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Communalism
and the writing of
Indian History

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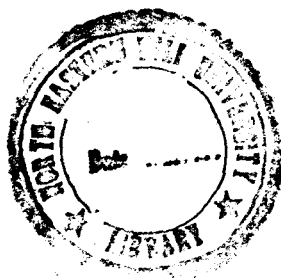
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Communalism *and the writing of* ***Indian History***



By

ROMILA THAPAR
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PREFACE

THE THREE PAPERS ON Communalism and the Writing of Indian History, included in this book, were originally read (in an abbreviated form) at a Seminar organised by All India Radio on "The Role of the Broadcaster in the Present Communal Situation" in October 1968. The discussion which the papers provoked among the participants persuaded us to publish them and make them available to a wider audience.

In criticising the communal approach to Indian history it is not our intention here to substitute the communal pattern by any other pattern of historical interpretation. As historians we are concerned at the obstruction which the communal interpretation places to the understanding of our history and the study of the subject. The purpose of these papers is to point out these obstructions and the limitations which they impose on a study of Indian history. In discussing this we have touched on those aspects of historical investigation which we feel would provide a more accurate understanding of our history.

ROMILA THAPAR

Communalism and the Writing of Ancient Indian History

ROMILA THAPAR

WHEN MENTION IS MADE OF a communal bias in the interpretation of Indian history it is generally assumed that this bias does not exist among historians writing on the ancient period of Indian history, or that, even if it does exist, it is not very relevant. However, the communal approach to the interpretation and understanding of Indian history is not limited to the medieval and modern periods of history, for, a basically communal approach can also pervert the interpretation and understanding of ancient Indian history. An examination of the ideology of modern communalism shows quite clearly that it seeks its intellectual justification from the historical past. Thus, Hindu communalists try and project an ideal Hindu society in the ancient period and attribute the ills of India to the coming of the 'Muslims'. Equally, Muslim communalists try and prove the roots of separatism from the beginning of the medieval period onwards, i.e., from the 11th or 13th century A.D.

Medieval Indian History and the Communal Approach

HARBANS MUKHIA

FOR VERY LONG NOW THE term 'Muslim India' has characterised more than seven centuries of our medieval history; and it continues to be very much in circulation.

The apparent rationale of such a communal characterisation of the medieval period of our history is the fact that the religion of the new rulers of India from the 11th or the 13th century A.D. onwards is Islam while the earlier rulers were Hindu. Apart from the serious flaws in such a characterisation pointed out earlier by Dr Thapar, there are two underlying assumptions to it which are open to question:

1. a history of the ruler's life or the ruling family or, at best, the ruling class is considered the equivalent of the history of India and the personal religion of the ruler is taken to be the determining factor;
2. a static view of Islam is taken over a thousand years and from Arabia to India. All the changes wrought in Islam by the centuries and the distances are ignored:

Historians of Modern India and Communalism

BIPAN CHANDRA

AT THE OUTSET, IT MAY BE pointed out that this paper does not deal in the main with the question: why communalism arose and grew in modern India? It essentially tries to trace the connection between the writing and teaching of history and the growth of communalism in India. It also tries to shed some light on the question: why were the Indian historians so prone to taking up a communal position? It is widely accepted today that the teaching of Indian history has a great deal to do with the spread of communalism in the last 100 years. In fact, it would be no exaggeration to suggest that a communal historical approach has been, and is, the main ideology of communalism in India. Take away that and hardly anything is left of the communal ideology.

I

We may note in the beginning that both nationalism and communalism are the products of a similar modern process

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