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Time Warps: Silent and Evasive Pasts in Indian Politics and Religion

Professor Ashis Nandy

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Ashis Nandy, one of India's foremost public intellectuals, contends in this book that India's political and cultural élites have been trying to impose a secular ideology on their country. This ideology makes little sense to most Indians, who have their own religious and cultural lives, their own diverse pasts, and their own principles of tolerance and hospitality.

Religious extremists have exploited this tension by offering packaged forms of ancient faiths, with ready-made theories of violence and hatred. The resulting clash has fragmented Indians' views of their precolonial past as well as their increasingly globalized present. In a country with deep roots in legendary pasts, some of these pasts have been made "silent" or "evasive" in the service of modern ideological agendas. They are no longer as easily drawn upon to oppose the forces of intolerance and hatred.

Most of the essays survey the ways in which India's colonial secularism has produced some of the conditions for the current rise of Hindu nationalism. He shows how both religious nationalists and secular modernists have employed the colonial state's ideology-producing power to blend the "religious" and "secular" domains. In the process, the indigenous traditions battling sectarianism and religious extremism have been marginalized. Nandy argues that it is possible to reclaim India's rich, multicultural pasts and alternative forms of cosmopolitanism in order to rescue a truly multicultural present.

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