earlier proponents of a theory of hemispheric balance whose thoughts are now forgotten, but the first record of such a theory is associated with Mercator at the end of the 16th century, more than a millennium and a half after the Antipodes were first conceived.

Little attention was paid to Mercator’s theory for a further century and a half, until the cartographers Philippe Buache and Charles de Brosses popularised arguments about hemispheric balance around the mid-1700s, at the same time that a young James Cook was beginning his merchant navy apprenticeship. By the time Cook was commanding his own ships, his contemporary, Alexander Dalrymple, was holding to the theory of hemispheric balance as proof that the continent of Terra Australis was still there, albeit further south than first thought (and it was Dalrymple’s opinion that he was just the man to discover it).

Ultimately, the theory of hemispheric balance was not denounced on theoretical grounds; it was simply made redundant. With his relentless scouring of southern latitudes in his 1772 voyage of exploration, Cook proved there was nothing in those spaces long reserved for Terra Australis beyond ice, islands and vast expanses of frigid ocean. No doubt less attractive than elegant reasoning and splendid imagination, but real – inexorably real.


**Censoring Indian History**

Laws against religious offence in India have altered the writing and understanding of the nation’s past.

*Audrey Truschke*

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Shivaji, a 17th-century Maratha king, is a hero of modern India. In Mumbai, both the airport and central railway station bear his name. Soon, he will greet those who arrive by sea to Mumbai as the world’s largest statue. A major political party calls itself the Shiv Sena, meaning ‘Shivaji’s army’, and often vehemently defends the hero – dead for more than 330 years – from
insults and defamation.

Shivaji is famous, above all, for opposing the Mughal Empire in the mid- to late-1600s. Part of his appeal is as the underdog. The Mughals controlled one of the largest, wealthiest empires in the early modern world and Shivaji’s comparatively modest forces were a persistent thorn in their side. But the core reason for which Shivaji remains a hero is religious: Shivaji was Hindu and the Mughals were Muslims. In Shivaji’s day, religious differences did not determine political alliances; in fact, the Mughals had amicable relations with numerous Hindu rulers and Shivaji likewise allied with Muslim kingdoms. In contemporary India, however, some members of the Hindu majority disparage Muslims.
with increasing fervour and the modern myth of Shivaji is of a strong Hindu warrior who fought Islam.

In India, history is a matter of vibrant public debate, especially in the current political climate, in which Hindu nationalists seek to rewrite the past and are increasingly enforcing their will through extrajudicial violence. India is also a country that bans books, on both federal and state levels, and imposes notable legal limits on freedom of speech. The potent mix of legal restrictions, public debates over history and communal politics has made academics the targets of attack, both through court cases and vigilante violence.

I recently wrote a biography of Aurangzeb, the major Mughal king who fought Shivaji, published as *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India’s Most Controversial King* and, in India and Pakistan, as *Aurangzeb: The Man and The Myth*. In accordance with legal advice, I altered some parts of the Indian edition of *Aurangzeb*, most notably censoring some information about Shivaji. In part this was because he provokes uniquely strong feelings in modern India, but the problems go far deeper than those posed by a single historical figure.

A major concern for scholars who publish on controversial aspects of Indian history is section 295A of the Indian penal code. The statute stipulates a fine or three-year prison term for anyone who writes or speaks ‘with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of citizens of India’. Section 295A is a broad and highly subjective law. In a nation of more than 1.3 billion people, anyone who finds offence against their religious tradition can invoke the act. Moreover, the law is based on personal sentiments and so it is open to wide interpretation – and abuse.

Section 295A, like many of the country’s laws, is a colonial
hangover. In the late 1920s, the British enacted the law in order to calm a violent Hindu-Muslim conflict sparked by a Hindu-authored tract about the Prophet Muhammad’s personal life. The law rested, in part, on the colonial idea that Indians were more like children than adults and so were unable to handle the freedoms enjoyed by Europeans. Despite these colonial origins, independent India has retained this law and the state has been banning books ever since.

Recently, section 295A has been used to silence academics, such as Wendy Doniger, a leading scholar of Hinduism at the University of Chicago. In 2010 Doniger published The Hindus: An Alternative History, which was met with a lawsuit claiming outrage of Hindu sentiment from Dina Nath Batra, a Hindu nationalist known for rewriting Indian textbooks.

One chilling aspect to Batra’s lawsuit were the objections to historical information. Batra alleged, for instance, that Doniger’s book defamed Swami Vivekananda, a 19th-century Hindu monk, by accurately quoting him as once saying ‘give me beef’. Batra argued that, while Vivekananda did in fact say this, repeating the historically accurate statement is nonetheless offensive to modern Hindu sentiments and hence illegal.

Penguin, the Indian publisher of Doniger’s The Hindus, fought Batra’s lawsuit for four years before they agreed, in an out-of-court settlement, to withdraw the book from the Indian market and to pulp all remaining copies. Following this, many Indian publishers now take precautions to avoid similar fiascos. It is rumoured that Indian publishers decline to acquire certain types of books.

Books that are published but might prove controversial are sometimes subjected to a ‘legal read’; a review by a lawyer who flags potentially problematic passages to be edited or removed before publication.

The legal reads of both of my books flagged several summaries of premodern sources or direct quotes as problematic. In the end, I made numerous wording changes to both books and, most dramatically, in Aurangzeb I cut several sentences that outlined Shivaji’s caste background and relations with Brahmins, the priestly caste, topics which are especially sensitive to those who subscribe to the modern mythology of Shivaji. In addition, the publisher declined to publish a map in the Indian edition of Aurangzeb showing the extent of the Mughal Empire, noting that a prison term can now await those who publish maps of India without first gaining government approval.

Religious (and nationalist) sentiments are increasingly trumping historical truth in modern India.

Beyond the law, there are additional concerns for scholars of South Asia regarding the safety of themselves and others. James Laine, a US academic, published a short book in 2003 on Shivaji. Soon after its publication, Indian individuals and institutions thanked by Laine in his acknowledgements became the targets of vigilant attacks. In broad daylight, vandals destroyed books and priceless manuscripts at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, a premier manuscript archive in India. One of Laine’s Indian collaborators, an elderly Sanskrit professor, was tarred, literally. In light of this, I omitted all names from the acknowledgements section of the Indian edition of Aurangzeb.

One effect of such censorship – both formal and informal – is that it slowly cedes Indian history to the West. In ensuring that full, uncensored scholarly texts are only available outside India, the Indian state is enforcing the ideas of its old colonial masters and, in the process, it denies Indian readers access to their own history.

Audrey Truschke is the author of Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India’s Most Controversial King (Stanford University Press, 2017) and Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court (Columbia University Press, 2016).