

REASON IN REVOLT



Beyond Deterrence



A Permanent Answer
to the Pakistan Question

By Panini



WITH NUMBERED REFERENCES

A missile can destroy a military installation. It cannot refute a theological claim. An army can defend a border. It cannot establish whether a revelation is true. Deterrence can make aggression costly, but it cannot, by itself, dismantle the convictions that make aggression appear sacred. If a conflict draws legitimacy from religious supremacy, its premises must face examination. Otherwise, each generation inherits the quarrel, acquires more destructive weapons, and calls the resulting insecurity a strategy.

My argument is that claims of Islamic supremacy are central to the ideological conflict between India and Pakistan. By supremacy, I mean the claim that a religion's asserted divine authority entitles it to govern or subordinate those who reject it. That claim demands evidence. My audience is the youth of Pakistan and India, my instrument is reason, and my objective is to challenge the convictions that sustain hostility and the institutions that perpetuate it.

This essay establishes the case for an intellectual strategy beyond deterrence; a subsequent essay will examine its practical implementation, institutional obstacles, and the evidence by which its success should be judged.

Begin with the people themselves. Who are Pakistanis? Their nationality is modern; their ancestry did not begin in 1947. Pakistan contains Punjabis, Sindhis, Pashtuns, Baloch, Muhajirs, and other communities with distinct histories. Their ancestry connects them, in varying proportions, to populations across the Indian subcontinent, the Iranian plateau, and Central Asia. Neither Pakistan nor India possesses one uniform genetic identity. Modern political borders do not erase ancient connections.^[1]

Many Pakistani Muslims descend from Hindu ancestors who converted to Islam over centuries. Others descend from Buddhist and other regional communities. Their histories cannot honestly be compressed into a single religious past, and DNA cannot establish which religion a particular ancestor practiced. Historical research also shows that religious identities sometimes changed gradually, alongside changes in settlement, agriculture, and social organization.^[2,3] But the

essential point remains: conversion changed religious allegiance, not ancestry. Adopting Islam did not transport a population's ancestors to Arabia.

Their languages make a related point. Punjabi, Sindhi, Saraiki, and Urdu are Indo-Aryan languages. Pashto and Balochi are Iranian languages. Brahui is a Dravidian language. Pakistan also contains languages outside these groups, including Balti and Burushaski. None of these languages descends from Arabic. Borrowing Arabic words does not make Arabic a language's ancestor.^[4]

Urdu is especially instructive. Its Perso-Arabic script and substantial Persian and Arabic vocabulary coexist with an Indo-Aryan grammatical foundation. The Muslim lexicographer Syed Ahmad Dehlavi compiled *Farhang-e-Asafiya*. Scholar Vasudha Dalmia reports his estimate that approximately seventy-five percent of its fifty-five thousand words derived from Sanskrit and Prakrit.^[5] This estimate concerns the words in his dictionary, not specifically nouns or every possible sample of contemporary Urdu. Rauf Parekh attributes Sanskrit/Prakrit roots to ninety-nine percent of Urdu verbs.^[6] These figures should remain attributed estimates, but the language's Indo-Aryan ancestry is clear.

Writing an Indic language in a Perso-Arabic script does not make it Arabic. Reciting Arabic does not confer Arab ancestry. Food, music, language, and inherited customs preserve substantial connections across the border. A Pakistani need not become Hindu or Buddhist to acknowledge them. Historical recognition is not religious surrender.

Yet people with these intertwined histories now live under states possessing nuclear weapons capable of mass destruction.^[7] On one side are India's Hindus and its many other communities. On the other are Pakistan's Muslims and minorities, including descendants of populations whose ancestors embraced Islam. Conversion did not erase their shared past. Partition did not erase it either. Yet their governments possess the means to turn an inherited conflict into a catastrophe for both societies. This is the predicament that deterrence manages without resolving.

To understand that predicament, we must examine the relationship between religion and political identity. The Muslim League's two-nation argument treated Hindus and Muslims as separate nations and made religion a foundation for political separation.^[8] Yet millions of Muslims remained in India. Their religion did not make their homeland disappear. Then Pakistan itself divided. Bangladesh demonstrated that shared religion could not overcome conflicts involving language, political representation, economic grievances, and military repression.^[9] Agreement about God did not settle disagreements about power.

Nor does shared Islam automatically confer equal political membership elsewhere. In Gulf societies, religious brotherhood coexists with restrictive citizenship systems. Long residence and a common faith do not guarantee equal political rights.^[10] These examples expose the limits of religion as a basis for political solidarity. Even if every Hindu embraced Islam, peace would not necessarily follow. Religious uniformity cannot abolish struggles over territory, resources, status, and authority.

But religion's failure to guarantee peace does not exempt its doctrines from scrutiny when they authorize domination. I trace a major historical starting point to Muhammad bin Qasim's conquest of Sindh in 711-712 CE.^[2] From 712 to 2026 is 1,314 years. My subject is recurring military and theological confrontation across that history, not one uninterrupted war. Islam rejects polytheism and image worship, while many Hindu traditions affirm forms of worship condemned on those grounds.^[11] Disagreement alone need not produce violence. The decisive issue arises when theological rejection becomes a claimed entitlement to suppression, conquest, or unequal citizenship.

Majid Khadduri examines the classical doctrine of legitimate warfare in *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*. He describes jihad as "a sanction against polytheism" (p. 59). He also writes: "Islam, it will be recalled, abolished all kinds of warfare except the jihad" (p. 69). His account generally describes the obligation as collective and includes protected non-Muslim communities paying tribute.^[12] Those distinctions specify the system under examination; they do not remove the

question of religious domination. These doctrines neither explain every war nor establish what every Muslim believes. My contention is that their authority must be challenged wherever they justify hostility or inequality.

That challenge begins with evidence. What establishes that one religion's sacred reference is real and another's is false? If God is omnipresent, divine presence alone cannot justify accepting one sacred place while rejecting another. A believer may answer that God has authorized one form of worship and forbidden another. But that answer introduces another claim requiring evidence. What establishes that the command came from God?

A book cannot independently authenticate its divine origin by announcing that it is divine. A religious authority cannot establish a revelation's truth by demanding obedience to it. Nor does punishing a question provide an answer. My position is atheistic: I approach revelation claims as human claims requiring evidence, not as divine facts entitled to prior acceptance.

A Muslim rejects the gods of other religions while affirming Allah. I reject one more god. Why should scrutiny stop at the entrance to one's own religion? If other gods are rejected for lack of evidence, what evidence exempts Allah from the same judgment? Without that evidence, I have no reason to stop disbelieving where the monotheist stops. An exclusive claim is not proof of exclusive existence. Neither antiquity, political power, nor the number of believers supplies the missing demonstration.

Pakistani youth should therefore examine the Quran, the Sira—the biography of Muhammad—and the Hadith critically. They should study what the texts say, their historical settings, their authenticity, and competing interpretations. They should ask how a religious proposition becomes a political command. Private spiritual experience cannot, by itself, establish a right to govern another person's conscience. Indians must apply the same scrutiny to Hindu religious claims, inherited customs, and nationalist histories. A standard that changes at the boundary of one's own religion is a preference masquerading as a principle.

What framework should guide this inquiry? I propose materialism as ontology, logical empiricism as epistemology, secular humanism as ethics, and free minds and free markets as social policies. These terms must earn their place through clear explanations and practical relevance. They are tools for examination, not articles of faith.

Ontology concerns what exists. My starting point is materialism: matter is primary, and consciousness is secondary, arising from material processes. I do not grant supernatural explanations the status of established facts. This philosophical position must itself remain open to criticism. My framework receives no exemption from the scrutiny it demands of others.

Epistemology concerns how we know. Logical empiricism demands clear claims, coherent reasoning, and evidence open to examination. Define your terms, present your evidence, explain your reasoning, and identify what could show that you are mistaken. Science cannot settle every ethical question through an experiment. But claims about the observable world must face empirical investigation, and arguments must remain accountable to logic. Calling a claim sacred does not cancel that obligation.

Ethics concerns how we should act. Secular humanism places human welfare, dignity, freedom, and suffering at the center of judgment. A command does not become humane because someone attributes it to God. The unbeliever's suffering counts as much as the believer's suffering. Religious disagreement cannot cancel a person's moral standing.

Free minds means freedom to investigate, criticize, publish, and revise one's convictions. It includes freedom to remain religious, change religion, or abandon religion. A freedom that protects only approved conclusions is permission to conform. Free markets means room for voluntary exchange, enterprise, innovation, and cooperation, supported by laws against fraud and coercion. Economic institutions must be judged by their operation and consequences. Neither commerce nor a philosophical label guarantees peace.

I do not require every Indian or Pakistani to abandon religion before this inquiry begins. People may retain religion as a source of comfort or personal fulfillment. But comfort is not proof. It cannot establish a right to impose belief on someone else. The boundary is between personal conviction and compulsory allegiance.

How do we carry this challenge across borders? Through the Internet. Videos, documentaries, and websites can place arguments before young people directly. Short videos can investigate one proposition at a time, while longer films examine the history behind inherited narratives. Websites can provide original texts, competing interpretations, and a public record of corrections. Publish in Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, and English. An argument must be understandable before it can be persuasive.

Teach audiences to distinguish quotation from interpretation, historical record from legend, and assertion from demonstrated conclusion. The Internet also distributes falsehood, so our credibility must rest on visible sources, honest translations, open criticism, and correction of mistakes. A falsehood serving our argument remains a falsehood. The objective is intellectual independence. Every viewer should leave better equipped to examine the next claim—including ours.

How does individual understanding change institutions? Institutions depend on people who staff them, finance them, obey them, and accept their legitimacy. Young people become teachers, parents, journalists, voters, judges, administrators, entrepreneurs, and political leaders. Their convictions shape what they teach, reward, tolerate, and refuse. A teacher who welcomes scrutiny teaches differently. A journalist who insists on evidence asks different questions. A citizen who rejects religious supremacy can withdraw support from policies justified by it.

Individual change becomes institutional pressure when people organize, vote, publish, educate, and demand that public authority answer to public reasons. This process is neither automatic nor effortless. Institutions resist, audiences reject evidence, and digital platforms amplify prejudice. Those obstacles demand sustained work and habits of scrutiny that outlast a single controversy. Changing

convictions matters because institutions cannot indefinitely rely on unquestioned legitimacy once people begin demanding justification.

Critics call my proposal impractical. What exactly makes it impractical—the difficulty of educating people or the resistance of powerful institutions? These are obstacles to confront, not demonstrations of impossibility. Two centuries ago, the transport systems we now depend on were absent or in their infancy. Fifty years ago, today's world of search engines, online video, and conversational artificial intelligence did not exist. Their eventual development does not prove that my proposal will succeed. It does show why present difficulty should not be mistaken for permanent impossibility. Progress required investigation, experimentation, correction, and persistence.

That is the discipline I propose. An entire population need not become philosophers before anything can change. Accessible education and public criticism can begin wherever people are willing to question inherited authority. The practical question is how effectively we develop and extend that work.

Then comes the accusation that my proposals are Western. Is evidence Western? Is a valid inference European? Does human suffering count differently according to longitude? The East uses computers, aircraft, modern medicines, and the Internet without requiring their inventors to have been born nearby. Philosophical proposals deserve examination on their merits. Their geographical origin neither proves nor disproves their validity.

Materialism must answer questions about reality; logical empiricism must answer questions about knowledge; secular humanism must answer questions about human welfare. Free minds and free markets must be judged by the freedoms they protect and the consequences they produce. Calling them Western answers none of those questions. Nor does the danger of catastrophe prove that my framework will succeed. It makes serious investigation urgent. Critics should identify its failures and explain how their alternatives would address the same problems. Difficulty is

not a refutation. Geography is not an argument. The familiarity of an inherited conflict is no reason to perpetuate it.

My challenge to Pakistani youth is direct: examine what you have been told about religion, nationhood, ancestry, and India. Ask what the narrative explains, what it conceals, and whose authority it protects. Indian youth must ask the same questions about their inherited certainties. Do not exchange one unquestionable identity for another. Question the demand for unquestionability itself.

The permanent answer I seek is a durable standard of scrutiny, renewed across generations. No honest thinker can promise the disappearance of every human disagreement. But we can challenge the sacred immunity that allows hostility to reproduce itself without examination. Deterrence addresses the danger of an action. Reason challenges its justification.

Both countries need generations willing to ask what makes a claim true, a demand legitimate, or a sacrifice necessary. “Our ancestors believed it” is not an answer. “Our leaders repeat it” is not evidence. “Our religious authorities forbid the question” is not a defense. Examine the claim you cherish with the discipline you bring to the claim you despise. Admit error when the evidence requires it. Refuse to turn inherited belief into compulsory allegiance.

Peoples with intertwined histories need not make mutual destruction their common future. The subcontinent does not lack convictions. It needs the courage to put them on trial.



Only reason can save the Indian subcontinent from self-destruction.

Numbered References

Reference numbers correspond to citations in the essay. The sources document factual claims; the philosophical conclusions and proposed strategy are the author's arguments.

[1] Narasimhan, Vagheesh M., et al. (2019). "The Formation of Human Populations in South and Central Asia." *Science* 365(6457), eaat7487. DOI: 10.1126/science.aat7487. Research on ancient ancestry, population mixture, and regional variation; genetics does not identify an ancestor's religious beliefs. [Source](#).

[2] MacLean, Derryl N. (1989). *Religion and Society in Arab Sind*. Leiden: E. J. Brill. Historical study of Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim communities in Sind and the Arab conquest and subsequent religious change. [Source](#).

[3] Eaton, Richard M. (2009). "Shrines, Cultivators, and Muslim 'Conversion' in Punjab and Bengal, 1300-1700." *The Medieval History Journal* 12(2): 191-220. DOI: 10.1177/097194580901200202. Explains gradual religious change and its agricultural and social context; does not establish a national percentage of Hindu ancestry. [Source](#).

[4] Desmet, Klaus, Ignacio Ortuño-Ortín, and Romain Wacziarg (2016). "Linguistic Cleavages and Economic Development," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Economics and Language*, pp. 425-446; especially figure 15.1, p. 429, showing the language-family classification of seven major Pakistani languages. For additional families and Burushaski, see Seth Sanders, "Language a main theme of 22nd annual Humanities Open House," *University of Chicago Chronicle*, 18 October 2001. [Source](#). [Additional language source](#).

[5] Dalmia, Vasudha (2017). *Hindu Pasts: Women, Religion, Histories*. Albany: State University of New York Press, p. 310. Reports, through Aijaz Ahmad, Syed Ahmad Dehlavi's estimate concerning approximately 75% of the 55,000 entries in *Farhang-e-Asafiya*. This is a reported dictionary estimate, not a new independent count by Dalmia. [Source](#).

[6] Parekh, Rauf. "Urdu's origin: it's not a 'camp language'." *Dawn*, 17 December 2011. [Source](#).

[7] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2026). SIPRI Yearbook 2026, chapter 8, “World Nuclear Forces.” Documents the nuclear arsenals and delivery systems of India and Pakistan. Possession establishes destructive capability, not a shared intention among their populations to use it. [Source](#).

[8] Jinnah, Muhammad Ali (1940). Presidential address to the All-India Muslim League, Lahore, March 1940. Text reproduced by Associated Press of Pakistan from the Government of Pakistan’s 1983 publication. Primary source for Jinnah’s presentation of Hindus and Muslims as separate nations. [Source](#).

[9] The National Archives, United Kingdom. “The Independence of Bangladesh in 1971.” Teaching resource with contemporary archival documents on Partition, the language question, political conflict, and independence. [Source](#).

[10] GLOBALCIT, European University Institute (2025). The Global State of Citizenship 2025: Gender Equality, Migrant Inclusion and Security of Status. See the discussion of ordinary naturalisation and the restrictive requirements of Middle Eastern and Gulf states. The essay’s comparison with religious brotherhood is the author’s interpretation. [Source](#).

[11] Religious primary texts: Quran 112:1-4 (divine unity), 4:48 (associating partners with God), and 21:52-67 (Abraham’s challenge to images); Srimad Bhagavatam 11.27.12 (forms of worshipful deity images). These passages illustrate the doctrinal contrast, rather than exhaust the diversity of either tradition. [Source](#). [Quran 4:48](#); [Quran 21:52 onward](#); [Bhagavatam 11.27.12](#).

[12] Khadduri, Majid (1955). War and Peace in the Law of Islam. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press. Quoted phrases: p. 59 and p. 69; collective obligation: pp. 60-61; protected non-Muslim status: chapter XVII, “Status of the Dhimmis.” The quotations describe his reconstruction of classical legal doctrine, not every Muslim’s beliefs or every modern state’s policy. [Source](#).