Aryan descent, discrimination by castes (untouchability), and the triumphalism of an atavistic Hinduism reiterate the earlier images of India as an inherently and uniquely divided and oppressive place.³⁸

Romila Thapar, Irfan Habib and their acolytes are prime examples of this kind of history writing. They lack competence in reading Sanskrit and Indian Classics and rely solely on colonial translations. Their main competence is in Marxism and other imported European social theories, such as subaltern studies.

Chauvinistic Theory of India

Another kind of history is being written by emotional and chauvinistic writers describing flying airplanes and fantastic inventions from ancient India. They see India as a nuclear power at the time of the *Mahabharata*. Such exaggerated accounts lacking rigor and evidence are causing harm because rational readers reject even those claims of our great heritage which are true and proven by hard evidence.

Key areas of a correct history

There is an urgent need to present India differently: that her dynamism has played a central role as agent for human advancement across the world.

One main area of focus would be the highly evolved nature of India's Indus-Saraswati civilization. The products of this civilization were highly prized by others in faraway places. The economic history from Angus Maddison states that India right from the start of the modern era, up until the 18th century, was an economic superpower of the world along with China. These two together covered about 50% of the total world GDP. Indian products were so sought after in the world because of their beauty and quality and India herself had no reason to look for anything from the other nations. India was at the center of an international trade network across all of Asia, Africa and Middle East. Our goods ultimately reached Europe where they were highly prized.

It was India's famed wealth that attracted barbaric and cruel attacks by invaders who plundered starting from about the 10th century.

In this brief writing, I cannot detail all the important areas of such a colossal history rewriting project. I shall merely outline one of the areas of focus that is seldom given enough importance and which I feel deserves greater research and dissemination.

History of Indian Science and Technology

The history of Indian Science and Technology is one of the most fascinating projects. Modern Western technology has produced amazing achievements, but we must analyze the wider implications of such technologies and their notions of progress. These technologies are often unsustainable and cause negative side-effects. We need to dispassionately investigate other alternative technologies as well. While Western intellectual discourse has marginalized the term 'traditional' with the connotation of 'pre-modern' in the sense of 'primitive' or 'outdated', many of the traditional sciences and technologies were quite advanced by 'modern' standards as well as better adapted to unique local conditions and needs than their later substitutes.

Until the 1800s, traditional knowledge generated large-scale economic productivity for Indians. India was one of the richest regions in the world, and most Indians were neither 'backward' nor uneducated or poor. It was economic drainage, oppression, social re-engineering at the hands of colonizers that made millions of 'new poor' over the past few centuries. Upon acknowledging India's traditional knowledge systems, one is forced to discard accounts of its history that essentialize its poverty and related social evils.

The rapidly-expanding, globalizing economy is built largely on Western lifestyles and is homogenizing human 'wants' in unachievable ways. Across the world, people are being forced to accept that progress, success and modernity are synonymous with Westernization. Those 'left behind' are made to feel like failures when measured against this standard. However, this promise of worldwide Westernization is simply unachievable. Many traditional knowledge systems on the other hand, are relevant to economic planning because they are eco-friendly, sustainable, labor-intensive, rather than capital intensive.

The depth and breadth of Indian science and technology is staggering. Infinity Foundation has pioneered this work since the year 2000 and undertaken to write 20 volumes on this untold story. So far, Infinity foundation has completed 14 volumes of this series. The titles and authors are given below.

	Title of the book	Author/s
1	<i>Harappan Architecture & Civil Engineering</i>	J. P. Joshi, late Director General I of Archaeological Survey of India
2	<i>Marvels of Indian Iron through the Ages</i>	(late) R. Balasubramaniam.
3	<i>History of Iron technology in India</i>	Vibha Tripathi.
4	<i>Harappan Technology and its Legacy</i>	D. P. Agrawal
5	<i>Himalayan Traditional Architecture</i>	O. C. Handa
6	<i>Indian Zinc Technology in a Global Perspective</i>	J. S. Kharkwal
7	<i>History of Metals in Eastern India and Bangladesh</i>	Pranav Chattopadhyay & Sen Gupta (former D. G. of A. S. I.)
8	<i>Traditional Water Management</i>	Manikant Shah
9	<i>Water Management and Hydraulic Engineering in India</i>	S. P. Shukla
10	<i>Animal Husbandry and Allied Technologies in Ancient India</i>	P. P. Joglekar and Pankaj Goyal
11	<i>Reflections on the History of Indian Science and Technology</i>	O. C. Handa (Ed.)
12	<i>India Beads: History and Technology</i>	R. K. Mohanty and Tilok Thakuria
13	<i>Beginning of Agriculture and Domestication in India</i>	Vasudha Pant
14	<i>Chalcolithic South Asia: Aspects of Crafts and Technologies</i>	Vasant Shinde, Shweta Sinha Deshpande and Amita Sarkar

It is imperative that we study, preserve, and revive traditional knowledge systems. India's scientific heritage is an important vehicle to challenge Eurocentric histories with an honest history of ideas.

Philosophy and Mind/Inner Sciences

India has a rich field of inner investigations called *adhyatma-vidya* (inner sciences or mind sciences). There are many varied and diverse disciplines and sub-disciplines of Indian inner science, usually in dialogue with each other spanning many regions, languages, and centuries, both competing and collaborating. Moreover, the diverse understandings of self and transformation interrelate with equally diverse Indian social theories.

The inter-relationship between Indian inner sciences and social, political, and environmental sciences is a fertile area for research that would benefit modern society.

We have found it useful to subdivide the Indian inner sciences into the following three broad categories:

Ethics

As an inner *science*, the field of ethics involves not so much the formulation of normative prescriptions and proscriptions, as it does a careful analysis of the way in which an individual's state of mind, motivations, and so forth can affect his perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of himself and the world. It also includes many practical techniques for de-conditioning and re-conditioning the mind/body, for systematically cultivating desired states or attitudes such as patience, love, compassion, a sense of universal responsibility, and so forth.

Theory or Worldview

The second broad category, world view (theory), includes many of the critical and analytical branches of philosophy; epistemology; philosophies of language; theories and models of consciousness and cognition; and the like.

Technology or Practice

The third broad category, technology (practice), includes advanced techniques for the cultivation of transformative insight (identity and reality therapies); coarse physical yoga; yoga of subtle states; meditative technologies; creative imagination techniques; yoga of bliss and beauty; and so forth.

These inner sciences comprise a range of theoretical and practical disciplines which are scientific in the sense that (1) they are based on empirical observation and experimentation, and (2) their findings are interpreted through heuristic yet rational models subject to public verification, scrutiny, debate, and revision.

Contrary to prevalent stereotypes which dismiss such inner sciences as "merely subjective," these "inner" sciences are frequently more scientifically rigorous than their "outer" counterparts for the simple reason that the latter, which purport to explore external "objective" realities, are often based upon the naïve assumption that the perceptual data, as captured by the sense organs and organized in the brain, accurately correspond to the "reality" they allegedly represent.

The paradigms underlying these Indian sciences present challenges and alternatives to the materialistic metaphysics underlying contemporary physical and biological sciences. While these modern sciences have produced many impressive results, their dogmatic adherence to a materialist paradigm has severely restrained their ability to explain the innumerable modalities of consciousness.

The Indian disciplines have given rise to detailed analyses of the mind and mental states, demonstrating that what is often simply treated as "consciousness" is in fact a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, consisting of multiple levels of consciousnesses. Likewise, they have given rise to models of the "body" that entail far more than the coarse, material form, and that describe subtle and extremely subtle levels of physiology as well. Furthermore, the psycho-physical models thus developed have provided detailed explanations for how these varying levels of mind and body interact in complex ways, how they function not as dualistically separate phenomena but more as modalities or reflexes of each other (somewhat akin to how matter and energy are conceived in modern physics).

Given their resonance with modern physics and given that they have provided the underpinnings of much of modern consciousness theory, we should not downplay the possible future contributions or breakthroughs that the Indian inner sciences might provide in our scientific quest to understand reality.

The path taken by the West has been one in which the very real problems and dissatisfactions of human life have been addressed through an externalized approach, an approach which seeks to address these problems via action in and on the external, material world. While the West likes to imagine itself as being "advanced" and "civilized", its legacy of violence and destruction, conducted on a global scale for the past three centuries, calls into question this cherished self-conception.

How might we inculcate, in ourselves and in our societies, a sense of mutual self-respect based on a deeply felt sense of interdependence? There is no doubt that the egocentric approach, which on a mass-scale leads to tribalism, nationalism, cultural chauvinism, and all the other us-versus-them mentalities, does not provide the answer.

Looking back over the past few centuries, a lesson learned seems to be that this externalized approach is unsustainable, and not effective about the pursuit of happiness and elimination of suffering which should be the aim of all human actions.

Instead, the gross deformations of the outer perspective need to be restrained and then complemented by an inner approach, one which proceeds from self-awareness and mindfulness, a perspective which ultimately leads to realization of the essential unity and interdependence of all life. What is needed is an integration of the inner and outer perspectives, a cognitive shift in the investigative field.

An integration of the outer and inner sciences might affect a shift from an alienated individuality to a spiritual sense of individuality in which we have a sense of being unique and precious beings inextricably connected to all other beings, who are equally unique and precious.

Social and Political thought

New *smritis* are needed for economic and social development along the lines of our tradition, and not based on Western models blindly. Of course, we must generously borrow from anywhere those ideas and practices that benefit us without compromising our dharmic foundations.

The family system and de-centralized economic processes are important in any Indian model. The top-down power of state must be limited and evaluated on a case by case basis, so we do not overdo the heavy-handed rule of centralized bureaucracies as we find today.

The ethos of democracy has been built into India's political thought from time immemorial. We know that in ancient India, a king or emperor's military conquests had very little effect on the daily lives of the common people. The new ruler had no right to re-structure society and re-shape its *dharmic* systems. Those tasks were left to the stalwarts in society itself. In fact, even in conquests, ancient Indian kings and emperors allowed the king of a neighboring conquered state to continue ruling his subjects so long as he paid some tribute. A king had to rule over his subjects following *dharmic* ideals.

Chanakya or Kautilya, the chief minister of emperor Chandragupta Maurya, has described how a people must be governed and how a king is supposed to rule, in his masterful text, the *Arthashastra*. Peaceful governance has for long been achieved in India through discussions among the various stakeholders. There needs to be an extensive analysis of Kautilya and others to understand the social-political applications of dharma for today. The *Mahabharata* also contains gems of social and political systems we can learn from. We must re-introduce the study of such traditional texts into our modern curriculum.

Only a decentralized mode of governance can drive the economy and bring prosperity to help the country become a strong global player again.

Art and popular culture

India in the past has had a strong influence on its neighborhood in art and culture. This also served as India's soft power projection. Even today, in places as far as Cambodia, Indonesia and Bali, the story of the *Ramayana* is narrated and enacted. These countries look toward India as the mother civilization and it is necessary to revive these age-old links with our neighbors. While India in recent centuries has continuously looked towards the West to define itself, in fact, it should be looking eastwards to set the definition of others on its own terms.

While the *shastras* have served the purpose of formal learning and transmission, its counterpart, *kavya* (popular culture) has served the purpose of engagement with the masses. In traditional terms, this would include *kala-kar* (artist), *katha-kar* (storyteller), *chitra-kar* (visual artist), *patra-kar* (journalist), *natya* (dance and theater) etc. Today's social media belongs in this space. Any grand narrative must take advantage of these modes of transmission in informal, entertaining ways and go alongside the development of formal texts.

There should be a revival of the various forms of story-telling of our two great epics that exist even to this day. And this should be used to forge the common identity that binds this nation. Various other elements of *sanskriti* that bind the diverse peoples of India as one nation, should be researched and these should be strung together and taught to all the kids so that they grow up with the sense of civilizational unity that India has long been known for. Such elements of unity can be found in the festivals, cuisine, the drawing of rangoli, and so on.

Revisiting the Renaissances

We have seen with Brexit and the vote in the turn to the Right in recent US elections, how the era of globalization has run its course. There was a phase when globalization was the *mantra*. What did globalization mean? There appear to be some who would be perfectly happy if it were to result simply in Pepsi being drunk in every household, and Hollywood cinema displayed in every movie theater around the world. One would have to conclude that "globalization" amounts to little more than the expansion of Western consumerism, or an attempt by one cultural area of the world to gain hegemony over all others. It should be of no surprise that increasingly vocal resistance is growing against this process.

Rather than arguing for the perpetuation and spread of a hegemonic cultural and economic system, which was built upon a foundation of the violent enslavement and exploitation of non-European peoples by Europeans, and which continues to engage in a coercive and environmentally destructive appropriation of an inordinate share of the earth's resources, I argue for what I call as a "global renaissance". This renaissance would entail an expansion of consciousness to produce a shift away from the coercive and subtly racist paradigm which persists in the policies and discourse in the West.

It would seek to redress the unfulfilled promise of the earlier European Renaissance, which was thwarted as Europe descended into a pattern of violent economic exploitation, supported by an ideology of cultural and racial superiority. And as the world has indeed become a smaller place with the rise of technologies, now is indeed the time to seek to expand truly enriching cultural exchanges, effecting a process of mutually beneficial awakening of the positive potential of humanity. Rather than dividing the world into increasingly hostile camps of "haves" and "have-nots", this process should result in mutual appreciation, not by erasing cultural differences but by appreciating and respecting cultural difference.

One might define a "renaissance" as a renewal of a civilization's culture, characterized by an expansion of knowledge and of creative activities, both of which stem from a shift or expansion in the collective consciousness of the people of that civilization. They are always culturally specific events; while we might compare the "renaissances" that occurred in Gupta India, Song China and so forth on general grounds, all these events are nonetheless unique and singular events. On the other hand, they did not occur in cultural vacuums. All societies interact and engage in cultural exchange with their neighbors, and the "expansion" process which occurs during a renaissance is in part due to the diffusion of new ideas and technologies across cultural boundaries.

In a Euro-American context, the word renaissance invariably invokes the Renaissance of Western Europe, which occurred as Europe was revitalized by an exposure to the arts and knowledge of Arab, Greek and other Asian civilizations during the 14th to 16th centuries. This era of cultural awakening was not as a purely European phenomenon. The European renaissance was based upon the renaissances of many different cultures. The European renaissance was largely a product of the European awakening to the rest of the world.

The West's domination has been a short-lived phenomenon of no more than two hundred years and the West should not expect it to continue forever. It is in the self-interest of everyone to seek an equitable and sustainable global paradigm. The dominant Western ideologies tend to ignore or downplay the truly "global," interdependent and thus contingent nature of history,

to advance the idea that Western civilization is intrinsically superior, and thus should dominate, eradicate and replace other civilizations. Globalization in the colonial context was understood to mean Western domination of the globe, and the subversion of non-Western cultures. This understanding remains prevalent if not explicit in the post-colonial world, and it assumes of the superiority of the West.

Two common views of non-Western cultures are: that they are either degenerate and corrupt or purely spiritual in an ideal, unreal fashion. These became the basis for the superiority complex of the West. Both are equally erroneous and share an important element of Orientalist discourse: the bifurcation of the world into the East and West, with the East being either “ideal” or “flawed”.

A global renaissance is inevitable and may already be happening. We must reject the idea that any one people is intrinsically superior to others. We are all deeply and profoundly interconnected. This new era requires an ethic of global responsibility and this can happen with a revolution in the mind sciences.

How to develop and disseminate our grand narrative

Intellectual *svaraj* (self-rule) is as fundamental to the long-term success of a civilization as is *svaraj* in the political and financial areas. Therefore, it is important to ask: *whose* way of representing knowledge will be in control? It is the representation system that defines the metaphors and terminology, interprets what they mean in various situations, influences what issues are selected to focus on, and, most importantly, grants privileges by determining *who* is to control this marketplace of ideas.

As an implicit body of standards, a representation system disguises a meta-ideology – the substratum of contexts on which specific ideologies emerge and interact. It includes the language used and the unstated frames of reference, and acts as the subliminal filter through which positions are constructed and their fate negotiated.

A people without their own representation system, in a worst-case scenario, get reduced to being intellectual consumers looking up to the dominant culture. In the best-case scenario, they could become intellectual producers, but only within the representation system as defined and controlled by the dominant culture, such as has happened recently with many Indian writers in English.

Control over the representation of knowledge is analogous to control over the operating system of computers: representation systems are to competing ideas what operating systems are to computer applications. Control over this platform, especially its invisible standards and rules, is of strategic consequence.

Swadeshi Indology Research

Before dissemination, we need to collect a body of work that builds up a coherent corpus of our story. Of course, there have been narrators in the past but we need to update that story and fill in the gap of the thousand year period in the second millennia of the common era which should be described as being akin to the Dark Ages of Europe. This is so, for not much of substance came out as intellectual output of our continuing story in this time frame. One would think that gaining independence would have broken the shackles and we would have re-constructed the story of who we are. Unfortunately, that was not to be and we ended up continuing to look at ourselves with the lenses of our invaders and oppressors. It is only in the last few decades that the Hindu spirit is rising up again. However, we don't have the intellectual corpus updated for the times that we can disseminate to the masses. That is where *Swadeshi* Indology comes in.

India was studied by the British and the branch of study regarding India was called Indology. However, the study was conducted using the Western lens for the colonizer's own agenda. The

Indian *mahakatha* for Indians was determined by these Indologists and even to the present day, Indians are looking at their story through those filters. *Swadeshi* Indology hopes to reverse the gaze using an indigenous *swadeshi* worldview to re-write and re-interpret studies on our civilization keeping more in harmony with our traditional worldview.

To this end, *Swadeshi* Indology has two parts:

Disruptive

The disruptive part of *Swadeshi* Indology actively reverses the gaze on the West and their scholarship on India. It studies the theories about India that have been propagated so far by Western academics, through influencers in areas like the press, government and so on. After understanding these theories, research is carried out by referring to our own vast corpus of ancient literature. It then studies how we looked at the very same issues that their theories explain, traditionally. The response is then made to the existing theory and this serves two purposes. It helps people on our side, re-equip themselves with the tools to do *purva-paksha*, *uttara-paksha* and also offer *siddhanta*. It also helps to build up the alternative corpus on who we are. The disruptive part critiques prominent individual scholars, the church, Islam, West based think tanks, NGOs, philanthropy foundations, media and other Western organs of dissemination. The means to building up the corpus is to have *Swadeshi* Indology conferences where scholars will present papers based on the issue chosen for debate. These papers will then be compiled into conference proceedings maintaining the highest standards of academic rigor and disseminated into university libraries, general libraries, sent to academicians of repute and put out for the general public. It would also attempt to put out an annual report of the US record on human rights whenever the US puts out its USCIRF report on the situation in India.

Constructive

Swadeshi Indology intends to write the grand narrative for India as it moves to take its place in the world as a world leader. To accomplish this, a lot of research and resources are needed to reconstruct the relations India has had in the past in its neighborhood. India should also aim to reclaim its former position as the knowledge destination of the east. The History of India's Science and Technology is a story that has not been written in any great detail and it is required that we do that. About 14 volumes have been completed by Infinity Foundation and we intend to bring out 20 volumes of this story. The world is mining the wisdom contained in our mind sciences practices and it is forming the cutting edge of research in consciousness studies. It is time we reclaimed that we are the originators of the extraordinary revelations coming out of this stream of study instead of playing the role of native informants. We should also reclaim

yoga as our practice though it is available to the whole world in general. Reconstructing our narrative largely consists in taking back the *adhikara* from outsiders to the Indian tradition. We also need to popularize the use of more Sanskrit non-translatables in English so that the contextual meaning of many of the Sanskrit words are not lost with an inadequate English translation.

Systems and Institutions

To accomplish this, apart from doing conferences, we need to focus on building systems and institutions that can take this project forward even when the original pioneers have passed on. It has been seen that India lacks lineages and that is why when an exemplar moves on, the lineage dies away or is taken over by foreign elements. Many guru movements like those of J Krishnamurthy or Osho in the West or others in India have withered away because there are no worthy successors groomed to continue their legacy. In the case of many other gurus like Maharishi Mahesh Yogi for example, the control has passed into the hands of westerners who have begun the process of digestion and soon his original principles will have been digested into some Judeo-Christian context. Thus, strong systems and institutions will ensure that the legacy of the pioneer is preserved, expanded and propagated.

For this to happen, there has to be a shift away from events/pageantry to asset building, creating knowledge, human resource training and institution building.

We should:

- Create 108 new scholars initially who know both English and Sanskrit deeply and can profoundly debate and have deep knowledge of a specialized area. We should give them national and international exposure
- Support these scholars in getting career opportunities in important universities, think-tanks and government departments thus ensuring that the *parampara* continues and spreads further.
- Establish a *Swadeshi* Indology Research Institute in India or create departments in various existing universities
- Create and promote online courses to engage people who do not want to study research papers or books but want to have some knowledge about India, the intellectual battles and various constructive & disruptive ideas about India
- Create courses for sadhus, young disciples of various gurus and people deeply rooted in dharma traditions so that they can understand the intellectual battle and participate in it

Network Consortium across various organs of society

For the grand narrative to become well entrenched in society, we need the co-operation and active participation of various organs of society. The very purpose of the grand narrative is to foster a national spirit and an identity. Thus, there are many institutions and organizations which must come together. I deal with a few of them below.

Research and Think Tanks

The *swadeshi* intellectual movement has to work in tandem with other research think tanks and help draw up the discourse on India for the 21st century. It has to conduct workshops for the brand ambassadors of India who will be posted in countries abroad, i.e the personnel in the foreign services, on the grand narrative of India. It should also think of setting up institutes on the lines of the Alliance Française that France has or the Confucian Institutes that China has, to help disseminate the culture and tradition of India abroad. Thus, it should slowly aim to influence through its soft power projection, the grand narrative of India as seen through an indigenous lens.

Higher Education

The citizens of tomorrow are molded in the institutions of higher learning today. It is essential that they should be equipped with the true story of who they are so that they can be good ambassadors of India.

To achieve this, we should:

- Introduce Indian knowledge traditions of holistic health through Ayurveda, Meditation, Yoga etc.
- Introduce Indian Classics which provide a profound worldview which not only would help Indians know about their past but also help them to find solutions to several global problems
- Organize events in colleges and universities and invite Hindu students to constructively discuss ideas on Hinduism, ask questions and get them answered

Schools

Schools are where the seeds of a person's national identity are sown. This is what determines how they will conduct themselves in the future. It is this stage at which the narratives they learn about their country will affect them the most.

We must:

- Expose young kids to Living traditions of Hinduism, HIST, Indian culture etc.
- Train teachers to present Hinduism in a constructive manner which is free from Western Gaze
- Take children on tours to historical places where the stories of those places will be narrated to them truthfully

Guru Paramparas

Despite the hostile ideologies constantly preying on our country, it is credit to *dharma's* endearing pull that gurus have such large following. Some gurus have a following that runs into millions. However, it is a sad shortcoming that most of the gurus do not understand the intellectual Kurukshetra.

We need to:

- Train young disciples of various gurus to understand intellectual battle and how can they participate in it –make them Intellectual Kshatriyas
- Train young priests and sadhus about inter-cultural discourse
- Develop a mechanism through which academic programs in Hindu seminaries become acceptable in secular institutions and see to it that scholars who have taken higher studies in these organizations are accepted as professors in secular institutions

Government – Administrators/Politicians

Administrators and politicians are the public representatives of the people of India whether within or without the country. If they do not have a well-formed idea of who they are, obviously they are going to be unable to defend their nation's decisions and choices with confidence.

To instill this confidence, we must:

- Train Indian bureaucrats to make them Area Experts
- Train them to make them brand ambassadors of India
- Shaming India through atrocity literature and further using USCIRF, Amnesty International, Green Peace and other organizations to harass India or negatively affect its interests is a part of American Foreign policy. Indian bureaucrats have to face these issues frequently and therefore, they need to be sufficiently trained and exposed to atrocities committed by USA and other powers. This will stand them in good stead at the negotiating table where they will operate from a position of confidence and assertiveness when deals are struck with other countries which would impact their nation's story in important ways.

Corporates

Another class of people who are the people's representatives in the public sphere are the corporates. As Shri. Gurumurthy says, corporates in India are very aware of the true story of India. However, because of a meek and weak state, their civilizational identity was something for private consumption. This needs to change. Corporates are part of the fabric of the *dharmic* Indian society's evolution and they should be able to project that civilizational ethos without hesitation.

In order to make them commit more strongly to their civilizational identity, we must:

- Train young businessmen about India which can be used in negotiations and power projections
- Encourage corporates to make serious investments in nation-building
- Expose them to atrocities committed by major world powers so that when any foreigner tries to take advantage of atrocity literature (against India) in business and trade negotiations, a reverse report can be produced for the opponent which helps to handle the situation more appropriately from a position of strength rather than weakness.

Media

In recent years, the mainstream media worldwide has lost credibility because of being perceived as being biased and often caught blatantly lying. Media houses are dens of corruption and completely dominated by the Leftist worldview.

In order to counter this, we must:

- Create our own TV channel which shows programs as per our worldview – apart from popular serials on *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, it can broadcast programs on issues like real history of many of our national monuments and kings, Indian medicine, Indian economy, etc. This channel could become popular and profitable within years.
- We can invest in a particular school of journalism and ensure that students are properly trained to be rooted in the *dharmic* worldview without being biased. Such students should also be helped when they seek employment opportunities.

NGOs

The grand narrative building and dissemination project has to be executed on the ground by the government and NGOs. However, NGOs need to be aligned to the *dharmic* civilizational worldview which is not the case at present. This scenario needs to change.

To effect that change, we need to:

- Build a list of NGOs working in similar areas and cooperate with them in order to amplify the impact
- Train staff of ideologically aligned NGOs to understand the bigger battles in the clash of civilizations.
- Sponsor and train NGO grassroots workers to disseminate the Indian grand narrative to the rural areas

It is time that all individuals and organizations concerned about the *dharmic* rejuvenation in India come together to forge a strong *mahakatha* for the 21st century and thus defeat the disruptive forces trying to tear India asunder. The world is urgently in need of a *dharmic* revival and it is only India that can show the way.

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Notes

¹ B R Ambedkar, *Pakistan or Partition of India*, p. 325, Thacker And Company Limited, Mumbai, 1945.

² Ibid. p. 287.

³ Ibid. p. 288.

⁴ Ibid. pp. 218-220.

⁵ Taittiriya Aranyaka 2.10

⁶The Mahabharata, Sabha Parva, Shishupal Vadha Parva, Section 61, Translated by K M Ganguli.

⁷ Rajiv Malhotra, *Being Different*, p. 94, HarperCollins Publishers India, Noida, 2013.

⁸ Ibid. pp. 83-84.

⁹ Ibid. p. 58.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 96.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 94.

¹² Ibid. p. 88.

¹³ Ibid. p. 92.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 87.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 87.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 300.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 58.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 6

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 6

²⁰ Ibid. p. 6

²¹ Ibid. p. 55

²² Ibid. p. 6

²³ Ibid. p. 55-6

²⁴ This is a 1975 ecumenical version. *Catholic Wiki*.

http://www.catecheticonline.com/wiki/index.php?title=I_Believe (accessed 5 April 2011).

²⁵ Hegel, *Samtliche Werke*. J. Hoffmeister and F. Meiner, eds. (Hamburg, 1955), appendix 2, p. 243; op cit. Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas* (New York: Continuum, 1995), p. 20.

²⁶ A copy of Indian Constitution can be obtained from here:

<http://lawmin.nic.in/coi/coiason29july08.pdf>

²⁷ Deen Dayal Upadhyay first presented his ideas about Integral Humanism in the form of four lectures delivered in Bombay on April 22-25, 1965.

<http://www.bjp.org/en/about-the-party?u=bjp-philosophy>

²⁸ Ibid. Chapter-1.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. Chapter-2.

³¹ Ibid. Chapter-3.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid. Chapter-4.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Hegel 1956, pp. 141-42, op cit. Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, p. 70, Hurst and Company London, 2000.

³⁸ Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, p. xii, Hurst and Company London, 2000.