

PROFESSOR WENDY DONIGER—A DHIMMI

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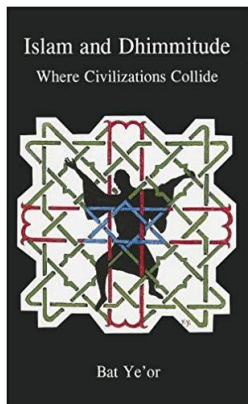
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Anti-Hindu mindset known as dhimmi attitude or *dhimmitude* is prevalent in sections of the American academy. The case in point is the book by Dr. Wendy Doniger¹, *The Hindus: An Alternative History*, The Penguin Press, 2009.

The concepts of dhimmi and dhimmitude were developed by the Egyptian born Jewish scholar, Bat Ye'or (Daughter of the Nile). Bat Ye'or fled Egypt in 1958, when Jews faced renewed persecution in the wake of the Suez Canal crisis. Her meticulous research puts to rest the myth of peaceful expansion of Islamic power in the Middle East and in Eastern Europe.²

Ye'or describes dhimmitude as the specific social condition that resulted from jihad. Dhimmitude is a state of fear and insecurity on the part of non-Muslims who are required to accept a condition of

humiliation. It is characterized by the victim's siding with his oppressors, by the moral justification the victim provides for his oppressors' hateful behavior.



The Dhimmi loses the possibility of revolt because revolt arises from a sense of injustice. The Dhimmi loathes himself but praises his oppressors.

Under Islam, dhimmis lived under some 20 disabilities. They were prohibited to build new places of worship, to ring church or temple bells or take out processions, to ride horses or camels (they could ride donkeys), to marry a Muslim woman, to wear decorative clothing, to own a Muslim as a slave or to testify against a Muslim in a court of law.

Ye'or believes that the dhimmi condition can only be understood in the context of Jihad. Jihad embodies all the Islamic laws and customs applied over a millennium on the vanquished population, Jews and Christians. Her argument can be extended to Hindus in India.

She believes that the dhimmi status was once the attribute of defeated Christian and Jewish communities under Islam. Now it is a feature of much of the Western world, Europe and America. Her theory of dhimmitude applies to many Hindus in India. Whereas the dhimmi syndrome in previous centuries resulted from real-life powerlessness under Islamic rule, modern dhimmi syndrome results from some combination of the following.

- The corrupting power of oil money. Saudi Arabia has spent in excess of \$80 billion to export Wahabism, puritanical Islam.
- De-Christianizing of Europe and America.
- Guilt feelings in the West on account of the Crusades (1095-1291).
- Multiculturalism: the belief that all practices and ways of life are equally valid.
- The rising number of Muslim populations in Europe and America.

¹ Dr. Wendy Doniger is a distinguished professor of the History of Religions at the University of Chicago. She has written some 30 books, several dealing negatively with Hinduism. Her writing has been described as “rude, crude and very lewd” by the BBC.

² Bat Ye'or's writings include: [*Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide*](#), Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001. *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996. [*Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis*](#), Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005.

- The rising level of alienation from one's own culture in the West.

Doniger's scandalous book on the Hindus makes sense only in the light of a larger global trend—a trend that seeks to re-package Islamic history as a force for tolerance and progress.

Doniger is not alone in holding such views. Dhimmi attitudes of subservience have entered the Western academy and also India, and from there into journalism, school textbooks and political discourse. One must not criticize Islam. For, “to do so would offend the multiculturalist ethos that prevails everywhere today. To do so would endanger chances for peace and rapprochement between civilizations all too ready to clash.” See more at: http://www.dhimmitude.org/archive/by_lecture_10oct2002.htm

The field of Middle East Studies in the U.S. is now controlled by pro-Middle East professors, writes Martin Kramer, editor of the *Middle Eastern Quarterly*. “The crucial turning point occurred in the late 1970s when Middle East studies centers, under /Edward/ Said's influence, began to show a preference for ideology over empirical fact and, fearing the taint of the ‘orientalist’ bias, began to prefer academic appointments of native-born Middle Easterners over qualified Western-born students.” Google his book: *Ivory Towers on Sand*.

In contrast, the field of Hinduism studies is controlled by non-Hindus and anti-Hindus, with some exceptions of course. Hindu gods and goddesses are lampooned. Hindu saints are described as sexual perverts and India in danger of being run over by Hindu fundamentalists. In these portrayals, Doniger is joined by Martha Nussbaum, Paul Courtright, Jeffrey Kripal, Sarah Caldwell, Stanley Kurtz, to name a few of the usual suspects. For a critique of the American academy, see Rajiv Malhotra at: www.rediff.com/news/2004/jan/21rajiv.htm and 2007 book titled, *Invading the Sacred*.³

Unhappily also, the American born Hindu youth choose lucrative careers in medicine, law, finance and engineering rather than in the social sciences and the humanities.

Doniger is quite harsh on the British record in India (1757-1947). She compares the British argument that they brought trains and drains to India to Hitler's argument that he built the Autobahn in Germany (p. 583). Censuring Britain and giving a pass to the more draconian Islamic imperialism in India fits with the dhimmi attitude that I have described.

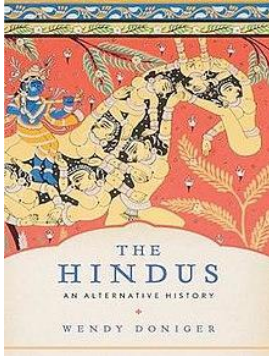
Review of Doniger's Book, *The Hindus: An Alternative History*

(Note: The book was withdrawn by Penguin publishing company in 2014, as result of a suit brought by Dinnath Batra. That made the book only more popular.)

Doniger's 779-page tome is laced with personal editorials, folksy turn of the phrase and funky wordplays. She has a large repertoire of Hindu mythological stories. She often narrates the most damning story—Vedic, Puranic, folk, oral, vernacular—to demean, damage and disparage Hinduism. After building a caricature, she laments that fundamentalist Hindus (how many and how powerful are they?) seek to destroy the pluralistic, tolerant Hindu tradition. But, why save such a vile, violent religion, as painted by the eminent professor?

³ Krishnan Ramaswamy, Antonio de Nicolas, Aditi Banerjee ed. *Invading the Sacred: An Analysis of Hinduism Studies in America*, Rupa and Co., Delhi, 2007.

The present review focuses on one section of Doniger's 779 page book: The Hindus. This review



critiques Doniger's discussion of Islamic invasions of India. Islam entered Malabar Coast in south India with Arab merchants and traders in the 7th Century. This was peaceful Islam. Later, Islam came to India as a predatory force. Mohammad bin Qasim ravaged Sindh in 711. Mahmud Ghazni pillaged, looted and destroyed numerous Hindu temples around 1000 CE. The Muslim rule begins with the Delhi Sultanate under Muhammad Ghauri, approximately 1200 to 1526. The Sultanate gave place to the Mughal Empire, 1526-1707. I end the Mughal period with the death of Aurangzeb in 1707. The empire continued for another 150 years but as a weakened state and as a shell. The

Marathas were the strongest power after Aurangzeb and ruled large parts of central and north India. Unfortunately, they lost to the British in 1818 because of internal rivalries.

Wendy Doniger makes the following dubious points regarding the Muslim imperial rule in India.

1. Muslim marauders destroyed *some* Hindu temples, not many. Ch 16
2. Temple destruction was a long standing Indian tradition. In an earlier period, Hindus destroyed Buddhist and Jain *stupas* and rival Hindu temples and built new structures upon the destroyed sites; "the Muslims had no monopoly on that." P 457
3. Muslim invaders looted and destroyed Hindu temples because they had the power to do so. If Hindus had the power, they would do the same in reverse. Pp. 454-57
4. The Jizya—the Muslim tax on non-Muslims—was for Hindu protection and a substitute for military service. Pp. 448-49
5. Hindu "megalomania" for temple building in the Middle Ages was a positive result of Muslim demolition of some Hindu temples. P 468
6. The Hindu founders of the Vijayanagara Empire double-crossed their Muslim master in Delhi who had deputed them to secure the South. P 467
7. Hindus want Muslims and Christians to leave India for India is only for Hindus. Concluding chapter.

I will take each point in turn to examine Doniger's views.

1. Muslim invaders beginning with Mahmud Ghazni in 1000 CE looted, pillaged and destroyed not few but many Hindu and Buddhist temples. Muslim chroniclers describe the humiliation and utter desolation wrought by the Muslims on the *kafirs* (unbelievers). Alberuni, the Muslim scholar who accompanied Mahmud Gazni to India in 1,000 CE, describes one such event:

"Mathura, the holy city of Krishna, was the next victim. In the middle of the city there was a temple larger and finer than the rest, which can neither be described nor painted. The Sultan was of the opinion that 200 years would have been required to build it. The idols included 'five of red gold, each five yards high,' with eyes formed of priceless jewels. . . The Sultan gave orders that all the temples should be burnt with naphtha and fire, and leveled with the ground. Thus perished works of art which must have been among the noblest monuments of ancient India."⁴

⁴ Vincent Smith, *The Oxford History of India*, Delhi, 1981, pp. 207-08. Smith derives his account of Mahmud's raids from the account written by Alberuni, the Islamic scholar who traveled with Sultan Mahmud to India.

At the destruction of another famous temple, Somnath, it is estimated that 50,000 were massacred by the Sultan. The fabulous booty of gold, women and children was divided according to Islamic tradition--the Sultan getting the royal fifth, the cavalry man getting twice as much as the foot soldier. Numerous Hindu and Buddhist shrines were destroyed.

2. Doniger asserts that during an earlier period, Hindus persecuted Jains and Buddhists and destroyed their shrines. She narrates the now discarded story about the impaling of Jains at the hands of Hindu rulers in the Tamil country. Then she says that “there is no evidence that any of this actually happened, other than the story.” (p 365). Then why narrate the story? Hindu sectarian violence pales in comparison to what happened either in Europe under Christianity or in the Middle East under Islam. The truth is that both Jainism and Buddhism were integrated into Hinduism’s pluralistic tradition. The Buddha is accepted as one of the Hindu Avatars. Exquisite Jain temples at Mt Abu at the border of Gujarat and Rajasthan built around 1000 CE survive in the region dominated by Hindu Rajput rulers, falsifying notions of Hindu carnage of Jain temples.
3. Wendy Doniger suggests that Hindus would do the same to Muslims if they had the power to do so (p 457). Hindus did come to power when the Mughal armies met defeat after the death of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707. The Hindu Marathas were the strongest power in Western and Southern India in the 18th and 19th centuries, as the Sikhs were in North India. There is no account of large scale demolition and looting of Muslim places of worship either by the Marathas or by the Sikhs. If a copy of the Quran fell into the hands of Maratha chief Shivaji during a battle campaign, it is said that the same would be passed on to a Muslim rather than being burned.
4. Contrary to what Doniger says, jizya is a long held Muslim tradition. It was levied to begin with on the defeated Christians and Jews, the People of the Book, as a price for the cessation of Jihad. Hindus, not being one of the People of the Book, did not deserve to live by paying the special tax. If defeated in battle, their only option was Islam or death. This was the position taken by the leading Islamic clergy. Unlike the clergy, however, the Muslim rulers were practical men. If they had killed the Hindus en masse for failing to adopt Islam, who would build their palaces, fill their harems, cut their wood and hue their water? ⁵
5. Doniger argues that Hindu ‘megalomania’ for temple building resulted from Muslim destruction of some Hindu temples. In other words, because the Muslims destroyed some of the Hindu temples, the Hindus went on a building spree. If Doniger’s argument is accepted, Hindus should thank Islamic rulers for looting and desecrating their shrines. The truth is that in northern India which experienced 500 years of Islamic rule (1201-1707), few historical temples of any beauty remain. In contrast, temple architecture of some beauty does survive in southern India, the region that escaped long Muslim occupation.
6. Doniger maligns Hindu character. She says that the Hindu founders of the Vijayanagara dynasty in the South double-crossed their Muslim master in Delhi, who had deputed them to the South. One may ask: why wouldn’t a slave double cross his oppressor?

⁵ See Ram Swarup’s *Hindu View of Christianity and Islam*, 1992. And, Andrew Bostom, *The Legacy of Jihad: Islamic Holy War and the Fate of Non-Muslims*, 2005, at: <http://www.andrewbostom.org/loi/>.

7. Doniger pontificates that the right-wing, fundamentalist Hindus want to drive Muslims and Christians out of India. This view is not one held by most Hindus, only by a small minority on the extreme fringes. Contrary to what the eminent professor says, Muslim population has increased in India from 9 percent at the time of Independence in 1947 to about 15 percent in 2019. In contrast, in Pakistan, Hindu population has declined from 10 percent and now constitutes less than 2 percent. Also in Bangladesh, Hindu population has declined from 30 percent to less than 10 percent now. People vote with their feet. Christian population has also increased in India. But Jews have migrated to Israel.
8. Muslims hold important positions in government and business in contemporary India. Among the richest person in India is a Muslim, Premji, the founder of Wipro, a software company doing business around the globe. He is ranked among the world's billionaires. The most popular film stars in India have been Muslim, Shah Rush Khan being at the top. The President of India has been a Muslim, and more than one state has been headed by a Christian or a Muslim Chief Minister and a Governor. It may not be farfetched to say that for many years the single-most important leader in India was an Italian-born woman, Sonya Gandhi. Dr. Manmohan Singh, a Sikh by religion, was the Prime minister, 2004-2014. APJ Kalam, a Muslim, was the popular President of India (2002-2007) and before that K R Narayanan, a member of the lower caste. In Federal and State civil service, 50 percent of the jobs are reserved for backward classes and untouchables, in order to compensate for past discrimination. India has moved.

Let us look more closely at Doniger's description of the following two episodes.

1. **Invasion of Sindh by Qasim.** Doniger describes the invasion of Sindh by Arab soldier of fortune Muhammad bin Qasim as follows:

Qasim invaded Sindh in 713. The terms of surrender included a promise of guarantee of the safety of Hindu and Buddhist establishments. "Hindus and Buddhists were allowed to govern themselves in matters of religion and law." Qasim "kept his promises." The non-Muslims were not treated as kafirs. Jizya was imposed but only as a substitute for military service for their "protection." He brought Muslim teachers and mosques into the subcontinent. (paraphrased)

From Doniger's assessment, Qasim should be regarded as a blessing in India. Contrast Doniger's description with that written by Andrew Bostom in "The Legacy of Islamic Jihad in India." ⁶

The Muslim chroniclers . . . include enough isolated details to establish the overall nature of the conquest of Sindh by Muhammad b. Qasim in 712 C.E. . . . Ballardur, for example, records that following the capture of Debal, Muhammad b. Qasim earmarked a section of the city exclusively for Muslims, constructed a mosque, and established four thousand colonists there. The conquest of Debal had been a brutal affair . . . Despite appeals for mercy from the besieged Indians (who opened their gates after the Muslims scaled the fort walls), Muhammad b. Qasim declared that he had no orders (i.e., from his superior al-Hajjaj, the Governor of Iraq) to spare the inhabitants, and thus for three days a ruthless and indiscriminate slaughter ensued. In the aftermath, the local

⁶ Andrew Bostom article published in 2005 in the *American Thinker* and available at: <http://www.islam-watch.org/Bostom/Legacy-of-Islamic-Jihad-terrorism-in-India.htm>

temple was defiled, and “700 beautiful females who had sought for shelter there, were all captured.”

Also, distinguished historian R. C. Majumdar describes the capture of the Sind royal Fort and its tragic outcome as follows:

Muhammad massacred 6,000 fighting men who were found in the fort, and their followers and dependents, as well as their women and children were taken prisoners. Sixty thousand slaves, including 30 young ladies of royal blood, were sent to Hajjaj, along with the head of Dahar [the Hindu ruler]. We can now well understand why the capture of a fort by the Muslim forces was followed by the terrible *jauhar* ceremony (in which females threw themselves in fire kindled by themselves), the earliest recorded instance of which is found in the *Chachnama*.

Doniger extensively footnotes Romila Thapar, John Keay, Anne Schimmel and A. K. Ramanujan as her sources for Islamic history, providing an impression of meticulous scholarship. Missing are works of these distinguished historians: Jadunath Sarkar, R. C. Majumdar, A. L. Srivastava, Vincent Smith, and Ram Swarup.

2. Muslim royal women. Doniger writes at page 458: when Muslim royal women first came to India, they did not rigidly keep to *purdah* (the veiling and seclusion of women). They picked the more strict form of *purdah* from contact with the Hindu Rajput women. Doniger finds much to praise in Muslim women during this period: some knew several languages; others wrote poetry; some managed vast estates; others set up “feminist” republics within female quarters (harems); some debated fine points on religion; some even joined in drinking parties (chapters 16, 20). Such descriptions are patently negated by other historians. See for example, *The Mughal Harem* (1988) by K S Lal: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K._S._Lal

If Hinduism is the source of strict *purdah* among Muslim women, as Doniger contends, how does one explain the strict veiling of women in the Middle East, a region far removed from India? Or, the absence of *purdah* in southern India, a region that escaped extended Islamic domination?

Doniger writes at page 627, “the Vedic reverence for violence flowered in the slaughters that followed Partition.” And, Gandhi’s nonviolence succeeded against the British. But it failed against the tenaciously held Hindu ideal of violence that had grip on the real emotions of the masses.

Doniger blames only the Vedic tradition of violence for post-Partition violence that engulfed both India and Pakistan. What is one to make of these weighty pronouncements uttered in all seriousness by the “eminent” historian? Perhaps, these far-fetched and outlandish interpretations are an expression of the feelings of hurt on her part. While discussing the Hindu epic Ramayana in London in 2003, Doniger put forth her usual gloss: that Lakshman had the hots for Sita, and that sexually-charged Sita reciprocated these feelings. An irate Hindu threw an egg at her in London, but conveniently missed hitting her. This incident is her *cause célèbre*.

Concluding Thought: Nearly 1,000 years ago, the Indian *Acharyas* (teachers) ignored the radical Islamic threat before it was too late. The great teachers (Ramanuja, Madhava, Abhinav Gupta, Vallabha and others) wrote thick treatises on spiritual subject matter but they said nothing about Islam, zero. They were busy debating each other. Some even proclaimed “All religions are the same.” Let not the contemporary professors and journalists in India, America and Europe repeat the error that the Hindus made during the previous centuries in understanding Islam. Let them not downplay the extremist threat to civilization.

For it has been said: Those who refuse to learn from History are doomed to repeat it.