From History to Healing: The Ethical Imperatives for Integrating Hindu Historical Trauma in Counselling

by

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Abstract

This capstone examines historical suffering and transgenerational patterns within Hindu history, analyzes their systematic exclusion from mental health case conceptualizations, and advocates for the inclusion of Hindu history as a matter of clinical necessity and epistemic justice for the Hindu-identifying population. Despite extensive historical documentation, mainstream mental health often overlooks these collective experiences, resulting in reductive understandings of distress. Focusing on the medieval period (7th–18th centuries), this study explores the transgenerational effects of invasions, iconoclasm, religious persecution, and epistemic violence on Hindu cultural identity, mental health, and community well-being.

Drawing on Hindu historiography, trauma studies, and decolonial scholarship, the literature review analyzes violence driven by political power, economic greed, and theological zeal, alongside patterns of survival and resilience, to demonstrate that erasing Hindu historical experience constitutes an ongoing form of epistemicide. Integrating historical context into clinical practice expands therapeutic validation by situating distress within a broader socio-historical frame, enabling grief for collective losses, fostering compassionate understanding, and opening paths for cultural healing and reconciliation. Recognizing historical suffering and epistemic differences allows clinicians to respond with cultural humility, honour lived and inherited experiences, and uphold ethical and epistemic responsibility. These implications align with trauma-informed approaches developed with First Nations communities in Canada and other populations affected by intergenerational trauma.

Keywords: Medieval Hindu History, Historical Trauma, Iconoclasm, Transgenerational Trauma, Epistemicide.

Dedication or Acknowledgement

ॐ गणेशाय नमः |ॐ गुरुभ्यो नमः |

ॐ पितरोभ्यो नमः |

ॐ सरस्वतेपय नमः |

To my Ajji, Tatha, Amma, and Appa for their unwavering love and support. To my brother for the plays of childhood and for being there for our parents. To my husband, for the experience of companionship and shared love of nature. To my friends, for their warmth and encouragement. To my teachers and my capstone advisor, for their guidance and wisdom. To this land, my homeland, and all which has nurtured and sheltered me.

To the trees of my childhood, especially the mango, mulberry, and guava, and to the butterflies, parrots, and cranes that filled my afternoons with endless wonder.

To Varuna Deva, who holds the Apah, the healing waters of the cosmos, and upholds ṛta, the cosmic order and energies of creation. To Shani Maharaj, who represents the cosmic law of cause and effect, compelling us to realign with dharma and release the burdens of past karmas through ethical efforts and patience. My praṇāma to samastha Devathas, Rishis and Pitrus.

Above all, to my daughter, thank you for choosing me as your mother, for inspiring me, for making the school hours possible, and for cheering me on endlessly.

To all who have shared their stories of suffering and healing, and to my own heart and body, which hold the many experiences that led me to the path of counselling and healing. I wish human-caused suffering did not exist, and yet it is the one we can control.

As my child says, #BuildBetter is a reminder that we can choose to create, improve, and grow.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This capstone explores how historical violence during the medieval period continues to influence Hindu psychological, cultural, and community experiences. Since 8th century CE to the colonial powers leaving India in 1961, Bhārata Varṣa, current-day India, has experienced recurrent external invasions driven by political, economic, and theological ambitions, resulting in mass killings, population displacement, enslavement, forced and survival based conversions, acculturation, iconoclasm, and widespread destruction of Hindu socio-cultural institutions that were vital epistemic spaces for cultural practices, community health, learning and research, and intergenerational knowledge transmission (Wink, 1997; Thapar, 2004). Often, these institutions were looted, destroyed, or repurposed, eroding cultural continuity and fragmenting the Hindu way of life (Assmann, 2011; Pollock, 2006). This, along with the large-scale enslavement, conversions and acculturation of Hindu people, left a vacuum in social and traditional continuity, disrupted family and kinship structures, and created long-term physical, psychological and cultural stress (Lal, 1994; Jackson, 2003). The events spanning nearly 1,250 years of the medieval period in India meet the criteria for historical trauma, encompassing prolonged, systematic, and population-wide trauma with the intent to erase Hindu identity and producing intergenerational consequences (Brave Heart et al.,1998; Sotero, 2006).

Chapter 1 introduces the research problem, key concepts, and the significance of integrating historical and epistemic context into understanding mental health among Hindu-identifying clients. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the Hindu cosmological worldview and historical trauma, and uses frameworks from historical and collective trauma theories, along with understandings of epistemicide and epistemic rupture, to interpret the woundings, resilience, and transgenerational patterns, emphasizing decolonial approaches and epistemic justice in mental

health and cultural identity. Chapter 3 applies these findings to clinical practice by identifying specific impacts within the Hindu collective and by presenting a practical tool, adapted from Indigenous models of historical trauma, for assessing historical losses and response. It outlines what a potential assessment tool might look like to capture culturally mediated expressions of distress within Hindu populations. This framework addresses gaps in current mental health treatment for Hindu clients by promoting historically contextualized, culturally responsive care.

Background of the Issue/Problem

The Hindu population accounts for over 1.2 billion globally, and approximately 2.3% of the Canadian population (Pew Research Center, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2022), and experiences significant mental health and community distress, despite mental health support (Singh, 2019). The historical, cultural, and epistemic roots of distress in Hindu mental health remain largely unexplored, and as a result, distress may be misattributed and, by extension, care. Hindu clients may experience cultural barriers or not resonate with linear Western models of therapy due to epistemic differences in meanings given to life experiences (Singh, 2019)

Hindu histories contain over a thousand years of survival through repeated experiences of physical violence, iconoclasm, forced or incentivized conversions, gendered violence, territorial fragmentation, and systemic cultural suppression under external political and religious dominance. This prolonged period of upheaval shaped social structures, collective memory, and patterns of cultural resilience within Hindu communities. This capstone focuses on the history of India, traditionally known as Bhārat. It examines developments during the period commonly described as the medieval period in India, spanning roughly from the early 8th century to the 18th century, with some variation among historians on the precise dating. This era was marked by significant violence, upheaval, and political and cultural transformations across Bhārat

following the entry and establishment of Islamic rule. It also includes early European colonial incursions, particularly Portuguese rule in parts of western India and the Goan Inquisition. For this study, these events are collectively referred to as medieval violence in India. It is also important to note that the term "medieval" originates from European historiographical frameworks and was later applied to Indian history during the colonial period, thereby shaping how this era has been interpreted (Thapar, 2002; Chandra, 2007).

The Hindu communities navigated these pressures through adaptive strategies, such as external and internal migration, the moderation or concealment of rituals, mass conversion under duress, or long periods of living under oppressive conditions (Mitra et al., 2025). These strategies helped survive and, over time, have become internalized and naturalized across generations. They are reflected in contemporary experiences of shame, heightened sense of vulnerability, suicidality, low self-esteem, cultural ambivalence, community conflicts, gendered violence and disparities, familial violence, secularized outlooks, and curated engagement with Hindu identity (Duran, 2006; Manna et al., 2024; Verghese, 2021).

Despite significant historical and documentary evidence, mainstream mental health literature rarely links Hindu distress to these long-standing historical harms, leaving significant gaps in research and practice (Das, V., 2007). Mainstream mental health frameworks often approach Hindu clients' distress through individualized or culturally generalized lenses, such as collective family systems, hierarchized social structures, patriarchal orientation, gendered rigidity, or family enmeshment (Jain et al., 2025; Karasz et al., 2019). Mental health assessments often treat South Asians as a homogeneous group, overlooking the distinct historical trajectories, acculturation, and lived realities of present-day Hindu communities, whose collective memory includes the endurance of centuries of religious, cultural, epistemic, and political violence (Jain

et al.,2025; Wink, 1997). While there are some overlaps, such as collective family systems, they are limited in their ability to assess for the specific historical, epistemic, and transgenerational stressors that shape contemporary distress in Hindu people. This absence of historical integration represents a consequential gap in the assessment and treatment of Hindu clients' mental health.

Research on South Asian mental health has been mainly through Western frameworks, often by scholars reflecting colonial and monotheistic perspectives, leading to misinterpretation or omission of the pluralistic perspectives of Hindu knowledge systems (Agarwal, 2024). Such approaches often overlook historical trauma, breaks in community coherence, gaps in worldviews, and local expertise, and perpetuate epistemic gaps in understandings of Hindu distress. Consequently, centuries of survival-led adaptations, internalized oppression, and cultural marginalization are frequently misinterpreted in clinical settings as inherently cultural or individual deficits, rather than as historically situated responses (Bombay et al., 2020; Eyerman, 2019; Gone, 2013). This perspective is framed through the dominant Western lens, which assumes its own views are neutral and universal, while systematically undermining the validity of non-Western ways of knowing (Santos, 2014). It seldom reflects whether the colonial foundations upon which much of Western academia is built can be trusted to offer unbiased knowledge, notably when that same lens once sought to dismantle the civilizations it now assumes to be neutral about. How can knowledge produced from this framework be considered objective or, at the very least, more objective than the perspectives of those whose culture is being examined? This critical question is rarely asked (Santos, 2014).

Research shows that integrating historical, cultural, and decolonial perspectives improves outcomes for populations affected by transgenerational trauma (Khúc, 2020; Kirmayer, 2014; Mullan, 2020). The same approach is advocated for Hindu mental health distress, situating

it within historical sufferings and transgenerational contexts to improve assessment and provide cultural care (Gone, 2013; Lehrner et al., 2018). In medicine, acknowledgment of the long-term effect of British colonization on South Asian health has strengthened prevention and treatment approaches (Qureshi et al., 2023). Historical trauma theory posits that without explicit recognition of collective and intergenerational harms, distress is often individualized and depoliticized (Brave Heart, 2003). In mental health contexts, this omission risks misdiagnosis, incongruent care, and the perpetuation of intergenerational and ambiguous loss for Hindus.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this capstone is to examine how centuries of violent invasions, exclusivist political and theological dominations, cultural suppression, sociocultural atrocities, and epistemicide have impacted Hindu cultural identity and mental health. Guided by the focal question, "*How have historical and transgenerational traumas influenced contemporary Hindu mental health and cultural identity?,* this work highlights the importance of situating Hindu mental health within its historical and epistemic contexts. The capstone studies the medieval period in India, roughly 711 CE to 1750 CE, and examines forms of violence that contributed to cumulative trauma within Hindu populations. By focusing on this period, the capstone sheds awareness on the medieval period violence that is often obscured in analyses of later British colonialism, showing how these early violences rendered Hindu communities highly susceptible to subsequent trauma. While the impacts of British colonialism have been well examined, the intergenerational effects of prolonged medieval violence on the Hindu community remain largely unexamined within trauma discourse (Qureshi et al., 2023). This omission of medieval violence in mental health scholarship is a critical gap in counselling psychology. The long-term psychological, relational, epistemic, and cultural impacts of historical violence on Hindu people

remain underrecognized and under-theorized, and this has led to limited awareness within the mental health community to incorporate historical trauma as an influence in Hindu mental health.

The capstone proposes a framework for integrating Hindu historical trauma in mental health for a more accurate understanding of the effects of historical trauma, epistemic loss, and intergenerational links. The final chapter discusses impacts, outlines a counselling framework, reviews ethical considerations, identifies limitations, and provides directions for future research.

Research Question(s)

How did medieval-period violence in India produce historical suffering and generational social, cultural, and psychological legacies among contemporary Hindu communities? To support this primary research question, the study explores the following sub-questions:

- How do historically and structurally embedded traumas from the medieval period manifest in contemporary Hindu psychological, communal, and cultural experiences, including cultural insecurity, epistemic ruptures, community fragmentation, conflict, and gendered violence?
- How have prolonged iconoclasm, cultural suppression, forced and strategic conversions, acculturation, and epistemic harms shaped Hindu community formation and identity?
- What are the clinical implications of integrating medieval-period historical trauma into mental health treatment for Hindu clients, and how might failure to acknowledge this history perpetuate structural harm and the marginalization of Hindu lived experience?
- How have Hindu communities preserved, adapted, and transmitted their philosophical, ritual, and cultural traditions across centuries of violent disruption, and in what ways has adherence to dharma functioned as a source of resilience, continuity, and collective striving?

Significance of the Capstone

This research is significant to counselling psychology because it addresses a critical gap in understanding Hindu clients' distress within mainstream frameworks. Clinical approaches often interpret concerns through generalized cultural narratives, without situating distress within the historical, theological, and epistemic conditions that shape the current Hindu identity. The aggregation of Hindu clients into a monolithic South Asian category further obscures a long history of religious, cultural, epistemic, and political suppression within the Hindu collective.

Accounting for these historical impacts has important implications for clinical practice, research, and education. Clinically, it supports assessments and interventions that recognize symptoms as adaptive responses to cumulative transgenerational trauma. For researchers and educators, it highlights the systemic exclusion of Hindu historical trauma from mainstream discourse, reflecting biases in definitions of trauma, knowledge validation and identity reclaimation. For Hindu communities, this research validates historically rooted distress and expands therapeutic care options that honour culture, resilience, continuity, and survival. Overall, it advances a decolonial lens by demonstrating how integrating historical, transgenerational, and epistemic justice perspectives reframes and enhances outcomes for marginalized communities.

Contribution to the Field

This study contributes to the field of counselling psychology by addressing a significant gap in the understanding of Hindu clients' mental health, particularly as it relates to historically, epistemically, and theologically rooted trauma. By exploring the violence of the medieval period on the Hindu community, the research expands the existing literature on collective, historical and intergenerational trauma, moving beyond Western-centric or generalized South Asian frames. It examines the impact of surviving centuries of invasions, exclusivist religious dominations,

epistemic suppressions, and cultural atrocities on Hindu cultural identity and mental health. It provides clinicians, educators, and researchers with a contextually grounded, nuanced understanding of contemporary distress and resilience.

The study's findings are intended to inform the development of culturally and historically informed counselling frameworks that consider the community's experiences, are decolonial in orientation, and allow practitioners and clients to recognize psychological symptoms as adaptive responses to historical and collective stressors rather than individual or cultural intrinsics. It is expected to reduce inaccurate misdiagnosis and to foster compassionate interventions that support individual and collective healing among Hindus. Additionally, the research contributes to scholarly discussions on epistemicide and the marginalization of non-Western knowledge systems, providing evidence for why Hindu historical trauma must be included in trauma discourse and clinical training. Finally, the study has the potential to influence counselling psychology practices, training programs, and policy development by promoting more equitable, historically informed, and culturally sensitive approaches to mental health care for Hindu clients.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Understanding Hindu historical and transgenerational trauma requires engagement with both Western frameworks and Hindu epistemology and knowledge systems. Srivastava (2013) notes that Hindu epistemology emphasizes the interconnectedness of individual, societal, and cosmic realities, offering a pluralistic framework for interpreting and responding to suffering. It provides tools to trace causes of distress across personal, familial, and collective dimensions, and practices that foster balance, resilience, and transformative well-being. Integrated into mental health discourse, these indigenous systems situate distress and healing within ancestral legacies and resonate with the Hindu psyche, offering cultural meaning-making (Sharma, 2021).

Building on these insights, this framework integrates historical, collective, and ambiguous trauma and decolonial theories, alongside the concepts of coloniality of power, epistemicide, and epistemic justice. Together, they examine how historical acts of violence have harmed and continue to impair and erode Hindu cultural and psychological well-being. The framework also considers how the ongoing exclusion of Hindu historical and civilizational experiences from mainstream mental health discourse perpetuates epistemic injustice, limits responsive care, and makes Hindu suffering, memory, and resilience largely invisible.

Historical Trauma Theory explores how repeated, systemic, and culturally targeted harm becomes embedded within communities and transmitted across generations. Pioneering work by Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998) with Indigenous peoples showed how collective experiences of colonization, loss, and cultural disruption shape identity, health, and resilience. Collective trauma theory highlights the shared impact of events that disrupt social cohesion and cultural safety (Alexander et al., 2004), while learning from ambiguous trauma theory addresses grief and chronic stress when trauma remains unacknowledged or socially invisible (Boss, 2006). Decolonial Theory situates these experiences within the broader legacy of historical subjugation and suppression of indigenous knowledge and shows how internalized oppression and survival adaptations perpetuate the devaluation of ancestral practices (Khuc, 2020; Mullan, 2020).

Coloniality of power extends this perspective, showing how Western epistemologies assume positions of power while Indigenous knowledge systems are marginalized, perpetuating cultural erasure (Quijano, 2000). Finally, the concepts of epistemicide and epistemic justice capture the loss and recovery of knowledge. Epistemicide refers to the deliberate erasure of Hindu knowledge through iconoclasm, missionary education, and colonial schooling (Santos,

2014), while epistemic justice emphasizes the restoration and recognition of ancestral epistemologies as valid frameworks for healing that sustain collective identity (Fricker, 2007).

Together, these frameworks offer a decolonial and historically informed lens for understanding how medieval violence served as a formative context for enduring collective and psychological harm. These unacknowledged traumas accumulated and compounded during the colonial period and were transmitted across generations, shaping contemporary Hindu mental and communal health. Clinically, this framework is intended to help identify hidden grief, epistemic loss, and disruptions in meaning-making, while acknowledging enduring resilience and adaptive survival. Unlike entire regions of Europe and Central Asia that shifted from polytheism to monotheism, Hindu civilization's unbroken continuity reveals the pluralistic ancestral wisdoms of life and survival in an exclusivist, linear, dominant context.

Reflectivity and Positionality Statement

My decision to pursue counselling qualifications and the subject of this capstone are informed by my lived experience and positionality as a Hindu woman. My engagement with Hindu historical, cultural, and intergenerational trauma reflects a desire to meaningfully engage with my ancestral legacies and create space for witnessing the losses of life, land, traditions, and epistemologies that often remain unnamed within dominant clinical and cultural contexts. This work seeks to open possibilities for healing and wholeness for those who identify as Hindu, or others who resonate with ancestral histories shaped by ungrieved loss.

This capstone engages an autoethnographic lens to position my lived experience as a meaningful source of knowledge. It explores the historical, cultural, and psychosomatic processes that shape my lived realities as a Hindu, with marginal understandings of traditions, struggles to sustain sādhana, and yearns for a felt-sense connection with deities. For much of my

life, I have sought clarity and guidance through Jyotiṣa Shastra, and I have been curious about broader Indigenous perspectives. At the same time, the Western world has been a pragmatic necessity. Through giving language to the felt but unengaged dissonances of my experience, this inquiry arises from grieving the historical fracturing of pluralistic worlds under monotheistic dominance. This rupture is lived not only as a cultural difference but also as a cultural loss and as a severance of relationships with the self, the sacred, and the ecosystems that once held meaning and belonging. It is mixed with the loss of connections to ecology and energetic dimensions, and an expansive selfhood that is only accessible through sustained contact with multitudes.

Through reflexive engagement with personal narrative, collective memory, and scholarly literature, this capstone explores how intergenerational trauma and epistemic loss are lived, recalled, and transmitted within Hindu contexts, and draws on the work of others who have named and made sense of these historical processes. My experiences are not universal and are located within the continuum of Hindu diversity. This inquiry resists essentializing the Hindu experience while reclaiming history and its impacts.

As a Hindu woman living in diaspora and educated in missionary schools in India, my relationship with tradition has been dialectical, marked by conditioned vigilance around safety, belonging, and visibility. These dynamics are seen in decisions around parenting, language and accents, dressing, education, and the navigation of political discourse within Western settings that continue to normalize colonial narratives. Because Hindu suffering remains ambiguous, these negotiations around safety, identity, and belonging are daily and automatic. They reflect the persistent tensions of historical suppression, ambiguous losses, and the absence of safe collective spaces to process Hindu histories that remain socially invisible and unacceptable.

My ancestors and their legacies hover on the margins of one day. I am grateful to my

ancestors and to the broader dimensions that have kept the Hindu civilization alive. My gratitude comes from the immense balance of adaptation and resistance shown by my ancestors in the face of violence and oppression. I also hold an inquisitive space about how exclusivist theologies have claimed the role of gatekeepers of civilizational narratives. My orientation to this capstone is grounded in an ongoing study of India's history, visits to archaeological sites, and pilgrimages to meet the longing for the unsaid and unseen. History provides a gateway to examine collective suffering. What is harder to access, however, are the epistemic connections and the coherence of our ancestors. This work, at its heart, is grieving for silenced knowledge systems, for the current distress and engagement with the ever-present, socially unacknowledged breaths.

With the invocation *Ambitame, Nadītame, Devītame* from the *Ṛg Veda* (2.41.16), I call upon Devi Saraswati as mother, river, and goddess, to attune us to the ancestral currents of wisdom that move through lineage, speech, collective memory and waters.

Definition of Terms

Ambiguous Trauma / Ambiguous Loss

Trauma experienced when historical or cultural losses are not fully recognized, acknowledged, or mourned, resulting in unresolved grief and intergenerational stress (Boss, 2006).

Collective Trauma

Shared trauma experienced by a group, which shapes collective identity, cultural memory, and social cohesion (Hirschberger, 2018).

Cultural Trauma

Trauma that impacts a community’s shared identity, traditions, and epistemologies, often resulting from systemic oppression, colonization, or cultural erasure (Alexander et al., 2004).

Decolonial Counselling

Therapeutic practices that acknowledge historical and cultural trauma, integrate indigenous knowledge systems, and resist Eurocentric or colonial frameworks in understanding client experiences (Khúc, 2020; Mullan, 2020).

Epistemicide

Systematic devaluation, erasure, or suppression of indigenous knowledge systems and practices through colonial or missionary education (Santos, 2014).

Historical Trauma

Historical trauma is defined as the cumulative and generational emotional, physical, and psychological harm stemming from mass trauma exposure (Brave Heart et al., 1998; Evans-Campbell, 2008).

Internalized Oppression

Adoption of negative beliefs and shame about one's own culture, identity, or community, often due to systemic marginalization or colonial narratives (Lee, 2021; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Medieval Violence

Sociopolitical and religious conflicts in India between approximately 700 CE and 1750 CE, including invasions, temple destruction, forced conversions, gendered violence, and social subjugation. (Majumdar, R. C. (1951). *History of medieval India*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

Sanātana Dharma, Dharma

Indigenous philosophical frameworks from Bhārata Varṣa (current-day India) with concepts such as dharma (ethical duty), karma (action and consequence), Kāla (time), Moksha (liberation), Dukkha (suffering), cyclical time, and approaches to life and existence (Joshi et al., 2022).

Transgenerational Trauma

Trauma that is transmitted across generations through behavioural patterns, socialization practices, epigenetic mechanisms, and adaptations in the nervous system (Bombay et al., 2020; Yehuda et al., 2016).

Outline of the Capstone Project Chapters

Chapter 2 undertakes a comprehensive literature review that begins by critically examining the decolonization of Hindu mental health and the exclusion of Hindu historical experiences within mainstream scholarship. It examines research practices that have ignored or obscured medieval-period suffering in Hindu history and argues for recognizing historical harms to avoid decontextualized clinical interpretations. The review is then grounded in Hindu epistemology and cosmology, situating psychological inquiry within the civilizational continuity of Bhārata Varṣa and exploring key concepts such as karma, rebirth, kāla (time), duḥkha, moksha, ancestral accountability, and civilizational memory. Building on this foundation, I examine the medieval history of Bhārata Varṣa as an act of reclamation, analyzing Islamic and Portuguese violence, iconoclasm, and political subjugation, as well as the cumulative effects of theological expansion. The analyses are interpreted through historical trauma frameworks to trace transgenerational psychological consequences and epistemic breaks.

Chapter 3 then synthesizes these findings into discussion and application, examining impacts on Hindu social organization, gendered socialization, internalized oppression, identity fragmentation, and collective loss, while drawing parallels from Indigenous trauma frameworks. The chapter concludes with counselling implications, limitations, future research directions, and reflexive practice considerations, articulating how historically and culturally grounded approaches can inform trauma-informed, decolonized counselling with Hindu communities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction and Roadmap

Chapter 2 situates Hindu mental health within a decolonial and historically informed framework, emphasizing the significance of Hindu epistemologies and civilizational continuity in intergenerational trauma. By focusing on the civilizational context of Bhārata Varṣa and its traditional knowledge system, Sanātana Dharma, this chapter shows how Hindu frameworks, cultural memory, and pluralistic traditions inform identity, suffering, and resilience. Recognizing Hindu epistemology as a coherent system challenges the dominance of exclusivist and Western knowledge frameworks and emphasizes the importance of including ancestral knowledges in mental health discourse (Quijano, 2000). A review of the traditional Hindu worldview lays the foundation for understanding how historical traumas are experienced, transmitted, and culturally embedded, as well as what reclamation within the Hindu context can look like.

The first section of Chapter 2 explores decolonizing Hindu mental health by highlighting epistemic gaps in current mental health models and providing an overview of the Hindu worldview and the concept of civilizational continuity. It demonstrates how knowledge systems, ritual practices, and philosophical frameworks have persisted despite centuries of external disruption and contribute to resilience and the transmission of collective knowledge.

The second section of Chapter 2 explores the themes of violence and suffering in medieval Indian history and draws on learnings from historical trauma theory and understandings of epistemic justice. It is organized around three core constructs: the historical trauma experience, the historical trauma response, and the transgenerational transmission of trauma. This section examines medieval-era violence, iconoclasm, conversions, cultural suppression, and displacement affecting Hindu communities. This section further examines the cumulative effects

of Islamic and Portuguese interventions in medieval India, their shared ideological hostility towards pluralistic Hindu traditions, and the transgenerational legacies of epistemic injustice, acculturation, and cultural marginalization.

The final section synthesizes historical and contemporary perspectives, emphasizing how the underrepresentation of Hindu experiences in global trauma discourse perpetuates invisibility and limits culturally responsive mental health care. Collectively, these sections cover historical inquiry, epistemological recovery, and decolonial mental health frameworks, offering a lens for understanding the relationship among historical violence, cumulative trauma, and contemporary Hindu experiences of cultural identity, distress, and healing.

Decolonization of Hindu Mental Health

This theme examines how Hindu historical trauma remains largely invisible within mainstream counselling, psychotherapy, and global mental health discourse, despite growing commitments to multiculturalism, feminism, decoloniality, and social justice (Qureshi et al., 2023). Western epistemological dominance continues to shape which suffering is recognized as trauma, whose histories are legitimized, and which knowledge systems are authorized to inform theory, research, and clinical practice (Quijano, 2000). When the omissions of Hindu history in current mainstream discourses, and negative responses to Hindu identity reclaimation are viewed through the lenses of decolonial and trauma theories, there emerge critical gaps in ethical, epistemic, and clinical applications in current mental health scholarship and service.

Exclusions of Hindu Historical Experiences

Even as mainstream counselling and psychotherapy integrate innovative and cutting-edge understandings of trauma, trauma-informed care, intersectional advocacy, and decolonial frameworks, these practices remain largely embedded within exclusivist theological biases and

Western epistemology, which determines what constitutes trauma, whose experiences are recognized, and whose are systematically excluded (Khuc, 2020; Quijano, 2000; Santos, 2014). The global discourse on mental health and trauma, including research funding, is largely controlled by Western geopolitics and hegemony (Bhatia, 2002; Santos, 2014). Despite over 1,250 years of documented historical violence, religious persecution, territorial fragmentation, cultural oppression, and epistemic marginalization, the traumas endured by Hindus remain largely absent from academic and clinical discussions (Bhatia, 2002; Chatterjee et al., 2006; Wink, 1997). This absence represents an ethical gap, as the lived sufferings and adaptations of Hindu communities remain unwitnessed, perpetuating marginalization and contributing to ambiguous or unprocessed trauma within the population (Boss, 2006).

The Hindu collective bears the psychological imprints of physical tortures, societal upheavals, religious persecutions, epistemic violence, land and community disintegrations, along with prolonged exposure and resistance to cultural erasure, with lasting physical and mental health consequences (Kirmayar, 2014). When significant historical and cultural considerations remain unrecognized in mental health, the affected community lives with generational patterns of distress and encounters service gaps, limiting their ability to advocate for and benefit from contemporary therapeutic approaches. Gopalkrishnan (2018) emphasizes that culturally diverse communities experience disparities in mental health care when services fail to incorporate the historical contexts and lived experiences that affect their mental health.

Decolonial Inquiry into Mental Health Research

A decolonial inquiry into the Hindu mental health begins with curiosity about why mainstream scholarship minimizes, debates, or ignores the historical violence endured by Hindus, despite diverse and massive documentation, archeological evidence, and historical

records. Is there an assumption that Hindu communities miraculously escaped the psychological, cultural, and social impacts of centuries of political conquests, mass deaths and enslavement, physical and mental atrocities, iconoclasm, temple desecrations, forced conversions and systemic suppression? Historical trauma provides a framework to understand the long-lasting collective wounds that arise when a group's culture, identity, and social systems are disrupted over time (Gone, 2013). Brave Heart's work on historical trauma among Native American communities shows how colonization, forced cultural assimilation, and systemic oppression produce intergenerational trauma (Brave Heart et al., 1998). Similarly, examining Hindu historical trauma reveals parallel patterns of cultural disruption, epistemic marginalization, and collective grief.

Marginalization of Hindu Representation in Scholarships

Dominant monotheistic global contexts, western hegemony, and secularization have dominated how Hindu histories and identities are remembered and represented in public discourse globally and within India (Qureshi et al., 2023; Santos, 2014). Although Hindus make up roughly 14.9 % of the world's population, Hinduism is the dominant religion in only two countries, India and Nepal (Hackett et al., 2025). In regions outside South Asia, even when Hindu communities are sizable, they do not constitute a national majority. By comparison, Islam and Christianity hold majority status in many more countries, with Muslims forming the majority in 53 countries and territories and Christians in 120 countries worldwide, which gives these religious groups greater global presence and institutional influence (Hackett et al., 2025). These figures highlight that while Hindus are a large religious group numerically, they have a relatively limited presence as national majorities compared with Muslim and Christian communities, which are spread across diverse regions in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

The relative scarcity of Hindu-majority states may help explain why scholarship, research studies, and global discourse on Hindu historical trauma remain limited or absent. With fewer internationally recognized political and cultural institutions representing Hindu perspectives, the historical experiences, collective memory, and culturally specific forms of trauma endured by Hindu communities have largely remained underexamined and undervalued within mainstream mental health, historical, and social science scholarship (Juluri, 2020). Given that both Islamic and Christian expansions historically sought to suppress or erase Hindu traditions in the Indian subcontinent, this raises a critical question: how might the global imbalance in religious visibility and political representation shape the polity and perspective on efforts of Hindus to bring visibility to their historical and transgenerational sufferings? Moreover, how does internalized oppression operate in Hindus, which prevents them from advocating for their histories?

Even when Hindus achieve academic and professional success across disciplines, they may still experience internalized oppression, the influence of dominant Western epistemologies, cultural identity conflicts, and a sense of shame or ambivalence that can limit their engagement with their ancestral traditions and instead work with dominant narratives that run contrary to or do not consider the historical contexts (Fernando, 2012; Kapoor, 2019; Patel, 2022). Such dynamics reflect historical trauma that continues to shape contemporary cultural self-perception, impeding both individual and collective capacity to reclaim and assert Hindu knowledge systems, traditional practices, and cultural heritage in global forums.

Why Recognizing Historical Harms in Scholarships Matters

While the Hindu community has sustained itself over a millennium of efforts to erase its culture, the impact of surviving with threats of extinction and under prolonged conditions of survival stress on individual and community generational health cannot be undermined or

overstated. There are significant benefits to global recognition, validation, and inclusion in mainstream mental health discourse. Not being recognized in mainstream society can perpetuate racial and cultural profiling. Experiences of everyday forms of marginalization, such as microaggressions and stereotyping, can compound historical trauma and affect well-being (Sue et al., 2007). Mainstream recognition ensures that the psychological, cultural, and historical dimensions of Hindu identity are given space in contemporary witnessing. This facilitates greater research, innovation, and the development of language and frameworks to identify how historical footprints persist in contemporary times (Gone, 2013). Integration into mainstream scholarship gives legitimacy to obscured Hindu suffering, heals internalized shame in cultural identity, and fosters the development of non-defensive collective resilience.

Many Hindu individuals are Westernized and have declining connections to their ancestral traditions due to acculturation and internalized oppression, which reflect symptoms of cultural suppression rooted in historical contexts (Nadal et al., 2021). These individuals often carry intergenerational patterns of stress, yet their mental health experiences are rarely linked to historical or familial transmission. The absence of culturally specific historical considerations renders contemporary mental health interventions insufficiently sensitive to the unique ways trauma has been experienced, transmitted, and embedded within Hindu communities (Gopalkrishnan, 2018; Misra et al., 2025). For some, this may replicate the historical invisibility surrounding their struggles (Kolk, 1989). Historical trauma is a distinct phenomenon that demands nuanced, context-sensitive engagement to provide effective, culturally informed care (Brave Heart et al., 1998). It necessitates hearing Hindu voices, acknowledging internal forms of oppression, and carefully examining historically and politically embedded and contemporary biases that may minimize or discount Hindu lived realities. It calls for integrating Hindu distress

and healing into ancestral epistemologies, or, at a minimum, critically examining Western frameworks to disrupt stereotypical assumptions that pathologize or marginalize Hindu knowledge systems and values (Bhatia, 2002; Sharma, 2024).

Attending to cultural and historical contexts enables a deeper comprehension of the intergenerational impacts of historical violence as experienced from the land and Indigenous perspective, rather than solely through external frameworks (Sharma, 2024). Li, Leidner, Hirschberger, and Park (2023) further suggest that reclamation of historical collective trauma and identity can be reframed from a source of threat into an opportunity for intergroup dialogue, relational choice-making, and reconciliation.

Summary of Findings

A decolonial advance for the Hindu community involves breaking the silence around historically misrepresented, underrepresented, and overlooked aspects of Hindu trauma in global mental health discourse. Recognizing this lineage of suffering, resilience, and endurance within mainstream frameworks can foster communal spaces for healing, reconnect fragmented communities, and spark curiosity about ancestral histories and traditions. It also provides individuals with pathways to culturally grounded and responsive healing practices. By broadening the contextual understanding of contemporary Hindu challenges, this approach enables communities in both India and the diaspora to shift from unconscious patterns of meaning-making to conscious engagement with their histories, identities, and religious choices.

An Overview of Hindu Epistemology and Cosmology

This section provides a broad introduction to Hindu understandings of their civilization, geography, concepts of time, purpose of life, meaning given to suffering, healing, and how suffering, healing, and the relationship with existence have been understood ancestrally and

continue to be practiced today. Dimensions of historical trauma often include interconnected elements of land loss, physical dislocation, disruption of temporal continuity, and suffering that compounds over time (Duran & Duran, 1995; Heart et al., 2011). Hence, among the many essentials that can be decolonized and reclaimed in work with Hindu historical trauma, a deliberate decision has been made to examine Hindu understandings of land, ethical/moral codes, time, karma, and the purpose of life as each profoundly shapes how trauma is experienced, interpreted, and responded to. These elements influence relationships to trauma, meaning-making, and the mechanisms through which trauma, particularly silenced pain and suffering, is transmitted across generations (Sotero, 2006). As Elder (2001, as cited in Sotero, 2006) observed, "lives are lived in specific historical times and places… if historical times and places change, they change the way people live their lives."

While many Westernized Hindus may have drifted from an embodied connection to their ancestral traditions, many continue to engage with them. Due to internalized oppression and the dominance of Western worldviews, ancestral practices may be undervalued internally until legitimized by Western recognition, highlighting the complex interplay between external validation, cultural pride, and historical erasure (Ranganathan, 2022). That is why decolonizing Hindu mental health necessitates understanding and integrating ancestral values into elements impacted by historical acts of erasure and suppression.

Bhārata Varṣa and Contemporary India

Understanding historical trauma within Hindu contexts requires understanding India in its civilizational form as Bhārata Varṣa, a geographic, political, cultural, and epistemological continuum that was historically inhabited, defended, and sustained by Hindu ancestors and continues to shape contemporary Hindu people (Kumari, 2024; Malhotra, 2011). This continuity

is formally acknowledged in Article 1 of the Indian Constitution, which states, “India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States” (Constitution of India, 1950, art. 1).

Bhārata Varṣa is anchored in the pluralistic Dharmic epistemology reflected in its traditions and practices of lineages, including Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain dharmas (Kumari, 2024). Ancient literature traces Bhāratato early Vedic texts, where the land is named after King Bhārata, a legendary ancestor. The Rigveda, composed over 3,500 years ago, is among the earliest texts articulating Hindu cosmology. In RV 3.53.12, the seer Viśvāmitra states:

*ya ime rodasī ubhe aham indram atuṣṭavam | viśvāmitrasya rakṣati brahmedam bhārataṃ Janam, “I have made Indra glorified by these two, heaven and earth, and this prayer of Viśvāmitra protects the people of Bharata” (*Wisdom Library, n.d., RV 3.53.12).

This verse explicitly links Bhārata to a sacred, civilizational space. The Vishnu Purana describes Bhārata Varṣa as the country lying north of the ocean and south of the snowy Himalayas, inhabited by the descendants of King Bhārata and distinguished as karmabhumi, where human actions are performed. It details the geography (Vishnu Purana, Book 2, Ch. 3).

Civilizational Endurance and Continuity of Bhārata Varṣa

Bhārata Varṣa stands as a rare example of civilizational continuity, persisting as a living tradition despite more than twelve centuries of political conquest and sustained epistemic marginalization. Its indigenous philosophies, ritual systems, and knowledge traditions continue to be actively practiced, embodied, and transmitted across generations (Malhotra, 2011).

Emerging alongside other major ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, Greece, and Persia, Bhārata Varṣa differs in that many of these civilizations now endure primarily as historical, archaeological, or intellectual legacies rather than as uninterrupted civilizational lifeworlds. Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations, for instance, did not continue

as living systems; their original languages, ritual structures, and cosmological frameworks largely disappeared over time (Kramer, 1981). Greek civilization survives through its enduring philosophical and literary contributions, yet it functions predominantly as an intellectual heritage rather than as a continuous civilizational way of life (Carter, 2023). Persia retains partial continuity through Zoroastrian communities, though its ancient epistemological foundations underwent significant transformation (Savant, 2013). China has preserved Daoist, Confucian, and Buddhist traditions; however, major ideological and institutional ruptures have reshaped its civilizational continuity, and some of these traditions entered through external transmission rather than emerging indigenously (Yang, 2011).

The civilization of Bhārata Varṣa has persisted through the ages, keeping its epistemologies, rituals, and philosophical practices alive, not merely as a geographical territory (Kumari, 2024). This continuity underscores the enduring capacities for resilience, coexistence, and ethical adaptation within Hindu traditions, which sets Bhārata Varṣa's civilizational trajectory apart from regions where earlier pluralistic systems were largely replaced through religious homogenization (Srinivasan, 2025).

This contradicts colonial historiography, which has often sought to minimize the civilizational continuity of Bhārataand Hindus by portraying it as politically incoherent and regressive prior to colonial intervention, thereby obscuring its longstanding Dharmic knowledge systems, sacred geographies, the deep atrocities committed by ideologies external to the land, and the enduring spirit of the Hindus. Such narratives reflect processes of violence, cultural and land fragmentation, acculturation, and epistemic domination that led to present-day India by destabilizing or erasing Hindu cultural identity (Malhotra, 2011; Mitra, 2019). While not wholly

successful, these efforts produced enduring epistemic marginalization and psychological consequences that continue to shape contemporary identity formation and collective memory.

Why Epistemological Recovery Matters for Bhārata Varṣa

The concept of religion itself is primarily a colonial construct (Nye, 2019). Sanātana Dharma, which informs Hindu, Buddhist, Jaina, and Sikh cultures, is understood by its indigenous adherents as an eternal, dynamic principle that guides ethical discernment, relational awareness, and lived experience within a responsive and interdependent cosmos (Mishra, 2025). Knowledge within this framework emerges through participation, context, and relational perception rather than adherence to universalized doctrines or static belief systems. The Dharmic epistemology is pluralistic and affirms the coexistence of multiple truths, including contradictory ones, without necessitating theological legitimacy, and it validates inquiry, dialogue, debate, and experiential realization as legitimate ways of knowing (Mishra, 2025; Srinivasan, 2022).

Realizing this epistemological difference is critical, as the imposition of fixed universalized worldviews has contributed to epistemic injustice, cultural dislocation, and the marginalization of Hindu ways of being (Malhotra, 2011; Quijano, 2000). Santos (2014) highlights that even modern scientific knowledge can function as a belief system, claiming neutrality and universality while disqualifying other forms of knowledge. The openness of Dharma might have made Bhārata Varṣa vulnerable to exclusivist invasions. However, it continues to sustain and nurture its followers through centuries of political conquest, religious persecution, and cultural suppression (Swarup, 2000). Recognizing Dharmic epistemology as a legitimate knowledge system challenges exclusivist theologies and hierarchies of knowledge, including Western models that have historically framed epistemic differences as incompatible or inferior, and seek to position themselves as authorities and gatekeepers of valid knowledge

(Malhotra, 2011). It is important to reclaim pluralistic epistemologies, as they contribute not only to healing within the Hindu community but also to collective knowledge. As Hall (2011) notes, the blend of Asian and Western principles would provide the human collective with a wide array of healing skills that may prove superior to those offered by therapies limited to Western norms.

Hindu Understandings of Karma, Rebirth, kāla, Dukka, and Moksha

Healing at the Hindu cultural level requires moving beyond monotheistic constructs that legitimize singular, linear worldviews and engaging instead with the pluralistic, cyclical worldviews of Dharma traditions indigenous to the subcontinent (Roy, 2020). Within Hindu epistemology, suffering (dukka) and healing (moksha) are understood through cyclical frames that dissolve rigid distinctions of past, present, and future, and recognize ancestral memory as active in the present and accessible for action (karma) and repair (Mishra, 2025; Sharma, 2021).

In Hindu knowledge systems, the concept of karma, which encompasses all physical, verbal, and mental actions, leaves subtle imprints (samskaras) on the atma, or soul, shaping future actions and birth coordinates (Mishra, 2025; Srivastava, 2013). Through the process of rebirth as a life form, a portion of accumulated past actions manifests in the present life at different stages of an individual's life for repair. At the same time, karma continues to accumulate (Sammrat, 2025). The imprints persist until worked through and influence tendencies, circumstances, and behaviours. Samskaras carry forward individual histories and recurring patterns of response and suffering in families and communities, which psychology identifies as transgenerational trauma.

Understandings of karma and rebirth are intrinsically linked to Mokṣha, the dissolution of suffering across time and lifetimes (Adhikary, 2024; Srivastava, 2013). Mokṣha is attained not

through cognition but through experiential engagement with karma to address imbalance, restore alignment, and become free from obligations, doubt, ignorance, and karmic constraints. It results in liberation from the cycle of birth and death, or union with the divine. Mokṣha represents an internal transformation that emphasizes right action, agency, bhakti (devotion), and discipline.

In the context of historical trauma, the Karma and Moksha framework highlights how collective and intergenerational experiences of oppression, violence, cultural erasure, and ethical choices leave karmic imprints that shape beliefs, behaviours, and psychological patterns across generations (Sammarat, 2025). As Shukla (2022) observes, the pluralistic Hindu knowledge systems reflect a cosmic, contextual, and existential understanding of mental health that extends beyond reductionist models, offering pathways for transformation. Karma and Mokṣha frame suffering and healing as existential realities embedded in cycles of history and time, placing accountability and incentive on individuals and communities to learn from the past and repair historical ruptures in ethical ways that minimize karmic footprints (Adhikary, 2024).

Recognizing these epistemological foundations is vital for decolonizing Hindu mental health scholarship, as it emphasizes the need to reclaim ancestral knowledge and frameworks to appreciate the embedded meaning-making in experiences of trauma, resilience, and healing. Relying solely on Western paradigms may overlook cultural attributions (Bhatia, 2002)

Hindu Understandings of Kāla or Time

In Hindu epistemology, time (kāla) is conceived as a cosmic, autonomous, and responsive intelligence that governs creation, preservation, and dissolution (Sharma et al., 2021). Time is invincible and relational, presenting accumulated karma (actions) for repair and balancing in human births, while itself remaining eternal and unchanged. Ancient Hindu texts

portray time as a cyclical, invincible force which creates, sustains, and dissolves all beings. The Mahābhārata (Vyāsa, n.d.) states:

कालः सृजपत भूतापन (Time creates all beings)

कालः सहंरते प्रजाः (Time destroys all beings)

कालः सुप्तेषु जागपति (Time awakens while all sleep)

कालो पह दुरपतक्रमः (Time is indeed invincible)

Similarly, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa emphasizes the imperishability of time, *na kālasya vināśo'sti* (Time itself never perishes), and the Atharva Veda describes time as sustainer and regulator of the universe (*kālaḥ prajā avati; kālo viśvaṁ bhuvanaṁ vaśī*) (Viṣṇu Purāṇa 1.2, Wilson, 2010). Within this worldview, kāla acts as a responsive governing principle rather than a passive tool of metrics. In Hindu cosmology, suffering and healing are understood to arise from the degree of misstep in ethical action (dharma) within the larger rhythmic cycles of existence (Adhikary, 2024; Mishra, 2025). Distress is not viewed as random or meaningless but as indicative of ruptures in relational, ethical, or cosmological attunement. Healing, therefore, emerges through remembrance, reconnection, and realignment with the divine within and necessitates engagement with time as a collaborator and witness rather than as a linear construct. This interconnection is conveyed in the Viṣṇu Sahasranāma, situating healing within a broader existential reality: *Viśvaṁ viṣṇur vaṣaṭkāro; Bhūta-bhavya-bhavat-prabhuḥ (Vyāsa, n.d.).*

The verse, *viśvaṁ viṣṇuḥ vaṣaṭkāro* conveys the divine as inherent in all beings, and experience, while *bhūta-bhavya-bhavat-prabhuḥ* dissolves distinctions between past, present, and future. The verse affirms that ancestral memory, collective experiences, unresolved pain, and divine support remain active in the present, and positions healing as a personal, collective, and transgenerational process. We are united in our suffering and in our rejuvenation.

Cyclical Time, Kali Yuga, and Purpose of Existence

The medieval period in Bhārata Varṣa and the present era are situated within Kali Yuga, a period described by Hindu texts such as the Viṣṇu Purāṇa and Bhāgavata Purāṇa as one of ethical decline, in which dharma, right action, is reduced to one-quarter of its fullness (Viṣṇu Purāṇa 1.2, trans. Wilson, 2010). This period is said to be marked by social fragmentation, materialistic greed, lust, violence, and disconnection. Kali Yuga is considered part of a cyclical cosmology rather than an absolute condition, and this period of decline is followed by Satya Yuga, the age of truth and renewal. Even amid the ethical and societal challenges of Kali Yuga, right actions remain necessary to repair karma and attain Moksha, liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Healing remains accessible through practices that require less discipline and ecosystem support, such as bhakti (devotion), Japa (chanting), and ethical actions reflecting an ethic of meeting individuals where they are, a principle that parallels Western counselling frameworks such as the Stages of Change model (Prochaska et al., 2008).

Ancestral Accountabilities and the Pancha Bhutas

In Hindu cosmology, individual and community well-being is inseparable from ancestral well-being and the wellness of the Pancha Bhutas, the elemental building blocks of life that carry memory (Adhikary, 2024). Engaging with historical suffering is therefore not optional but an important life goal and responsibility. The Garuda Purana, an important Hindu sacred text, states that honouring ancestors and the Pancha Bhutas restore balance, fulfill historical duties, and liberate karmic imprints, enabling Shanti (peace), Svasti (well-being), and Samriddhi (prosperity) (Adhikary, 2024). Regular discernment of actions aligned with greater ecology and cosmos, in consideration and practice of ancestral rituals, is expected to cultivate resilience,

agency, and continuity, demonstrating how ancestral knowledge and remembrance of past suffering directly support contemporary distress and healing.

Civilizational and Cultural Memory

Hindu civilizational continuity is reflected in the unbroken continuity of cultural, traditional, ritual, and philosophical practices in contemporary India and the Hindu diaspora, despite over 1,250 years of upheaval. Assmann's (2011) theory of cultural memory explains how shared texts, rituals, symbols, languages, and everyday practices transmit identity and meaning across generations. Decentralized practices such as ritual, language, oral transmission, Ayurveda, yoga, pilgrimages, festivals, deity worship, and engagement with sacred geography have acted as living archives, preserving civilizational memory across centuries of foreign rule and destruction.

The daily saṅkalpa, recited by Hindus, exemplifies this continuity, "*Om Viṣṇur Viṣṇur Viṣṇuḥ, Śrīmat Parameśvara Prītyarthaṁ, adya brahmaṇaḥ dvitīya parārdhe, Jambūdvīpe, Bhārata-varṣe, Bhārata-khaṇḍe, Saṃvatsare, m*āse, *pakṣe,tithau, vāsare,gotraḥ, nāmadheyaḥ ahaṃ, karma kariṣye*[name, place, time, and deity]" (Nitya Karma Pūjā Prakāśa, n.d)

Translated as "In Jambudvipa, in Bhārata Varṣa, in Bharata Khanda, in this year, month, fortnight, lunar day, and weekday, I (name, lineage) perform this act."

This diction situates the practitioner within sacred geography (Jambudvipa, Bhārata Varṣa, Bharata Khanda), cosmic temporality (Kalpa, Manvantara, Yuga), and ancestral lineage (gotra). By explicitly naming sacred geography, the deity, ancestral lineage, and temporal context, the saṅkalpa connects practitioners to civilizational memory and collective belonging. It preserves historical and cultural identity and transmits knowledge across generations. Recitations act as a living record, preserve cultural connections, and foster knowledge and relational continuity with the land, the deity, and the time.

In the context of historical disruptions, including iconoclasm and forced conversions, such ritual frameworks sustain cultural coherence, transmit collective memory, and act as buffers against epistemic rupture. They demonstrate that Hindu society has long maintained mechanisms for encoding and transmitting knowledge across generations, reinforcing resilience, social cohesion, and ethical continuity even amidst historical trauma (Kumari, 2024).

Cyclical Epistemology and the Limitations of Linear Progress

The Hindu cyclical epistemology and civilizational goals of Moksha, liberation from the cycle of life and death, contrast sharply with dominant Western frameworks of linear progress and material advancement. When imposed as universal, Western models risk epistemic harm by marginalizing Hindu ways of knowing, meaning-making, disrupting cultural continuity, and intensifying intergenerational identity distress among colonized populations (Bhatia, 2020; Fricker, 2007; Santos, 2014). Linear interpretations of history, alongside narratives that frame Westernization as the pinnacle of human progress, decimate the achievements and contributions of pluralistic and Indigenous societies. They also obscure different perceptions, such as the Hindu view of the current period as one of decline, Kali Yuga, due to the adharmic (unethical) dominance. Western understandings view history as the past and naturalize imposed conditions as irreversible. In the Hindu worldview, with its cyclical understanding of time, past imbalances do not disappear but recur across unfolding ages, again and again, until rectified. This return reflects a natural course correction inherent within existence itself, upheld by Ṛta, the sustaining principle of cosmic order, and resonates with contemporary understandings of the trauma.

Psychological Colonization and the Reclamation of Hindu Knowledge Systems

Decolonizing Hindu mental health requires examining the contributions of Hindu knowledge systems to contemporary psychology and attribution to Bhārata Varṣa. Many Hindu

practices, such as yoga, pranayama, mudras, meditation, and Vedantic philosophies, have been integrated into Western mental health frameworks, stripped of their ethical, spiritual, and cultural contexts and without explicit attribution (Mendoza, 2018; Millner, 2021). Hindu philosophical concepts, teachings, and practices are frequently extracted from their epistemological roots and decontextualized for Western consumption (Munir et al., 2021). This is problematic because decontextualization is not a neutral cultural exchange; it buries the source, strips away the ethical and philosophical dimensions of the roots, and capitalizes without attribution (Mendoza, 2018). Decontextualization and the lack of standard scholarly acknowledgment raise ethical concerns and risks reinforcing psychological colonization by continuing patterns of historical erasure.

Internalized oppression contributes to limited advocacy among Hindus for the proper attribution of Hindu knowledge within research and practice. A study by Christopher (2014) demonstrates that the growing popularity of yoga in the West has also increased its uptake among the Indian population, due to the legitimacy it confers through Western recognition. Colonial narratives, power structures, unquestioned acceptance of Western paradigms, and the positioning of Western research as authoritative on Hindu society have all served to maintain colonial power structures and entrench internal oppression in Hindus (Bhatia, 2002).

Internalized oppression influences self-identity in Hindus, fostering self-doubt, eroding the authorship of traditional frameworks, devaluing cultural frameworks, and encouraging passive acceptance of Eurocentric ideals (Bhatia, 2002). To advance decolonial mental health, scholars and clinicians must advocate for recognition of Hindu contributions and situate practices within their ethical, sacred, and cultural contexts, or make the adaptations explicit. This strengthens cultural integrity and ensures ethical scholarship, and helps combat psychological colonization.

Summary of Findings

By situating Hindu mental health within the ancestral, cyclical, cosmological, and ethical frameworks of Hindu epistemology, this section highlights how a pluralistic worldview, dharmic practices, and civilizational memory offer healing by restoring cultural confidence. Within this framework, counselling becomes a reflective space where individuals can explore how distress has been internalized at the levels of identity and meaning, consciously examine inherited and conditioned shame, and repair ruptured continuity across generations. Addressing individual and transgenerational patterns through cultural connection, rather than through linear, secular Western frameworks, allows recognition of both historical injury and resilience embedded in Hindu cultural memory.

Moreover, in Hindu tradition, engagement with history is an act of ancestral obligation. Studying historical periods marked by pain, acknowledging ancestors' sacrifices, and honouring them through cultural rituals helps forward movement. Thus, history serves as a starting point for healing and an ongoing process, leading to an exploration of the medieval period in Bhārata.

Studying Medieval Bhārata Varṣa as an Act of Reclamation

Events such as Islamization, colonization, cultural oppression, and religious persecution have transformed the religious and political identities of Bhārata Varṣa and continue to affect communities across generations (Brave Heart et al., 1998; Sotero, 2006; Wink, 1997). Studying history is important for Hindus because the violence experienced during the medieval period has been suppressed or selectively curated in colonial-era historical narratives. However, historical documents such as archives, oral histories, official records, and repurposed sacred structures and temples preserve evidence of wars, territorial conquests, human losses, and material acquisitions. These sources provide insight into the social conditions and cultural realities of people and

territories, enabling communities and researchers to access experiences that have been silenced, erased, or marginalized (Boss, 2006, 2022). For populations such as Hindus that have undergone forced changes, the study of history allows them to connect with their ancestry and sense of self.

Historical recordings are narratives shaped by the society of the time, as are notions of what trauma is. While we can never directly know the impact of historical events on ancestors, understanding historical contexts allows us to work with transgenerational links to current distress using historical knowledge (Mohatt, 2014). Without acknowledging these events, the intergenerational impact of trauma remains invisible, making it harder to understand contemporary psychosocial patterns and intragroup and intergroup community conflicts.

Islamic Violence during the Medieval Period in Bhārata Varṣa (711 – 1750)

From the 8th century CE onward, Bharat experienced continual invasions from Central Asia driven by political ambitions, material greed, and theological imperialism (Wink, 1997). Large parts of India came under the rule of Turkic, Afghan, and Mughal dynasties between the 8th and 18th centuries. Braudel (1995) characterizes Islamic rule in India as an experimental form of colonialism, implying that the rulers sought to extract resources, assert dominance, and reshape society according to their authority, using violence as a systemic tool rather than sporadic events. Daniélou (1991) observes that from the arrival of Muslims around 632 CE, India experienced extensive violence, including widespread killings, lootings, and destruction. These actions were often justified as religiously sanctioned wars, resulting in the devastation of communities and the annihilation of entire communities. Together with Braudel's account, these descriptions underscore the systematic and often coercive character of Islamic political expansion and religious authority in parts of medieval Bharat.

Historical scholarship documents widespread wars, changes in rulership, large-scale killings, population displacement, enslavement, and the destruction of Hindu traditional, educational, and economic institutions, with lasting implications for social and cultural continuity (Majumdar, 1951; Thapar, 2004). Contemporary Persian chronicles, regional histories, and archaeological records describe the destruction of settlements, seizure of resources, and capture of civilians during military campaigns (Basham, 1967; Thapar, 2004). While enforcement and severity differed by rulers, there were consistent patterns of killings, structural inequality, iconoclasm, cultural humiliation, sexual violence, enslavement, and religious conversion that persisted throughout the medieval period (Jackson, 2003; Majumdhar, 1951).

Drawing on medieval chroniclers and later historians, Chauhan (2023) reports multiple claims of large-scale Hindu fatalities during Islamic invasions. Persian chronicles describe Mahmud of Ghazni's raid on Somnath (1000 CE), resulting in the killing of approximately 50,000 Hindus, a figure echoed by later historians (Elst, as cited in Chauhan, 2023; Husain, as cited in Chauhan, 2023). Ferishta's chronicles state that the Bahmani Sultans (1347–1528) set a minimum objective of killing 100,000 Hindus during punitive campaigns (Ferishta, as cited in Chauhan, 2023). Regarding Timur's invasion of Delhi (1398–1399), approximately 100,000 Hindu captives were reportedly executed prior to the sack of Delhi (Habib & Raychaudhuri, as cited in Chauhan, 2023; Yazdi, as cited in Chauhan, 2023). Following Akbar's conquest of Chittorgarh in 1568, Mughal-era accounts indicate that around 30,000 Rajputs were killed (Chauhan, 2023). At a broader demographic level, K. S. Lal estimates that the Hindu population declined by approximately 80 million between 1000 and 1525 CE, with aggregate estimates ranging from 60 to 80 million Hindu deaths over several centuries of Islamic rule, suggesting a prolonged demographic devastation rather than isolated wartime losses (Chauhan, 2023).

Normative Differences Between Hindu and Invader War Ethics

Hindu war ethics, governed by dharma-yuddha (righteous war), conducted wars on designated battlefields between rulers and their armies and prohibited harming civilians, women, children, priests, and farmers (Chakrabarti, 2020). There were strict codes of conduct, such as the requirement that battles occur at specified times, that surrendered, fleeing, or disarmed warriors be treated with dignity, violence against women, children, disabled, elderly, priests, teachers, and farmers was strictly prohibited, which indicated the perspective that war was a formal contest between ruling and military classes rather than indiscriminate violence. In contrast, Jackson (2003) observes that in medieval India, the Islamic regimes leveraged jihad as an ideological instrument to justify state expansion and maintain security. They viewed their territories as islands of Dar al-Islam surrounded by hostile Dar al-Harb, framing violent military campaigns against Hindu kingdoms and civilians as necessary for legitimacy (Jackson, 2003). One illustrative example concerns Muhammad of Ghor (12th century CE), who played a significant role in the expansion of Islamic rule in parts of the Indian subcontinent. Historical accounts describe instances in which he was defeated and released by Hindu rulers, who later returned to defeat and violently execute former adversaries, exemplifying differences in war conduct and the pattern of Hindu-Islam conflicts in the medieval era (Lane-Poole, 1903).

Accustomed to dharmic norms that placed ethical limits on violence and upheld a moral relationship to life, Hindu communities may have experienced profound cultural shock when confronted with Islamic warfare, which treated war very differently and sanctioned violence (Jackson, 2003). Bound by their own ethical codes, Hindus may have been unprepared for strategies that operated outside those constraints. This abrupt rupture of familiar moral

frameworks could have contributed to collective disorientation and distress, disrupting social cohesion and trust, shaping intergenerational patterns of fear, and altering communal practices.

Targeting of Civilians, Women, and Children in Medieval Islamic Campaigns

There are records of significant violence against women and children, including capture, abduction, enslavement, and forced assimilation (Al-ʿUtbi, 1858/11th century, Wink, 1997). While chroniclers provide extensive accounts of these events, the scale and precise numbers are difficult to verify due to the limitations of medieval record-keeping and the narrative conventions of the time. Chroniclers of Mahmud of Ghazni's campaigns, such as al-Utbi, report hundreds of thousands of captives, with some sources claiming as many as 500,000 in a single campaign and up to 750,000 across multiple raids (Chatterjee & Eaton, 2006). During the Battle of Peshawar, approximately 100,000 men and women were reportedly enslaved (Wink, 1997). When defeat to Islam became imminent, some Hindu women committed jauhar, a practice of self-immolation to avoid enslavement, with accounts describing thousands participating during sieges (Wink, 1997).

While historians continue to debate the accuracy of specific numerical estimates, there is convergence across primary chronicles and secondary analyses regarding the scale and repetition of mass killings, iconoclasm, enslavement, and the cultivation of fear among subjected masses.

Interpreting Islamic Violence Using the Historical Trauma Frameworks

The medieval period events of community enslavement, sexual violation, conversions, and harm can be understood through historical trauma theory, which conceptualizes trauma as cumulative, collective, and transgenerational (Brave Heart, 2003; Sotero, 2006). The violent interventions of a theologically distinct ruling group from Central Asia reorganized the Hindu community and social structures, disrupted cultural continuity, and transmitted psychological and social distress across generations through suppression, embodied memory, and altered relational

patterns at individual, familial, and community levels. These experiences of the Hindu people meet the criteria for historical trauma: collective, high levels of collective distress, and events were perpetrated by outsiders with a destructive intent (Evans-Campbell, 2008).

Building on this, Brave Heart's work emphasizes how such trauma becomes intergenerationally transmitted, manifesting in descendants as somatic shame and distress, heightened vigilance, suppressed rage, and moral injury (Brave Heart et al., 1998). Applying Sotero's (2006) framework highlights the structural and demographic mechanisms through which oppression and inequity are internalized across generations in Indigenous communities. Kirmayer's (2004) work on psychosocial pathways shows how historical and cultural disruptions remove symbolic practices that support grieving and healing, weaken individual and collective identity, impair culturally mediated coping strategies, and diminish resilience to trauma.

These frameworks help to unpack and interpret the medieval atrocities of Bhārata Varṣa not as discrete historical events, but as persistent, interwoven sources of trauma that cumulated and compounded generationally in the political, social, cultural, epistemic, and psychological dimensions of the Hindu collective.

Political Subjugation of the Hindu Community

Politically, Hindu rulers, institutions, and elites were displaced or subordinated within Islamic polities. In many regions, Hindus occupied an unequal legal position, facing special taxation (jizya), exclusion from state power, and limitations on public religious expression (Basham, 1967; Thapar, 2004). They were categorized as dhimmis, humiliated, and often criminalized for practicing their traditions, and their cultural symbols were desecrated (Lal, 1994). These processes encapsulate both symbolic and structural violence, target cultural identity, disrupt collective meaning-making systems, and impair the intergenerational

transmission of cultural knowledge (Alexander et al., 2004). Usage of violence on the people and on their meaning-making systems generated fear of cultural extinction and put the community in shock, fear, chaos, and instability across multiple dimensions, from physical to societal and psychological and remains largely unexamined and unacknowledged (Kapoor, 2019).

Community Fragmentation Associated with Religious Conversions

Socially, the period saw forced, coerced, and strategic conversions to Islam along with voluntary conversions prompted by the patronage, survival, and mobility (Lal, 1994). Through this period, there were large-scale forced conversions to Islam through warfare and jihad, making proselytization a continuous practice across India (Wink, 1997). This fragmented the families and communities. People who were newly converted often lived in in-between identities, which caused confusion, shame, and community divisions. Reconversion was restricted and punishable. The newly converted were expected to show loyalty by acting against their former Hindu community, which created stress, moral conflicts, and ruptures (Chandra, 2007; Lal, 1994). Trauma theory shows that repeated exposure to structural oppression diminishes perceived control, a key factor in resilience (Evans-Campbell, 2008). Hindus who were prevented from reconverting after coerced conversions might have experienced acute entrapment, reflecting powerlessness over identity, beliefs, and destiny. Forced conversions and pressures to demonstrate loyalty to Islam created intra-community fissures, making relationships tense and suspicious (Brave Heart, 2003; Kirmayer et al., 2014). At the group level, this produced collective trauma through breaks in shared identity, trust, and social norms, as well as repeated betrayals (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Sotero, 2006). Communities were displaced, fragmented, and exposed to systemic violence, and with temples and sacred sites destroyed, there was both

limited cultural space and also fear to access sacred places(Chauhan, 2023; Evans-Campbell, 2008).

As a result, Hindus navigated trauma largely on their own in survival mode, leading to repressed memories, interrupted cultural transmission, defensive relational patterns, and shared ways of making sense of suffering that compounded trauma over generations (Brave Heart, 2003; Kirmayer et al., 2014; Sotero, 2006).

Subjugation, Enslavement, and Sexual Violence During the Islamic Regimes

One of the significant elements of Islamic campaigns and regimes during the medieval period in India was the large-scale enslavement, forced domestic and military labour of the captured Hindus, and sexual slavery (Lal, 1994). As trauma theory shows, communities exposed to prolonged bodily and sexual violence often develop safety-oriented adaptations, such as strict gender norms, restricted social interactions, and curtailed autonomy for women (Hirschberger, 2018). These adaptive behaviours, when unacknowledged over generations, become embedded in social memory, family narratives, and somatic stress responses. This manifests as defensive behaviours, rigid gender norms, enmeshed family dynamics, and internalized shame (Bombay et al., 2020; Eyerman, 2019; Hirschberger, 2018; Lehrner et al., 2018).

In Hindu populations, these adaptations have shaped generational identity and are reflected in societal rigidity and stagnation, hyper-vigilance in dominant cultural contexts and silencing of self, internalized scarcity consciousness and fear for cultural survival, gendered hierarchies, internal oppression, and susceptibility to secularization and ambivalence toward ancestral culture and identity fragmentation (Lal, 1994; Mitra, 2014, 2024). Historical trauma studies show that powerlessness and shame can be transmitted intergenerationally through stories, rituals, and social norms, embedding fear and subordination in collective memory (Brave

Heart, 2003). Brave Hearts' findings show that men and women show distinct grief patterns informed by historical trauma, with men exhibiting more externalized behaviours and women having more internalized behaviours. These gendered responses are historically coherent adaptations and explain how collective and intergenerational trauma shows in individual behaviour and relational dynamics.

Psychosocial Impact of Medieval Islamic Rule on Hindu Men

Medieval Islamic campaigns involved the mass capture of Hindu men and boys, and forcibly incorporating them as military or domestic slaves, such as Mamluks, serving administrative or military functions under Muslim rulers (Jackson, 2003; Lal, 1994; Wink, 1997). For Hindu men, trauma was not only physical or economic, but also identity-based and adharmic (unethical) that undermined their beliefs and culturally embedded roles of protection, sovereignty, and stewardship of Dharma (Chandra, 2007; Lal, 1994). Kshatriya Dharma, the code of duties and conduct for the warrior, was tied to their roles as protectors of kingdoms, ancestral obligations, communities, and deities, and was of great importance to rulers and warriors alike (Majumdhar, 1951).

Experiences of repeated community violence, powerlessness to stop the abductions and violation of women and children, temple desecration, forced conversions, and cultural humiliation constituted a form of soul injury and a deep sense of failing their ancestors and Dharma. There are reports of rulers and warriors choosing suicide, following military defeat, unable to show their face before their people, reflecting profound moral injury, which is described as the psychological and ethical anguish arising from a perceived failure to uphold deeply held codes of honour and duty (Litz et al., 2009; Poole, 1903). That suicide was resorted

to indicates the depth of the moral codes for the Hindu men, and the intensity of their experience for failing their Dharma.

The loss of leadership and capture of men and boys created a vacuum at the community level and generated collective insecurity, producing fear and cumulative historical trauma (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Kirmayer et al., 2014). Sotero's (2006) framework shows that historical trauma operates through structural oppression and ongoing marginalization. Under Islamic governance, Hindu men were often excluded from political and military authority, socially subordinated, and experienced collective disempowerment from the dismantling of culturally sanctioned roles as rulers and protectors. These experiences and feelings of helplessness, moral injury, and suppressed anger and grief were transmitted through silence, hyper-discipline, rigid boundaries, and intra-familial violence, persisting beyond the medieval period to contemporary times (Brave Heart, 1998). Kirmayer's (2004) concept of social suffering explains how these patterns became normalized and invisible.

When assessed through a historical lens, behaviours often labelled patriarchal can be reframed as adaptive responses and empathized. Hindu men's suffering, endurance, family values and inherited patterns are not studied nor acknowledged, reinforcing ambiguous losses, even in therapy.

Psychosocial Impact of Medieval Islamic Rule on Hindu Women

Similar to men, Hindu women and girls experienced systematic vulnerability that included abduction, enslavement, being sold or absorbed into Muslim households and imperial systems, where they faced sexual servitude, forced marriage or concubinage, coerced conversion, permanent displacement, and trafficking to Central Asia, resulting in irreversible separation from their families (Lal, 1994; Wink, 1997). This constitutes gendered historical trauma. Brave

Heart's formulation emphasizes how trauma inflicted on a group's most vulnerable members, particularly women, becomes a primary vector for transgenerational transmission, shaping collective identity, parenting patterns, and protective social norms (Brave Heart, 1998). Hindu women's bodies became sites of symbolic domination and central to the community's experience of vulnerability, fears, and existential threat (Bostom, 2008).

Sotero's (2006) model identifies four pathways of historical trauma: mass trauma exposure, structural oppression, cultural loss, and intergenerational transmission, all of which Hindu women experienced. Mass violence, enslavement, forced marriages, structural inequalities under Islamic law and cultural loss through the fragmentation of family and community, erasure of religious identity, and internalized objectification. Trauma was transmitted across generations through inherited fear, silence, hypervigilance, and restrictive gender norms. Kirmayer's (2014) work on collective trauma and social suffering explains how these experiences became embedded in cultural schemas, moral codes, and women's internalized identities.

Practices such as gender preferences, heightened concern for daughters, anxiety over women's safety, and strict norms of dress and interactions developed as protective measures and reflect adaptive responses to prolonged gendered threat. Over time, these adaptations came to be associated with cultural values, obscuring their traumatic origins and, at times, reproducing harm. The absence of acknowledgment of this harm and the lack of restorative justice contribute to the persistence of social and familial suffering in contemporary times.

Interlinked Trauma of Hindu Men and Women

The traumas and sufferings of the Hindu men and women under medieval Islamic rule were linked and reinforced each other. Violence against women inflicted direct bodily and psychological harm while also producing moral injury and humiliation among men, who were

socially positioned as protectors of family and lineage. Simultaneously, men's political and military subjugation heightened women's vulnerability, contributing to restrictive protective practices within households. Through these gendered dynamics, trauma became embedded within family systems and transmitted across generations, consistent with frameworks of historical trauma (Brave Heart, 1998; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Sotero, 2006).

Many contemporary Hindus, due to internalized shame and limited historical awareness, distance themselves from their ancestral culture, viewing it as inherently regressive. By engaging with ancestral histories, grieving, and processing, individuals can distinguish survival-based responses from enduring cultural values. This process supports a more meaningful engagement with inherited stress patterns and conscious choices.

Reclaiming Medieval Hindu Women's Leadership

Mainstream historical narratives have often overlooked the participation and leadership of Hindu women, adding an additional layer of invisibility to their experiences of medieval India. Scholarship on women rulers is more commonly found in gender history, regional histories, and feminist historiography than in general political or mainstream historical studies. Hindu women exercised sovereign authority and military leadership, challenging medieval incursions and patriarchal norms and shaping regional politics and culture. For example, Rani Didda of Kashmir exercised sovereign authority and strategic governance, consolidating her control over the kingdom against Islamic expansion (Kaushik, 2019). Rani Durgavati of Gondwana defended the kingdom against Mughal invasions, while Abbakka Chowta led sustained resistance against Portuguese colonial forces, demonstrating that women's political and martial roles contributed meaningfully to regional stability and cultural continuity during this period (Thakur, 2025).

Documenting the achievements of medieval women rulers helps reintegrate their contributions into Hindu history, which has often been subsumed under patriarchal frameworks imposed by Islamic and Christian societies, colouring these histories with an external gendered lens and influencing Hindu social and gender norms. Reclaiming the histories of women rulers of the period challenges entrenched narratives about Hindu social structures and gendered norms and reinforces cultural memory, identity, and the recognition of women's agency.

Medieval Islamic Iconoclasm and Cultural Trauma

Ideologically, iconoclasm was sanctioned by Islam, and there were continual episodes of destruction and desecration of sacred sites, and the suppression of Hindu practices throughout the medieval period, both during times of war and peace, which intensified during conquests or under particular rulers (Chandra, 2007; Wink, 1997). Temples and shrines were destroyed, and mosques and other structures were built on the very site, using the materials from the destroyed structures (Moin, 2015). By the late 15th and early 16th centuries, thousands of Hindu shrines and temples had been destroyed or repurposed. Historian Goel (1990) documents approximately 2,000 mosques, dargahs, and other structures built on the sites of demolished Hindu temples, based on research drawing on inscriptional evidence and medieval Indo-Persian chronicles, with some historians citing higher numbers and others lower. This constituted material loss, and symbolic and psychological injury (Alexander et al., 2004).

Impact of Iconoclasm on Hindu Temples, Knowledge Centres and Lineages

Temples, gurukuls, learning centers, and libraries functioned as interconnected epistemic spaces in Dharmic traditions, sustaining cultural memory and intergenerational knowledge transmission (Assmann, 2011). They preserved histories, knowledge, and trades, including literary and philosophical works, science and medicine, weaving, pottery, art and music, ritual

practices, and ethical codes (Pollock, 2006). Knowledge was transmitted orally, through manuscripts, and via long-term apprenticeships, and was also embedded in architecture, sculpture, and the spatial organization of temples, Gurukuls, and ashrams, as well as in their ecology (Dhanorkar, 2017). Traditional knowledge was also maintained through family, lineage, jāti, and varṇa-based systems, structuring vocational, ritual, and ethical expertise (Dharampal, 2000; Thapar, 2002). Jāti organized community-specific expertise, while varṇa functioned as ethical and practical guidance rather than fixed hierarchies (Dhanorkar, 2017).

The learning centres and lineages were integrated into daily life, and thrived through inter- and intra-community exchanges, forming living knowledge ecologies (Pollock, 2006). Patronage from ruling elites, the wealthy, and the local community supported rich knowledge environments in which diverse knowledge streams and disciplines were created, tested, debated, memorized, practiced, and transmitted through teacher–student lineages (Majumdar, 1977). There was a diversity of linguistic media, including Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali, and regional languages, and major intellectual centers drew teachers, students, artists, and philosophers from throughout the subcontinent and neighbouring regions (Majumdar, 1977).

During the medieval period, these systems suffered profound destruction and disruption. Temples, libraries, and gurukuls became targets of invasions and iconoclasm. Reputable learning centers such as Nalanda University Library (5th–12th century CE) were repeatedly destroyed, culminating in 1193 CE under Bakhtiyar Khilji, when contemporary chroniclers reported the beheading of monks and the burning of manuscripts (Minhaj-i Siraj Juzjani, 1897). The killing and forced assimilation of knowledge holders fractured pedagogical networks, disrupted Guru–student apprenticeships, and impeded intergenerational knowledge transmission (Lal, 1999; Majumdhar, 1977). Communities were put into defensive mode and responded by developing

rigid social boundaries, caste, and vocational structures, preserving continuity under threat, but the fluid transmission of Dharmic knowledge was damaged (Dharampal, 2000; Dirks, 2001; Thapar, 2002). These ruptures embedded generational suffering in collective memory and societal structures, impairing cultural connection and cultural regeneration, effects that continue in contemporary Hindu communities.

Epistemicide of Dharmic Ecology and Cultural Trauma

Boaventura de Sousa Santos's concept of epistemicide provides a lens for understanding this iconoclasm, the destruction of knowledge, and knowledge structures (Santos, 2014). Epistemicide occurs when entire knowledge systems are systematically annihilated, rendering non-Western epistemologies invisible, delegitimized, or labelled irrational. The destruction of Hindu institutions and the killing of knowledge holders, combined with mass enslavement, displacement, acculturation and conversions, represents epistemicide of Dharmic knowledge systems. The conversion of Hindus into muslims and their displacement from the community left a vacuum in knowledge transmission. For Hindus compelled to acculturate under Islamic rule, acculturation often required restructuring social and communal life to accommodate the dominant political and religious order (Lal, 1993, 1999; Majumdhar, 1951).

Daily rituals, kinship networks, language, and public expressions of faith were reshaped. Over time, as Hindu traditions were suppressed and converts were sometimes mocked for retaining them, the collective memory of pre-conversion identities weakened. As Talbot (2001) notes, communities reconstruct memory and identity in response to political pressures. Assmann (2011) highlights that cultural memory depends on shared narratives, rituals, and symbolic frameworks that anchor a community to its past. When these structures are disrupted, historical consciousness fragments, and inherited traditions risk being reframed or forgotten. Forced

acculturation thus altered outward behaviour, destabilized intergenerational memory, reshaped communal identity and created unease and tensions in the community. Niranjana (1992) highlights how translation and cultural dominance reorganize language and historical narratives, thereby eroding earlier identities and reframing cultural memory. Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, and vernacular scholarly traditions became fragmented or lost, creating a "sociology of absences" in which internally coherent knowledge systems became invisible or marginalized (Santos, 2007).

Even in contexts where Dharmic traditions have endured, they have been frequently translated, reinterpreted, or reframed through Islamic, Christian, and Eurocentric epistemological lenses, leading to distortions, epistemic erosion, and the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems (Chakrabarty, 2000; Niranjana, 1992). The underlying understandings of a pluralistic tradition by exclusivist theologies, meanings that are lost, and attributions that are given are rarely questioned. The rich intellectual and spiritual traditions of Bharat were reduced to the periphery and stripped of legitimacy by ideologies that regarded Dharmic cosmologies as incompatible, hostile, and erasable. This loss was beyond cultural and material, and was acutely epistemological, not only to Bhārata Varṣa but also to the broader collective knowledge of humanity. The privileging of one epistemic system over others fractured cultural memory, disrupted knowledge transmission, and eroded social legitimacy, producing enduring collective cultural trauma (Fricker, 2007). These processes were violent, intentional, and systemic, and marginalized Dharmic traditions (Santos, 2014). They left patterns of cultural disruption that continue to shape Hindu cultural identity, subjectivity and community life today.

From Pre-Islamic Arabia to Bhārata: Tracing the Origins of Theological Iconoclasm

Medieval iconoclasm in Bhārata Varṣa is often debated as primarily political, with the construction of mosques and the desecration of temples interpreted as strategies to assert control,

redirect resources, and dismantle rival authority (Eaton, 2003). To understand the mechanisms underlying this iconoclasm and epistemicide, it is instructive to examine early Islamic history in Arabia, where the systematic dismantling of pre-Islamic traditions reflects both theological and political agendas. Pre-Islamic Arabia hosted rich goddess-centred traditions, with shrines to deities such as al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā, and Manāt, where devotees offered, circumambulated, and performed rituals tied to fertility, death, and destiny, and women often held key ritual roles (Al-Jallad, 2022). With the rise of Islam, these practices were systematically dismantled, shrines were destroyed, pilgrimages redirected to the Kaʿba, idols broken, and other deities invalidated to centralize religious authority in Allah (Khan, 2009). Driving this process was the doctrine of tawḥīd, the absolute oneness of God, which directly challenged polytheistic and female-centred traditions and provided a theological rationale for reform. Early Islamic expansions combined this doctrinal emphasis with theological instruction, legal restructuring, and material interventions, forcing conversions, imposing new religious institutions and suppressing local ritual practices (Goel, 1990; Majumdhar, 1977).

In Bhārata Varṣa, these interventions served to reorganize religious authority, reshape ritual life, and create social conditions that pressured communities to acculturate, contributing to the gradual transformation of Hindu religious and cultural practices (Goel, 1990). Recognizing this pattern shows that the disruptions to Dharmic ecosystems were not incidental but theologically motivated, generating enduring cultural trauma.

Comparative Perspectives: Epistemic Ruptures in Iran and Bhārata Varṣa

This pattern of epistemic disruption is not unique to Bhārata Varṣa. Post-conquest Iran provides a comparative case in which external theological systems reshaped collective memory and disrupted historical continuity. Pre-Islamic Zoroastrian traditions were selectively preserved and

reframed through Islamic historiography, while sacred-fire temples, Pahlavi texts, and indigenous modes of knowing declined under sustained institutional pressure (Savant, 2013).

Similarly, in Bhārata Varṣa, temples, monasteries, and libraries that functioned as pluralistic epistemic centers were repeatedly damaged or dismantled, fracturing intergenerational transmission of Dharmic knowledge. Medieval Indian history is often presented as a story of architectural grandeur and co-existence (Eaton, 2003). This framing hides Hindu suffering, forced acculturation, and reconversion (Goel, 1990). Similarly, Savant (2013) shows that Persian Muslims kept admired aspects of their past while deliberately reshaping narratives to obscure points of resistance. This selectively curated memory aligned their history with the new Islamic order and created a reimagined collective identity. In both contexts, dominant narratives marginalized conflicting experiences while supporting new power structures.

By situating Bhārata Varṣa within this broader historical pattern, it becomes evident that the destruction of Dharma knowledge and sacred spaces was part of a systematic, theologically motivated project of epistemic dominance, rather than an incidental byproduct of political conquest. Hindu experience and existence were arbitrated through Islamic and later Western colonial frameworks, which led to layered, ambiguous cultural trauma that continues to shape collective memory and subjectivity (Swarup, 2000). Neglecting this dimension risks erasing the theological rationale for these disruptions and obstructs pathways for open dialogue, repair, and healing within Hindu communities.

Transgenerational Legacies of Medieval Islamic Rule on Hindus

Islamic rule in Bhārata Varṣa developed gradually and lasted several centuries, shaping politics, culture, and social customs across the subcontinent. Hindus continually resisted for over 1,250 years of Islamic domination, and it took about 500 years of sustained warfare for Islamic

rule to be established in Bhārata(Lal, 1994; Wink, 1997). Hindus and Muslims mostly lived separately, a division reinforced by Islamic principles distinguishing between believers and non-believers, which made it easy to impose conversion, subjugation, or taxation on non-Muslims (Chandra, 2007).

In response to violence, trauma, suppression and adaptations, Hindu society developed defensive patriarchal strategies and rigid social boundaries, experiencing epistemic ruptures, disruptions in the transmission of cultural traditions, and a loss of collective belonging rooted in shared understandings of traditional coherence. Losses of community members compounded these effects through forced conversions, killings, and enslavement (Majumdar, 1951–1977). Despite centuries of conquest and efforts at Islamization, Bhārata Varṣa was never fully converted, with many Hindus often choosing death and displacement over conversion, and Bhārata Varṣa retained a Hindu majority alongside Muslim communities (Lal, 1993).

Much of the history of medieval India was curated in post-colonial India to advance a secular narrative, portraying the medieval period as one of grandeur and peace, with British colonization introducing divisive policies (Goel, 1990; Swarup, 2000). This narrative contrasts with historical and archaeological evidence and colloquial memories, which reveal that the divisiveness, conflicts, and vulnerabilities faced by Hindu communities were established during the Islamic period (Majumdar et al., 1974). The colonial period layered upon this foundation of Hindu trauma and resistance to external invasions.

To foster meaningful dialogue, repair, and restorative work for Hindu mental health and community distress, historical trauma, transgenerational impacts, and collective endurance must be acknowledged and honoured.

Portuguese Violence in India during the Medieval Period (1457–1750)

This pattern of political, theological, and epistemic violence in the medieval period on the Hindu community did not end with Islamic interventions. Portuguese colonization brought additional layers of violence and epistemic disruption to Bhārata Varṣa, arriving in 1498 and capturing Goa in 1510. Their colonial project encompassed imperial conquest and Christian evangelization, in which conversion was used both as a moral mission and as a tool of political control (Boxer, 1969; Subrahmanyam, 1993). Francis Xavier, a central figure in establishing the Goan Inquisition, consistently articulated evangelization as inseparable from colonial authority (Priolkar, 1961). In a 1545 letter to King João III of Portugal, Francis Xavier advocated for the Goan Inquisition, arguing that those who continued to follow the customs of local non-Christian communities posed a threat to both religious and royal authority (Priolkar, 1961).

The Goan Inquisition, Iconoclasm, and Transgenerational Legacies on Hindus

Before the Portuguese conquest, Goa was a pluralistic society with a Hindu majority alongside Buddhist, Jain, Muslim, and Jewish communities (Axelrod & Fuerch, 1998). Following Portuguese rule, a systematic campaign of religious persecution and cultural suppression was instituted through the Goan Inquisition (1560–1821) (Axelrod & Fuerch, 1996, 1998). The inquisition sought to impose Christian supremacy through legal, ecclesiastical, and governance practices, resulting in widespread temple destruction, prohibition of Hindu rituals, burning of Sanskrit texts, forced conversions, exile, and the criminalization of ancestral practices (Priolkar, 1961). Those who resisted conversion were subjected to public torture and execution, and Hindus and non-Catholic communities were forced to watch them, as a way of intimidation and to force conversion and compliance (Priolkar, 1961; Subrahmanyam,1993).

These measures dismantled religious institutions, disrupted social infrastructure, and severely harmed the intergenerational transmission of cultural and religious knowledge. Hindu communities were compelled to convert, migrate, or adopt strategies of concealment and outward conformity to survive (Axelrod & Fuerch, 1998). Adaptations to these violent experiences produced long-term consequences of cultural losses, survival fears, internalized shame, low self-esteem, psychological distress, and intragroup tensions and hostility, which continue to shape Hindu communities in Goa and across India.

Cumulative Impacts of Medieval Islamic Expansion and Portuguese Colonialism

Building on the historical overview of Islamic interventions and Portuguese colonialism in Bhārata Varṣa, it becomes evident that disruption occurred in layers over centuries, shaping collective memory, cultural continuity, and social cohesion. Both Islamic and Christian frameworks targeted Hindu civilization for land, wealth, intellectual capital, and theological expansion, targeting Hindus as dhimmi, kaffir, or heathen to justify coercion and conversion (Majumdar, 1977; Priolkar, 1961). The Islamic period in India laid the foundation for systemic disruptions to Hindu social cohesion and knowledge systems, and Portuguese interventions compounded these disruptions by layering Christian theological frameworks, destroying temples, texts, and cultural symbols, replacing indigenous education with missionary schooling designed to produce Christian subjects (Axelrod & Fuerch, 1998; Wink, 1997). Through the imposition of two distinct theological systems of Islam and Christianity, both external to Bhārata Varṣa and both enforced by violence, coercion, and suppression of indigenous practices, the collective integrity of Hindu society was systematically undermined. These interventions disrupted social networks, instilled fear and distrust in community relations, eroded traditional epistemologies,

and fractured the transmission of cultural knowledge, leaving lasting impacts on community cohesion, identity, intergenerational continuity and mental health.

Epistemic Injustices During the Medieval Period and Cultural Losses

These transformations were not only political and social but also fundamentally epistemological. Both Islamic expansion (7th century CE onward) and Christian colonialism (15th century CE onward) determined which knowledge systems and cultural institutions would be preserved, silenced, or subordinated (Feener, 2016). Islam and Christianity share important, overlapping epistemological elements rooted in Abrahamic monotheism, including revelation-based authority, scripture-centred knowledge, and universal truth claims, which were institutionalized in Bhārata Varṣa through state power (Assmann, 2010; Khan, 2009). Dharmic epistemologies, by contrast, emphasize svadharma, which designates the duties of an individual as per his svabhava (particular nature), aptitudes, and life stage, rather than universal moral duties and inner transformation, and adherence to revealed dogma (Mishra, 2025). Dharmic traditions are non-universalizing and contextual (Ranganathan, 2022). This orientation contrasts sharply with Abrahamic traditions, which institutionalized beliefs as universal. The contrast helps explain why layered historical interventions, Islamic and Christian, produced profound cultural and psychological harm. Hindu indigenous traditions were delegitimized and stigmatized, a process scholars describe as epistemic injustice or epistemicide, the systematic devaluation and erasure of entire knowledge systems (Fricker, 2007; Santos, 2014).

Impact of Epistemic Injustice on Mental Health

Understanding these cumulative layers of epistemic disruption in the Hindu community is essential for addressing the intergenerational trauma experienced by Hindu communities. The exclusion of medieval violence and civilizational continuity from trauma discourse constitutes a

form of epistemic injustice, rendering the historical suffering and endurance of Hindu people psychologically invisible within dominant knowledge systems (Khuc, 2020; Mullan, 2020).

Integrating historical scholarship with trauma theory allows clinicians to adopt a developmental understanding of the collective psyche of the subcontinent, in which centuries of religiously sanctioned violence and forced acculturation have become naturalized and continue to shape contemporary meaning-making, mental health, and intra-community interactions. Fricker's framework of epistemic injustice illuminates this process (Fricker, 2007). Testimonial injustice occurs when marginalized voices are not taken seriously, while hermeneutical injustice arises when communities lack accepted ways to interpret their own experiences. In the medieval period, Islamic and Christian interventions produced both wherein the Dharmic ways of knowing were devalued, institutions destroyed, and collective memory rewritten through foreign frameworks. Over time, these losses were internalized, and narratives of cultural inferiority became absorbed into self-understanding (Alexander et al., 2004). This historical trauma continues to manifest in contemporary Hindu communities as ambivalence towards ancestral culture, internalized shame, negotiated cultural visibility, and intra-family tensions.

When therapeutic frameworks fail to recognize these historical dimensions, distress may be mistaken for personal or cultural traits rather than for historically embedded, unresolved losses carried intergenerationally through stories, silences, and bodily memory (Eyerman, 2019). Fears of cultural extinction in ancestral geographies, such as Pakistan and Bangladesh, further weaken intergenerational continuity and the ability of communities to recognize themselves as cohesive cultural collectives (Mitra et al., 2025).

Epistemic Justice in Clinical Practice

Recognizing historical epistemic ruptures has significant clinical implications. Western therapeutic models often originate in ontologies that do not account for historical epistemic loss. Hindu clients may experience testimonial injustice when their cultural frameworks are dismissed, and hermeneutical injustice when suppressed cultural knowledge limits their ability to articulate distress. An epistemically just approach requires expanding interpretive frameworks to include culturally grounded modes of meaning-making, healing, and ethical reasoning. This approach mitigates epistemic injustice and supports resilience by reconnecting clients with suppressed or marginalized sources of cultural continuity. Clinicians can validate ancestral knowledge systems as legitimate sources of psychological insight and attend to intergenerational and collective trauma. It would also help to create collective spaces where cultural grief and epistemic loss can be named and processed. Situating individual distress within long histories of knowledge loss, community fissures, and understandings of the historical acculturation process enables culturally and ethically responsive care.

Medieval Acculturation, Mass Conversion, and Historical Trauma

Acculturation is often discussed in the context of Indigenous peoples adapting to Western modernity or immigrant populations adjusting to host societies. However, the concept can also be extended to medieval India, where Hindus shaped by pluralistic dharmic worldviews encountered and adapted to the monotheistic theological, legal, and political frameworks of Islamic and later Christian rule. In this context, acculturation did not occur through voluntary migration but under conditions of conquest, religious transformation, and shifting power structures, making it historically distinct yet theoretically comparable. Conversion occurred through coercion, political incentives, survival strategies, and Sufi and missionary movements, fragmenting communities previously organized around shared cosmologies, temple networks,

ritual systems, and kinship structures. As acculturation occurred under asymmetrical power, it generated varied responses, including resistance, separation, selective adaptation, assimilation, or marginalization (Berry, 1997). For some communities, it intensified endogamy and rigid boundary maintenance that served as a protective separation, while for others, conversion represented opportunities (Berry et al., 2011). Defensive survival strategies also contributed to internal fractures. Newly converted groups were often expected to demonstrate loyalty by distancing themselves from, or even showing hostility toward, their former communities. Sustained threat and humiliation become embedded in collective narratives, rituals, and social norms. Over time, these dynamics consolidated as mechanisms of belonging and protection, reinforcing separation from Hindu ancestral lineages and solidifying intergroup distrust (Prislin, Limbert, & Bauer, 2000).

The disruptions were not only social but also psychological, and their effects continued across generations. Later generations did not experience the events directly, but they inherited feelings of fear, mistrust, vigilance, and defensive pride, which shaped community identity and ongoing tensions (Brave Heart, 2003; Sotero, 2006). These memories are passed down through sacred places, rituals, and cultural practices (Jan Assmann, 2011), and are continually reshaped through education, historical writing, translation, and public discussion.

As Niranjana (1992) argues, knowledge production is never neutral. It reconstitutes identity and meaning, and narratives may amplify, mute, or criticize historical trauma, embedding it within contemporary identity politics. Medieval acculturation and mass conversions that happened under unequal and coercive conditions can be understood as forms of historical trauma and cultural trauma. Their impact did not end in that period but has continued to shape contemporary community memory and identity. The medieval period left a complex

legacy, marked by conflict, distrust, burdens of atrocities, historical and cultural trauma, and ongoing communal tensions, making its assessment inherently controversial due to the deep intertwining of religion, governance, and contemporary politics (Lal, 1992; Wink, 1990).

As articulated by Nandy (1983), the idea is not to replace Western practices with reactive cultural practices but to advance the mental health discipline by fostering genuine discussions on the history and cultural needs of the Hindu population. The objective is to make mental health practices socially and culturally rooted, thereby enhancing their theoretical value and applications across all communities.

Challenges with Hindu Identity Cultural Reclamation

Hindu identity has been historically regulated, systematized, and understood through external theological frames that, for centuries, sought to delegitimize and erase it (Goel, 1990; Swarup, 2000; Viswanathan, 1989; Wink, 1997). In both India and the diaspora, expressions of Hindu identity are often negotiated within dominant secular and Western discourses that mark Hindu self-assertion as divisive, rendering cultural reclamation a political act rather than a decolonial choice (Hall, 1996; Swarup, 2000). Colonial and orientalist scholarship construct Hindu society as oppressive, while positioning Islamic society as egalitarian and modernity as the benchmark of progress (Viswanathan, 1989). These narratives are entrenched in academic and public discourse, resulting in heightened scrutiny of Hindu cultural expression and the pathologization of Hindu cultural reclamation. Consequently, Hindus, particularly urban and in diasporic, academic, and clinical contexts, may experience pressure to dilute, justify, or distance themselves from their traditions to avoid being perceived as politically reactionary or socially divisive (Hall, 1996). Conflating Hindu identity reclamation with radicalism reflects a failure to distinguish cultural recovery from political weaponization (Juluri, 2024). What is often labelled

as radical nationalism in Hindu reclamation may instead represent a challenge to dominant political positions and an attempt to suppress Hindu identity that is rooted in a pluralistic civilization as inherently regressive or suspect (Juluri, 2020).

Identity scholarship suggests that reclaiming historically marginalized identities is a normative response to cultural suppression and epistemic violence, not evidence of extremism (Hall, 1996). As Abadian (2006) notes, reclaiming movements can aid healing, but they can also intensify unresolved grievances if not engaged carefully. The outcome depends on how historical memory is handled. Mohatt et al. (2014) explain that, while historical trauma is carried through collective narratives, these stories are interpretive yet rooted in real experiences of injustice.

The medieval period left a complex legacy of community conflicts, distrust, and cultural trauma, making its interpretation and Hindu reclamation controversial given the interwovenness of religion, governance, and politics. This calls for building community capacity and creating spaces for nuanced open dialogues so that Hindu identity reclamation is not reflexively dismissed as politicized or pathological. It requires acknowledging historical harms while engaging collective memory in ways that promote repair rather than perpetuate silencing, hostility, or exclusion.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined how medieval-period political conquest, iconoclasm, forced and strategic conversions, cultural suppression, and epistemic marginalization shaped Hindu civilizational continuity and collective psychology. The findings suggest that these processes were not isolated historical events but structurally embedded disruptions that altered knowledge transmission, social organization, identity formation, and intergenerational meaning-making.

First, the chapter established that Bhārata Varṣa represents a rare instance of continuous civilizational endurance. Despite prolonged conquest and epistemic suppression, Dharmic philosophies, ritual systems, sacred geographies, and embodied practices survived as living traditions. However, survival did not occur without cost. The damage and disruption of the dismantling of educational institutions, the destruction of temples, the killings and displacement of knowledge holders, and the interruption of guru–śiṣya lineages produced forms of epistemicide and cultural fragmentation.

Second, the findings indicate that historical trauma became embedded in collective memory and social structures. Patterns of hypervigilance, internalized shame, communal defensiveness, and identity insecurity can be understood as long-duration adaptations to repeated civilizational threat. Gendered violence and moral injury further shaped rigid social protections and community boundary-making.

Third, the chapter identified epistemic injustice as an ongoing structural issue. Hindu historical trauma remains largely absent from mainstream trauma discourse, contributing to testimonial silencing and hermeneutical gaps within clinical frameworks. When historical and civilizational contexts are ignored, adaptive survival strategies risk being misinterpreted as pathology and leading to the perpetuation of marginalization within mental health systems.

Finally, civilizational continuity, endurance and resilience emerged as an important finding. Hindu communities preserved philosophical depth, ritual continuity, and ethical frameworks grounded in dharma. Civilizational continuity functioned through ritual adaptation, narrative preservation, and intergenerational transmission. This continuity provides culturally rooted healing resources that address both individual and collective dimensions of trauma.

Overall, the findings necessitate that integrating medieval historical trauma and epistemic rupture into mental health theory is critical for culturally responsive counselling. A historically informed, culturally grounded, and attuned framework enables clinicians to move beyond reductionist models and toward approaches that recognize both injury and civilizational resilience.

Chapter 3: Discussion and Application

The final chapter of this capstone presents a practical synthesis of the research findings, guided by the central question: How has medieval-period violence in India created transgenerational suffering legacies that influence contemporary Hindu mental health, cultural identity and community? The purpose of this capstone has been to highlight the importance of situating Hindu mental health within historical and transgenerational contexts and to advocate for culturally and historically informed counselling practices.

This chapter is organized into six sections: discussion, practical application and counselling application, ethical considerations, limitations, future research, and conclusion. It synthesizes literature on historical and intergenerational influences on Hindu identity, social structures, and mental health, highlighting gaps in existing therapeutic approaches. Drawing on Indigenous trauma frameworks, the practical application section proposes a Hindu Historical Loss framework to guide culturally responsive counselling through narrative repair, embodied practices, and community reconnection. Ethical, methodological, and research considerations are addressed, emphasizing nuanced approaches, counsellor bias, marginalized voices, and the need for empirically grounded, culturally relevant studies to inform future interventions.

Discussion/Implications

This section highlights how medieval and colonial trauma continues to shape Hindu identity, social structures, and intergenerational experience. Survival-oriented patterns such as hypervigilance, rigidity, perfectionism, internalized oppression, identity fragmentation, and cultural ambivalence can often be understood as adaptive responses to historical trauma rather than individual deficits. Addressing these dynamics requires a decolonial multidisciplinary approach that integrates counselling psychology, history, religious studies, and postcolonial

scholarship. In the context of Hindu historical reclamation, decolonization is not merely about inserting Hindu perspectives into pre-existing colonial historiographical frameworks, but about transforming the epistemic structures that shaped those narratives in the first place. Efforts framed as inclusion or diversity may make space for Hindu voices within dominant interpretive models, yet leave intact the categories and assumptions through which Hindu traditions have long been interpreted. A genuinely decolonial reclamation involves rejuvenating Hindu knowledge systems and civilizational self-understandings that were marginalized or reframed under Islamic and colonial rule. It is therefore not merely about gaining representation within established narratives, but about reconstituting the conceptual ground on which history itself is written and understood (Nye, 2019; Shukla, 2022).

Impacts on Hindu Social Organization

The historical oppression and violence of the medieval period led to the rigidification of the Hindu society. Hindu social categories, which were originally fluid with social and occupational mobility, became rigid as defensive protective measures against the prolonged violence and conversions of the Hindu communities. As the ecosystems that enabled fluidity were decimated, rigidity hardened and was crystallized into fixed categories by British colonization (Dirks, 2001; Sagar & Matolia, 2025). This transformed the social structure of Hindu society, with lasting social consequences. The maladaptive aspects of society have to be addressed through a trauma lens with empathy and compassion for what has come to pass and the present realities.

Impacts on Gendered Socialization

Repeated experiences of ensvalement, abductions, physical and sexual violence during the medieval period intensified fears and anticipatory threats and set in gendered socialization

patterns in which women's bodies became linked with honour, community survival, and continuity. This led to protection-oriented restrictive practices that later became normalized as tradition (Das, 2007). Hindu men's gender socialization was similarly shaped by the collective trauma of powerlessness, normalizing emotional suppression, vigilance, and control. When unprocessed, these trauma-based behaviours increased the likelihood of familial violence (Volkan, 2001). Colonial governance entrenched these dynamics by dismantling Hindu relational systems and codifying rigid gender roles through law and education, and embedding trauma responses into everyday social life (Das, 2007). These dynamics continue to shape the lived experiences of Hindu women, who may carry intergenerational imprints of fear, hyper-responsibility, and self-surveillance. In therapy, approaching gendered experiences with cultural humility is essential, recognizing both harm and resilience of restrictive gender norms that often functioned as survival mechanisms to external trauma, rather than cultural intrinsics.

Impacts of Epistemic Losses and Injustice

Hindus experienced profound epistemic injustices during the medieval period, as Islamic and later Christian interventions devalued Dharmic knowledge systems, destroyed institutions, and imposed universalizing frameworks. These interventions produced testimonial and hermeneutical injustices where communities were denied authority over their own experiences, and historical violence was silenced or naturalized. Over generations, this led to internalized shame, ambivalence toward ancestral culture, acculturation at the cost of self, and relational tensions. In counselling, recognizing these historic epistemic disruptions is critical and necessitates incorporating an epistemically just approach that validates ancestral knowledge, situates distress within historical trauma, and supports cultural mourning.

Internalized Oppression, Overperformance, and Survival-Oriented Identities

Internalized oppression among Hindu populations reflects the psychological imprint of long-term stigmatization and epistemic hierarchy. In urban, Western-educated, and diaspora communities, it often manifests as a privileging of Western norms and values, the English language, and model minority strategies that emphasize academic achievement and professional success as means of securing safety and validation. High expectations around performance, particularly in engineering, medicine, or technical fields, function as survival strategies in environments where cultural legitimacy feels conditional. Internal oppression has resulted in many Hindus being disconnected from their local languages, unable to have a nuanced understanding of their history, mocking ancestral traditions, viewing through the lens of their historical oppressor,s and a tendency to accept Hindu traditions when validated by the West (Lee, 2021; Swarup, 2000). While adaptive, these strategies embed chronic stress, fawning and functional freeze responses, hyper-responsibility, and self-worth contingent on productivity, reinforcing nervous system dysregulation and limiting emotional flexibility, and internal unsafety that continues to seek safety through the oppressors' validation. Counselling approaches that name and challenge internalized oppression can help clients reclaim cultural knowledge on their own terms and reduce shame-based overperformance.

Identity Fragmentation and Cultural Ambivalence

Centuries of cultural suppression have fragmented Hindu communities. Contemporary Hindus, diaspora and those in India, especially those who are urban and Western-educated, navigate tensions between Westernization, secularization, and ancestral traditions, often internalizing a lens that devalues their heritage (Viswanathan, 1989). Shame, anxiety, and fear of being perceived as divisive or backward can accompany attempts to reclaim cultural identity. Missionary school education and Westernized curriculum frequently marginalize local

languages, Hindu knowledge systems, and traditional ways of life, creating generational knowledge gaps (Bombay et al., 2020; Yehuda et al., 2016). These tensions are intensified by the distortion of the Hindu society in global platforms that obscure the violence of Islam and Christianity in Hindu history, and the lack of Hindu advocacy to articulate the invisible but felt tensions, discomforts and dissonances around cultural identity (Viswanathan, 1989). Second- and third-generation Hindus often struggle to carry traditions forward, experience cultural dilution or outsider status, and alternate between pride and discomfort, curiosity and distancing, or anxiety around cultural expression. This can be understood as an ambiguous loss, in which ancestral traditions and collective meaning are partially lost or delegitimized, yet remain emotionally present (Boss, 1999). Counsellors can contextualize distress as transgenerational adaptive responses to historical trauma rather than as individual orientations (Bombay et al., 2020; Yehuda et al., 2016). Interventions can help clients acknowledge unrecognized losses, reclaim cultural meaning, and navigate identity without pressure to idealize or conform to tradition.

Tools to Assess Hindu Loss: Parallels from Indigenous Frameworks

An attempt has been made to assess the historical trauma within Hindu populations using the work of Whitbeck et al. (2004) and Evans-Campbell (2008) in Indigenous communities. While the systematic empirical studies for Hindus are limited, the parallels between the cumulative, intergenerational impacts of colonial violence on Indigenous peoples and the experiences of Hindus during the medieval period are striking. Recognizing these parallels provides a foundation for culturally informed research, mental health assessment, and interventions that honour the enduring legacies of historical trauma. It allows for the inference of comparable patterns of collective grief, disrupted social structures, and embodied trauma in Hindu communities. Drawing on Whitbeck et al.'s Historical Loss Scale (2004), the following

domains reflect cumulative, collective losses experienced by Hindus during medieval regimes, many of which remain unresolved due to silencing, denial, or forced assimilation:

- **Loss of Sacred Geography** (destruction or desecration of temples, pilgrimage sites, shrines, and sacred ecological places)
- **Loss of Ritual Continuity** (interruption of pūjā, samskāras, ancestral and death rites)
- **Loss of Ancestors Without Closure** (mass killings, enslavement, unmarked deaths, abduction and trafficking of Hindu women and children)
- **Loss of Gendered Safety and Dignity** (sexual violence, concubinage, forced marriages, sex trafficking)
- **Loss of Masculine Authority and Protection Roles** (emasculation through defeat, loss of culturally sanctioned roles, enslavement, conversion, moral injury)
- **Loss of Language, Script, and Knowledge Systems** (destruction of temples, ashrams, gurukuls, libraries, lineages of transmission)
- **Loss of Communal Autonomy and Governance** (replacement of dharmic law with imposed legal regimes, jizya imposition, treatment as Dhimmis)
- **Loss of Collective Voice and Historical Narrative** (erasure, minimization, or criminalization of memory)
- **Loss of Intergenerational Trust and Safety** (cultural suppression, necessity of secrecy, loss of community coherence, ingroup betrayals and compliance for survival)
- **Loss of Cosmological Confidence** (fracturing of faith in ṛta/dharma as a stable order)

These losses align with Evans-Campbell's (2008) criteria for historical trauma, namely, affecting large populations, generating sustained collective distress, and being perpetrated by external powers with religious-civilizational destructive intent. In parallel with the Historical

Loss Associated Symptoms framework (Whitbeck et al., 2004), these historical losses may manifest as embodied and relational patterns, even without explicit awareness of them. Internalized expressions, often seen in women, include chronic vigilance, fear, shame, emotional constriction, over-responsibility, masking, and burdened experiences of life. Externalized expressions, often seen in men, include suppressed rage, moral injury, hyper-control, and heightened threat sensitivity. As research on Indigenous populations demonstrates, the patterns are not reducible to individual PTSD diagnoses but reflect the interaction between historical loss and contemporary stressors (Whitbeck et al., 2004; Evans-Campbell, 2008).

Counselling Implications

Indigenous historical trauma research provides a useful conceptual entry point. It can serve as a preliminary guide, but it cannot replace frameworks grounded in Hindu histories, epistemologies, and lived experiences. In counselling practice, this framework shifts assessment towards a historically contextualized understanding of identity, attachment, and cultural meaning-making. Naming these patterns of intergenerational trauma can help reduce internalized shame and show that present distress is connected to historical and collective experiences, not just personal psychological issues or cultural traits. Integrating historical suffering caused by Islamization and colonization with Hindu resilience, civilizational continuity, histories of resistance, including those of women rulers, supports challenging entrenched narratives about Hindu culture and mental health in the community. Incorporating concepts such as karma, moksha, and kāla, ancestral obligations, and balancing Pancha bhutas can offer culturally relevant ways to repair and restore impacted cultural meaning-making and rebuild trust within communities. In this way, creating and using a Hindu Historical Loss framework can serve as a

decolonizing approach, placing Hindu experiences and suffering within their own historical and cultural context and supports ethical and broader therapeutic reach.

Ethical Considerations

There are significant gaps in historical and collective trauma scholarship concerning Hindu populations, particularly regarding medieval violence and its long-term psychological consequences. Despite documented evidence of cultural suppression, religious persecution, gendered violence, and social destabilization, Hindu collective trauma has received limited attention within trauma theory and counselling psychology.

Ethical practice in this context requires a nuanced, non-generalizing approach that centers the voices of those historically marginalized or silenced, remaining attentive to counsellor bias, and the influence of media heuristics that continue to shape dominant narratives about Hindu identity and history. Recognizing sociohistorical factors helps clinicians understand clients' experiences, provide culturally responsive care, and create spaces for grieving and acceptance.

Limitations

While this capstone explores historical trauma and its impact on Hindu cultural identity and mental health, some limitations should be acknowledged. Research specifically examining transgenerational trauma in Hindu populations is limited. Much of the existing literature on Hindus stems from the British colonial period and often categorizes Hindus as regressive or as part of the broader South Asian" population (Dirks, 2001; Nandy, 1983). This obscures the unique historical, cultural, and psychological experiences of Hindu communities, as well as the bias of the missionaries and British-funded writers who authored studies of Hindu communities. The studies overlook important differences in worldview and epistemology between Dharmic traditions and Abrahamic religions (Malhotra, 2011).

The capstone relies on historical studies, secondary analyses, or frameworks developed for other communities, such as Indigenous or Holocaust-affected populations. These approaches provide helpful frameworks for examining Hindu history, but some conclusions are inferential rather than evidence-based. It is also worth noting that Hindu communities are diverse, and the experiences of one subgroup may not reflect those of others. Therefore, the findings presented here offer a broad perspective rather than prescriptive guidance for all Hindu communities.

The sensitive nature of the subject, alongside concerns about religious persecution, internalized oppression, and limited historical and cultural awareness, can constrain open discussion. Fears of being perceived as regressive or politically divisive may further limit the depth of qualitative insights. This capstone is primarily conceptual and lacks primary data, and serves to address this critical gap in mainstream trauma literature and the need for culturally specific research on the Hindu population.

Future Research

Future research that incorporates Hindu clients' experiences, community narratives, and clinical interventions would strengthen the evidence base and provide more concrete guidance for culturally informed counselling practices. Developing Hindu-specific and Dharmic-informed trauma frameworks grounded in primary qualitative and quantitative data through community-based participatory research, clinical case studies, and narrative inquiries across diverse regional, sectarian, and diasporic contexts would be particularly valuable.

Further research is needed to explore how medieval and colonial experiences uniquely shaped Hindu identity, relationships, and psychological distress, rather than subsuming them under broader South Asian categories. Longitudinal and intergenerational studies could clarify

the transmission of trauma and resilience, and the role of culturally rooted interventions in supporting healing.

Conclusion: Historical and Cultural Trauma in Practice

This capstone explores the underexamined link between Hindu history and contemporary mental health, situating psychological distress within centuries of invasion, persecution, cultural suppression, and epistemicide. It highlights the scarcity of literature on Hindu historical trauma and advocates for counselling practices that incorporate collective, historical, and cultural dimensions, while also emphasizing the need to develop Hindu-specific tools and frameworks for assessment and intervention. Clinicians are encouraged to validate ancestral losses, reframe survival-oriented behaviours as historically adaptive, and support nervous system regulation through culturally congruent practices, reducing shame and internalized colonial narratives in clients with Hindu cultural ancestry. Addressing historical trauma requires a multidisciplinary approach, reflection on counsellor bias, and attention to social, cultural, and epistemological contexts, fostering integration, continuity, and resilience grounded in collective belonging. Despite limited empirical research, this work contributes to a growing dialogue on historically informed, culturally responsive, and decolonial approaches, offering guidance for practitioners and directions for future study.

This capstone concludes with a guiding prayer from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (c. 800–600 BCE), reflecting the civilizational ethos of Dharma:

Asato mā sad gamaya – Lead me from untruth to truth

Tamaso mā jyotir gamaya – Lead me from darkness to light

Mṛtyor mā amṛtaṁ gamaya – Lead me from death to immortality

This invocation embodies the movement from ignorance to knowledge, suffering to liberation, and mortality to enduring truth. It echoes the aim of this work to engage with Hindu historical and epistemic legacies in a way that fosters ethical renewal, cultural continuity, and collective insight.

ಲೋಕಾಃ ಸಮಸ್ತ ಾಃ ಸುಖಿನೋ ಭವಂತು (May all beings in all worlds be content).

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