

To Say That an Indian Nation-State Existed in the Ancient Past Is Historical Manipulation: <https://thewire.in/history/india-nation-state-ancient-past-history-manipulation>
 Dr Kaul's *The Idea of India: A historical corrective* <https://www.newindianexpress.com/opinions/2020/aug/14/the-idea-of-india-a-historical-corrective-2183141.html>

Kasturi and Gomes	Response to Kasturi and Gomes
<p>Article title: To Say That an Indian Nation-State Existed in the Ancient Past Is Historical Manipulation</p>	<p>For this statement to be the title of an article that claims to be a rejoinder—which normally entails careful reading before reasoned criticism—it actually demonstrates poor reading skills and manipulation. "Nation-State" appears in Dr Kaul's article twice:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Under the photo: "Unlike a nation-state, a nation is first and foremost a notion". 2. In the body of the article: "Unlike a nation-state, a nation is first and foremost a notion: the jointly held sense of belonging to a common territorial and cultural entity that a people name and assert; a community of emotion, belief and praxis." <p>Did the authors not read "Unlike a nation-state..." which has appeared not once but twice? This alone should be sufficient to establish an unfavorable appraisal of their reading skills in this case. It is manipulation because Kasturi and Gomes are trying to pass off something Dr Kaul has not said as something she has.</p>
<p>Tag line: The idea of 'Bharatavarsha' as found in ancient texts is distinct from that of present-day India.</p>	<p>This is a strawman argument. Here is why: so far as I have seen, Dr Kaul has not written anywhere that the idea of 'Bharatavarsha' as found in ancient texts is EXACTLY the same (and across all facets) as that of present-day India. Anyone with basic reading skills should be able to tell the difference between saying that "a nation is first and foremost a notion: the jointly held sense of belonging to a common territorial and cultural entity that a people name and assert; a community of emotion, belief and praxis" and saying that the idea of 'Bharatavarsha' as found in ancient texts is exactly the same (and across all facets) as that of present-day India. Geography is one aspect of the idea of a space. The area of present-day India is certainly lesser than as the 'Bharatavarsha' of, for instance, the Mahabharata, in part, courtesy the brutal violence-filled partition on communal lines that led to the creation of Islamic Pakistan, whose religious minority population has seen tremendous degrowth since the the idea of Pakistan was born in stark contrast to India where the population of Abrahamic minorites has only gone up (with Islam growing fastest).</p>

1	<p>On August 5, 2020, Mohan Bhagwat, the current chief of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) announced the birth of a 'New Republic' at the bhoomi puja ceremony for a Ram temple at Ayodhya.</p>	<p>Amongst the things that constitute a quality rejoinder include specificity and verifiability while avoiding ad-hominem, fiction, strawman arguments, false equivalencies and other fallacies. It is not at all clear why is a response to Dr Kaul commencing with Mohan Bhagwat.</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rWKyOgiDz4 is the only speech of Bhagwat I could find from the Bhoomi Poojan ceremony. Nowhere in this recording could I hear him say "revitalising Hinduism". If Kasturi and Gomes have a source which can help one verify what they have said, then they should share that. If the above link is indeed the sum total of Mohan Bhagwat's speech during the poojan, then Kasturi and Gomes are potentially spreading misinformation.</p>
2	<p>His call for revitalising Hinduism, allegedly on hold for the past 500 years, also rang out for historical 'correctives' that the New Republic would be based on.</p>	<p>Also, what does "rang out for historical 'correctives'" even mean? Using the word 'correctives' in this expression reads more like a desperate, forced (and spectacularly unsuccessful) attempt to connect its usage by Dr Kaul, by hook or by crook, to Bhagwat's speech during the day of the Bhoomi puja ceremony.</p>
3	<p>Such calls to rewrite history and highlight the "glorious Hindu past" are not new and are regularly circulated on WhatsApp and Twitter.</p>	<p>The word "Hindu" does not occur even once in Dr Kaul's piece, leave alone "glorious Hindu past". Also, why is "glorious Hindu past" within double quotes? Is it to mislead the reader to think Dr Kaul had used it?</p>
4	<p>Then again, the obvious absurdities of these 'corrections' are clear for all to see.</p>	<p>So far, nothing has been said to justify the use of the words "obvious absurdities of these 'correctives'". If anything, what has been absurd so far is a rejoinder being riddled with factual inaccuracies seen earlier.</p>

5	<p>Take for example how BJP politicians like Vinay Katiyar and Kapil Mishra have recently resurrected and championed a long-standing conspiracy theory that the Taj Mahal is in fact Tejo Mahalaya, a Hindu temple that was converted into the world-renowned monument.</p>	<p>We just saw above how a contrived connection between Dr Kaul and Mohan Bhagwat's speech was attempted. This sentence is far more absurd though because to a connection which has not been established but merely conjectured, "false equivalence" is being added. What has Vinay Katiyar of Kapil Mishra have to do with Dr Kaul's argument?</p>
6	<p>Though clearly ridiculous, it has already inspired real-life court cases.</p>	<p>This statement has no relevance in a rejoinder to Dr Kaul's article.</p>
7	<p>At the time of writing this article, on India's 74th Independence Day, Mishra's tweet promoting this theory was shared more than 8,000 times.</p>	<p>Same as above.</p>
	<p>Louder than ever before</p>	

8	<p>The obsession with righting alleged historical wrongs and the abuse of historians who call out manufactured lies spread as 'corrected history' is common.</p>	<p>This statement has no relevance in a rejoinder to Dr Kaul's article.</p>
9	<p>This goes alongside reinforcing the ancient origins of Bharatiya culture that always was nothing but Hindu.</p>	<p>This statement has no relevance in a rejoinder to Dr Kaul's article. Recall that the word "Hindu" does not occur even once in her article. This is more manipulation of the reader, betting that s/he may not put in the effort to read it slowly, closely and cross-verify.</p>
10	<p>These new pasts rest on lies and the fabrication of an eternal Indian nation-state or Hindu rashtra.</p>	<p>This statement has no relevance in a rejoinder to Dr Kaul's article. "Hindu rashtra" does not find a place in Dr Kaul's article.</p>
11	<p>That such imaginings of the past are louder than ever before is unsurprising given how anxious the RSS and the BJP are to prove that they did indeed have some part to play in the anti-colonial struggle and the achievement of independence.</p>	<p>This statement has no relevance in a rejoinder to Dr Kaul's article.</p>

12	<p>In light of the new 'turn' taken by the Indian republic on August 5, where the Indian republic and constitution are being subverted from within, fabrications of an eternal Indian nation-state are only to be expected.</p>	<p>I am glad the constitution has been invoked. Surely, the authors of this piece are aware of the phrase "India, that is Bharat..." in the constitution, don't they?</p>
13	<p>That such new versions of history might well become part of syllabi and textbooks make it worth examining these banal, yet dangerous, manipulations of history in the service of the current regime, especially when they are validated by the media and the Twitter accounts of politicians and vice-chancellors, such as that of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU).</p>	<p>"...banal, yet dangerous, manipulations of history in the service of the current regime..." What is banal, dangerous and manipulative so far is the usage of these words without a shred of verifiable reason. This is ad-hominem on steroids.</p>

14	A recent example of such manipulation was Shonaleeka Kaul's opinion piece, where she sought to 'correct' the idea of India.	Ad-hominem on steroids. Can this be charged under defamation?
15	The author, a specialist in ancient Indian history, made a series of extraordinary and blatantly ahistorical claims to assert that the nation-state of India can be found even in the ancient past.	"...to assert that the nation-state of India can be found even in the ancient past". As pointed out earlier, the nation-state occurs only twice in Dr Kaul's article. Both times, it is preceded by " Unlike a... ". Frankly, this alone should be reason enough to not bother responding further to this counterfactual fallacy-ridden lump of manipulative ad-hominem masquerading as an academic rejoinder.
16	Kaul cherry-picks from a vast and complex body of texts from different time periods to put forward a crude and poor analysis, yoked to ugly underpinnings.	"cherry-picks": no evidence or reasoning provided to substantiate this allegation "crude and poor analysis, yoked to ugly underpinnings": more additions to an unreasoned, fictional lump of ad-hominems.
17	This is particularly shocking given that Dr Kaul is a former student of and currently an associate professor at the Centre for Historical Studies (CHS) at JNU.	Ad-hominem on steroids.

18	<p>This is the same institution where students learn to think critically about how ideas and societies change over time and translate this thinking into critical arguments based on textual and archival evidence.</p>	<p>As mentioned in the previous line, Dr Kaul is a former student of JNU and from what I gather, a distinguished one, who not only graduated with top honors but has been an incredible ambassador of the institution in several international fora and whose books have been published by highly regarded publishers like Oxford University Press.</p>
19	<p>Further, it imparts and stresses a rigorous scholarly examination of a vast body of scriptures and commentaries from different religious traditions, and philosophers (such as those quoted by Kaul) in context, and with deep attention to their shifting meanings.</p>	<p>This statement has no relevance in a rejoinder to Dr Kaul's article.</p>
	<p>Incorrect, ahistorical assertions</p>	

20	In a striking shift from the rigorous training she should have received at CHS, Kaul makes incorrect, ahistorical assertions about the existence of an Indian "nation" from the early period.	In her article, Dr Kaul expands on what her view of a nation is, in only place, where she writes that "a nation is first and foremost a notion: the jointly held sense of belonging to a common territorial and cultural entity that a people name and assert; a community of emotion, belief and praxis." Without engaging with this statement and critiquing it specifically -- which is not found anywhere in Kasturi and Gomes even later -- all that the authors do here is start with an ad-hominem attack targeting Dr Kaul's pedigree and reputation.
21	Her presentation of an unchanging Indian "nation" that was always clearly "Hindu" is pernicious.	As noted above, the word "Hindu" does not occur once in Dr Kaul's article. Furthermore, even the word "unchanging" (or any word or phrase implying that) is absent in Dr Kaul's article. This is yet another example of Kasturi Gomes setting up a straw man and being manipulative instead of engaging academically with Dr Kaul's points in a reasoned and civil manner.
22	These ideas draw selectively upon colonial ideas about the periodisation of Indian history.	Can the authors elaborate what they mean here? Can they establish how what has been included by Dr Kaul is insufficient to reach the conclusions she has reached? Wherever Dr Kaul presents an argument, here is one way to assess the soundness of an argument: 1) are her premises factual 2) does the conclusion she draw follow from her premises? Maybe Kasturi and Gomes should revisit critical reasoning skills (I recommend Marianne Talbot's ' <i>Critical Reasoning: A Romp Through the Foothills of Logic</i> ') before endeavoring to write academic rejoinders. The quality of their reading skills is matched by the absence of ethical engagement when they don't mention that Dr Kaul has actually said "for example".

23	<p>That such an op-ed is being written on the eve of India's independence day, and in the wake of attacks on the Indian constitution, on historians, and anyone who does not subscribe to the ruling regime's extremist majoritarian ideology of Hindutva, and amidst the open persecution of Muslims and Dalits is not accidental.</p>	<p>If much-to-be-desired reading skills are not bad enough, one has to bear with disjointed writing too with one unrelated point being foregrounded after another. Usage of "Hindutva", "Muslims" and "Dalits" only exposes the virulent condemnable effort on the part of Kasturi and Mehloka to polarize what is pretending to be an academic rejoinder.</p>
24	<p>Instead, Kaul's assertion of a homogenous "Hindu" past is in the service of the current regime's ideas of "Hindutva nationalism."</p>	<p>Again, as noted above, the word "Hindu" does not occur once in Dr Kaul's article. Also missing are words such as "homogenous" and "Hindutva". The strawman fallacy is there for all to see, as is the grotesque attempt to manipulate.</p>
25	<p>This is poor history that reads like propaganda.</p>	<p>Here is what is poor: writing a rejoinder filled with ad-hominem attacks, straw man fallacies, false equivalencies, invoking fiction, writing to polarize rather than to engage. Here is what is worse than poor: attacking an academician's credentials just because she is stating facts that may be uncomfortable to some.</p>

26	This editorial makes blatant misrepresentations and manipulations of ancient texts and the Indian past.	Ad-hominem on steroids.
27	The renowned scholar professor B.D. Chattopadhyaya, retired from CHS, has written extensively about how we must understand the idea of Bharatavarsha as found in ancient texts as distinct from that of present-day India.	Some distinctness are not the same as complete discontinuity. That there might be some distinctness in some facets need not mean that there is hence a total discontinuity. Let me, without drawing a false equivalence, just give one example: the product portfolio of IBM is distinct from its product portfolio when it started off. Even the vision statements of the organisation has changed over time. Based on these, can one argue against the existence of IBM since the day it was founded? Of course one can say that IBM has transformed in many ways. Yet, it is still IBM. Its geographical reach has altered over time. Yet, it is IBM.
28	This is not a repetition of colonial ideas of history as Kaul would lead us to believe.	More attempts at being clever. Has Dr Kaul named B.D. Chattopadhyaya's work? No.
29	Rather Chattopadhyaya's arguments are the result of exhaustive research on political terms such as janapada and desha found in ancient texts.	Ok

30	This has shown how the idea of Bharatavarsha changed with time and its boundaries were constantly redrawn and challenged.	In response to what exactly in Dr Kaul's article is this statement being made? Like I said earlier, blood-filled communal creation of Islamic Pakistan is an example of Bharatavarsha's boundary being altered. That alone does not mean, though, that at all points of time in the past, the region that is today Pakistan (and more) was never part of Bharatavarsha.
31	Janapada and desha always meant places and regions: Magadha, Gandhara, Dravida, Kuntala and so on.	See 32.1.2 below
32	There is not a single text or inscription where someone claims to belong to the country of Bharatavarsha.	<p>Which texts and inscriptions have Kasturi and Gomes themselves studied before declaring this? Can they list their sources? Are they certain they have read ALL texts and all inscriptions? One should not forget two things: 1) there are millions of manuscripts yet to be fully analysed 2) several manuscripts have been destroyed, both naturally and during brutal invasions when whole institutions were destroyed.</p> <p>Also, is it necessary that <i>only</i> if one finds a textual attestation of someone explicitly claiming they belong to Bharatavarsha, <i>only then</i> Bharatavarsha can be said to have existed?</p> <p>Let us, though, engage with the implication of this point with the following textual evidence:</p> <p>32.1. 06010001 धृतराष्ट्र उवाच 06010001a यदिदं भारतं वर्षं यत्रेदं मूर्च्छितं बलम् 06010001c यत्रातिमात्रं लुब्धोऽयं पुत्रो दुर्योधनो मम</p> <p>32.1.1 By no stretch of anyone's imagination, Alex Cherniak (translator of Book 6 Vol 1 of Clay Sanskrit Library (of which the General Editor is Sheldon Pollock)) can be alleged to be advancing an RSS agenda or a Hindutva agenda, can he? Yet, this is his translation: "Give me a true description of this land Bhārata-varsha, where these forces have so senselessly assembled, of which my son Duryódhana is so</p>

		<p>excessively covetous..." (Chernaik 2008:69). Now, if there never existed a notion or conception of Bhāratavarśa as a whole, what explains the verse above?</p> <p>32.1.2 Cherniak translates 06010037a अत ऊर्ध्वं जनपदान्निबोध गदतो मम as "Now listen while I tell you the names of the tribes inhabiting the land's provinces." (Chernaik 2008:75) In case not seen already, I suggest a home work for Kasturi and Gomes: try finding Magadha, Gandhara, Dravida, Kuntala in the names Chernaik lists. Let me assure you they exist. For example, see this: 06010056c अथापरे जनपदा दक्षिणा भरतर्षभ, 06010057a द्रविडाः केरलाः प्राच्या भूषिका वनवासिनः.</p> <p>That there existed a <i>Bhāratavarśa</i> that encompassed all of today's India and then more, geographically speaking, and was seen as a political whole, is easily established by the above (and more verses) from the Mahābhārata. And yes, all the above references are from the critical edition only.</p>
33	<p>This is not an 'illusion of multiplicity' as the editorial claims but rather the past as it actually was.</p>	<p>What is being referred to when Kasturi and Gomes say "this" in line 33? Since there is nothing in the sentence itself which helps clarify, one is forced to look above and sentence #31 contains some sort of multiplicity, in terms of the janapada-s named. In other words, they are likely alleging that Dr Kaul is referring to janapada-s when she wrote "multiplicity". I cannot speak for Dr Kaul but to allege the above is laughable, even if this is the only piece of Dr Kaul anyone has read, given the fact that she herself lists "...Tamil Nadu, then Andhra, Vidarbha, and Karnataka, whereafter he reached Gujarat, onwards to Ujjayini (MP), Bahlika (Bactria), Shurasena (Mathura), Darads (Gilgit Baltistan), Kuru-Pancala (Punjab, Haryana), and then Kamarupa (Assam), Gauda (Bengal) and Koshala (UP)."</p> <p>Let us look at the entire sentence where the 'illusion of multiplicity' is found: "However, Shankara's pan-Indian voyages also subtly demonstrate the ancient idea of India: a sphere peopled by great diversity of thought but unified by a consciousness that pierced through the illusion of multiplicity." Anyone who reads this statement for what it is, will easily spot that Dr Kaul is not denying multiplicity in the form of existence of multiple janapada-s.</p>

34	In fact, the editorial does exactly what it accuses others of doing, reproduces outdated 19th-century histories where Bharatvarsha is equated with colonial British India.	This is a general accusation with no evidence to back it up.
35	There are also several errors in this article that demonstrate a lack of awareness of recent scholarship as well as of other sampradayas or religious traditions.	As shown through a line-by-line engagement with this so-called rejoinder, there is not a single error in Dr Kaul's article that Kasturi and Gomes have demonstrated.
36	For example, while the establishment of mathas by the historical figure of Shankara is accepted by some within the tradition, historians do not uncritically accept this as historical fact.	This is really scraping the bottom. Will Kasturi and Gomes next ask for a video recording of the actual journey and bhoomi puja videos of establishment of matha-s? They are giving more reason why DD should document the bhoomi poojan of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya! So that such mindless future scepticism is addressed. Surely they don't have a video of a certain Prophet's birth and his life, do they?

37	Rather the historians' task is to understand tradition: how it is formed and transformed, not uncritically misrepresent it to the wider public.	Being critical is one important aspect of the historian's task. It is not necessarily the be-all and end-all of the work of a historian. Yet, one should also be aware of the critique of the historical-critical method when applied to Indic texts. One can start with Adluri and Bagchee's ' <i>Cry Hindutva: How Rhetoric Trumps Intellect in South Asian Studies</i> ' (2019). 23, 24 and 44 are all good examples of Kasturi and Mekhola crying Hindutva instead of responding in a reasoned academic way.
	Everything changes over time	
38	Since 1947, scholars have repeatedly criticised colonial ideas of history through their writings.	Ok. Has Dr Kaul claimed that not a single author after 1947 has criticised colonial ideas? She has merely said some are continuing some colonial ideas and has given examples.
39	The first principle of history is that everything changes over time.	Perhaps it is someone's turn to ask Kasturi and Gomes to update themselves, starting with this Aug 8 2020 article. Even a question such as "What is History?" has diverse answers! See https://www.historytoday.com/archive/head-head/what-history/ . They need to pull better tricks out of their hat than declaring a "first principle" of history.
40	Students of history are also taught about the dangers of anachronism, where 19th-century ideas about "Hindu" and "Muslim" nations and rule were used to justify and sometimes challenge colonial oppression.	Dr Kaul's article contains neither "Hindu" nor "Muslim" in it.

41	There are no eternal and unchanging pasts; nor can chronology and periodisation be yoked to sealed religious categories.	Where has Dr Kaul said that there are eternal and unchanging pasts? Again, an example of setting up a straw man and responding to that rather than to Dr Kaul's points.
42	When applying basic principles of history, it is clear that imaginations of Bharatavarsha in the Mahabharata in the 5th century BCE are not the same as those in the Puranas written almost 1,000 years later.	Repeating the same point—about differences—does not prove discontinuity. Dr Kaul cites Mahabharata and Vishnu Purana. Kasturi and Gomes need to get down to work and demonstrate why these two cannot be cited together in tracing the idea of Bharatavarśa. Word-histories are legit. Perhaps Helena Rosenblatt's Princeton-published book ' <i>The Lost History of Liberalism: From Ancient Rome to the Twenty-First Century</i> ' might convince them that it is OK to trace the history of a word.
43	Such ideas simply cannot be reduced to the 19th-century concept of nations and all of its legacies.	Dr Kaul actually says "Unlike a nation-state...". If only Kasturi and Gomes were thorough in their reading and ethical in representation of Dr Kaul's views in their rejoinder!
44	At a time when the government has moved to link Indian citizenship with religion and Indian citizens can be declared "anti-national" simply for exercising their right to disagree with the government, it is urgent that such blatant manipulations of the past are called out for they are: shoddy historical writing in the service of exclusionary Hindutva nationalism.	Cry Hindutva! Ad-hominem on steroids.