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INTERPRETING THE LEGACY OF PARTITION IN THE SUBCONTINENT: INDIAN AND PAKISTANI PERSPECTIVES

ABSTRACT   The twentieth century partitions, it has been argued, have been essentially the by-products of three interlinked global developments: (a) decolonisation; (b) democratisation and the (c) Cold War dynamics. The partition of the Indian subcontinent, in particular, bore the imprint of the maelstrom produced by the intertwining of these three forces. The process of partition in South Asia did not only involve simple division and reorganisation of territories but was accompanied by devolution and indigenisation of political institutions and governance, placing partition at the heart of the process of nation-state formation. In this sense, the *longue duree* process of the partitioning of the subcontinent has continued to cast its long shadow over the nation-building process leading to internal discrepancies and the development of regional dynamics, often competitive and conflictual in nature.

Keywords: Partition; India; Pakistan; ethnicity; security; communalism; South Asia; imperialism; conflict

The British poet W.H. Auden captured some of the drama surrounding boundary commissioner Cyril Radcliffe's partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 in his poem 'Partition,' written in 1966:

> He got down to work, to the task of settling the fate
> Of millions. The maps at his disposal were out of date
> And the Census Returns almost certainly incorrect,
> But there was no time to check them, no time to inspect
> Contested areas. The weather was frightfully hot,
> And a bout of dysentery kept him constantly on the trot,
> *But in seven weeks it was done, the frontiers decided,*
> *A continent for better or worse divided.*[1]

The general consensus across the spectrum (while differing in apportioning the share of the blame) on the partition of India in 1947 is that it was a traumatic and catastrophic event continuing to cast its tragic spell in the course of time. The fact that the process of decolonisation and partition happened simultaneously generated much reflection upon the nature of the competing nationalisms in the region, and the location of "difference" between the two sides of the border.

Many scholars have traced the origin of Indo-Pakistan conflict to the ethno-national rivalry between Hindus and Muslims who became increasingly politicised communities during the colonial period, and to the emergence of the "two-nation" theory and the concept of a separate "Muslim homeland" and its realisation in 1947. One scholar has even traced back the ideological and cultural roots of today's Pakistan to the protohistoric Indus Valley/Harappan Civilisation, different from an essentially Indic or *Gangetic* based Indian civilisation.[2] The bitter legacy of partition along with large-scale human displacement and unspeakable misery affected bilateral relations in the immediate years after partition and independence. When the pre-1947 two-nations theory was married to the post-1947 theory of India's hegemonic threat to Pakistan, the state ideology and policy required the exacerbation of differences with India.[3] As one analyst argues:

> *[T]he short-term, day-to-day policies of India and Pakistan are made within the context of the long-term norm of behavior that exists between the two rivals... this norm, or equilibrium level of behavior, has been characterized by high levels of sustained hostility punctuated by an intense ideological, religious, and political rivalry. This underlying norm provides the context for day-to-day foreign policy behavior; the short-run adjustments of foreign policy behavior occur within this context.*[4]

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[1]　W.H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. E. Mendelson, New York 1976, p. 604.

[2]　For details see, A. Ahsan, *The Indus Saga and the Making of Pakistan*, Karachi 1996.

[3]　A. Kapur, 'Major Powers and the Persistence of the India-Pakistan Conflict' in T.V. Paul (ed.), *The India-Pakistan Conflict. An Enduring Rivalry*, Cambridge 2005, p. 142.

[4]　S. Rajmaira, 'Indo-Pakistani Relations: Reciprocity in Long-Term Perspective,' *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (1997), p. 549, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/0020-8833.00056>.

Pakistanis excluded the possibility of accommodation and acceptance of Indian regional leadership as a means of ensuring their own national well-being. After all, they defined their very rationale for existence as being "not-India" and the heritage of conflict had been intensified by orders of magnitude through the horrors of partition.[5] As Yasmeen and Dixit (1995) comment in their study:

The dominant view of India among the Pakistani elite is one of an expansionist, arrogant and bullying state that did not accept the idea of partition and/or the basis on which the partition took place... India is credited with an uncontrollable urge to destroy Pakistan and reintegrate it with the larger India or at least to subjugate Pakistan and relegate it to subordinate status... The dominant view of Pakistan within the Indian elite is one of a theocratic, religiously fanatic and militaristic state... seen as denying its cultural links with the Indian civilization... At the same time, it is accorded a sense of vengeance which motivates Pakistan to undermine the secular basis of Indian polity by meddling in Kashmir, Punjab, and India's financial nerve center, Bombay.[6]

WAS THE INDIAN PARTITION UNIQUE?

The question is whether one should treat the subcontinent's partition in 1947 as a unique event or perhaps a comparative analysis of the process is possible. Twenty-four years later, South Asia would witness yet another partition when the state of Pakistan split in 1971 and Bangladesh emerged as a new nation state. The collapse of old polities and the redistribution and reorganisation of fragmented portions into new units is an essential part of the state-formation process in all parts of the world. The recent problems in Ukraine indicate that this is not a typical problem related to poor governance or state failure in underdeveloped and developing parts of the globe. But partitions in most cases have their own distinctive character and not only involve simple division and reorganisation of territories but are also accompanied by devolution and indigenisation of political and governing powers. Its advocates would often recommend partition as the ideal strategy for resolving an ethnic conflict is to intervene and take partition to its logical conclusion by dividing a country along its communal battle lines and helping to make the resulting territories ethnically homogeneous through organized population transfers. Partition, however, has its own sordid history, not arising as a means of realising national self-determination, but imposed as a way for outside powers to unshoulder colonies or divide up spheres of influence, essentially a strategy of divide and quit.[7]

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[5]   T.P. Thornton, 'Pakistan: Fifty Years of Insecurity' in S.S. Harrison, P.H. Kreisberg, D. Kux (eds.), *India and Pakistan: The First Fifty Years*, Washington DC 1999, p. 171 (*Woodrow Wilson Center Series*).

[6]   S. Yasmeen, A. Dixit, *Confidence-Building Measures in South Asia*, Washington DC 1995, pp. 10-11 (*Occasional Paper (Henry L. Stimson Center)*, 24).

[7]   R. Kumar, 'The Troubled History of Partition,' *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 1 (1997), at <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/20047907>.

According to Willem van Schendel, twentieth century partitions actually fit as by-products of three developments: (a) decolonisation; (b) democratisation, and the (c) Cold War, the partitioning of India, in particular, bearing the imprint of all these three processes.[8] In a longue durée view, the 1947 partition, from the perspective of decolonisation, would be situated between the separation of Burma (1937) and the creation of Bangladesh as an independent state in 1971-72. The official nationalist discourse in Bangladesh, in fact, does not attach too much importance to the partition of 1947.[9] Scholars, in particular Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, remind us of the long term process involved in the partition and ask us to stretch our understanding of "partition violence" to include this long, and in some sense ongoing, bureaucratic violence of postcolonial nationhood, and to place partition at the heart of a twentieth century of border-making and nation-state formation.[10]

But the story of partition is often integrated within the broad narratives of triumph and glory of the respective nation-states in South Asia. While the partition continues to be looked upon as a monumental tragedy in terms of destruction and displacement, as it becomes more distant in time there is an attempt at official levels to reduce it to a "micro-script" within the "meta-narratives" of nationalism. Nevertheless, its legacy still continues to affect the nation-building process in the subcontinent.

THE LEGACY OF PARTITION

One could identify the influence of the partition legacy in at least four major areas of the state-building project in countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. These are: (1) attempted territorialisation of the nation states; (2) defining identity of the nation state; (3) search for a development discourse; and (4) addressing the state-nation gaps in the post colonial state

Territorialisation of the newly created nation states includes generating an idealised notion of a bounded national territory with a clearly defined space inhabited by a community of citizens. In an exuberant display of nationalism, post-colonialism and machismo, the flag-lowering ceremony at the Wagah border between India and Pakistan is accompanied by a ritual of competitive marching and stomping by fully-uniformed men from the Pakistan Rangers and the Indian Border Security Force (BSF). Each side flexes its strength in an opulent show of border aggression.[11] Such shows often hide the fact that such borders are neither secure nor sacrosanct. Crossing over is a daily

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[8]   W. van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia*, London 2005, p. 26 (*Anthem South Asian Studies*).

[9]   Tan Tai Yong, G. Kudaisya, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*, London 2000, p. 5 (*Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Asia*).

[10]   V.F.-Y. Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of on Modern South Asia. Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*, New York 2007 (*Cultures of History*).

[11]   N. Purewal, 'The Indo-Pak Border: Displacements, Aggressions and Transgressions,' *Contemporary South Asia*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2003), p. 11, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0958493042000194363>.

occurrence and not all of those who cross are "infiltrators" or "illegal citizens" having nefarious designs or desiring to inflict terror-related violence and damage. Ambiguities regarding territories and citizenship in post-partitioned South Asia and undefined borderlands stand out as unresolved issues crying out for attention. Nor are such issues related to India and Pakistan only. India and Bangladesh, for instance, have decided to complete this year the long-pending task of integrating the respective *Chitmahal* enclaves within their own territories, giving an option to the residents of the enclaves to choose their citizenship. Migration and unofficial trade continues as a matter of daily occurrence in eastern South Asia bypassing the post-partition borders delineated by state authorities.

Discourses of sub-national movements also form part of the story surrounding identity politics in South Asia. Various versions of sub-national politics are discernible in all countries of South Asia. While India has (and continues to) experience separatist movements among the Nagas and other tribal groups in Northeast India; sections of the Sikhs in Punjab; Sunni groups in the Kashmir valley and Tamil localism; in Pakistan, sub-nationalism becomes evident through the Sindhi, Muhajir, and of course the Taliban movements throwing challenges and offering alternatives to the broad state sponsored nationalistic narrative produced from Islamabad.

However, the reality of a post-partitioned space that does not conform to the idealised notion of a bounded national territory with a clearly defined community of citizens generates tensions between the statist notions of legitimate national territoriality and the reality of a non-national space which creates consequences ranging from border firings to riots. It has been argued that policies premised on the fiction of hard national borders that are fundamentally at odds with ground realities cannot provide the foundation for a stable legitimate political order.[12]

The second process is related to the formation of new and contentious ethnic landscapes in the hinterlands, together with the troublesome and amorphous borderlands, providing the momentum for construction of highly centralised state formations in South Asia. This has resulted in a distorted form of federalism. Grievances often translated and aggravated into violent challenges and the centralised state retaliating with more intensive and damage causing violence. India's use of force to crush Sikh separatism in Punjab, its policy of using force in various internal conflict zones, for instance, have been justified in the context of threat to the basic concept of its nationhood. Pakistan, on the other hand, became an authoritarian military-bureaucratic polity, in which Sindhi ethnic assertion and Bengali ethno-nationalism confronted the Punjabi--centered and Urdu-speaking nation-building process. The partition continues to dominate the nation's mindset, as reflected in the imagined fear of the Indian conspiracy to further dismember Pakistan. Challenges to the nation-building process have led to the emergence of a virulent militant political Islam and centrifugal challenges from the res-

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[12] For details see, S. Baruah, 'The Partition's Long Shadow: The Ambiguities of Citizenship in Assam, India,' *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 6 (2009), pp. 593-606, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13621020903309581>.

tive provinces of Baluchistan or the northern territories in Pakistan-controlled Jammu and Kashmir region.

Thirdly, both India and Pakistan had adopted developmental ideology focused on a state-led initiative and control. Such policymaking, while advocating the new rhetoric of "self reliance" and autonomy, in fact, *stretched state bureaucracies to their widest extent to date, and, simultaneously, revealed new weaknesses and opened up new opportunities for corruption that stretched into the postcolonial period.*[13] One could perhaps recall the Pakistani scholar Hamza Alavi's conceptualisation of Pakistan being an "overdeveloped state." Such ideas, however, did not always successfully address the issues of development and redistribution in a proper manner, leading to a distorted or top down development paradigm creating more fissures.

In this connection, one could perhaps mention the model of "Low Intensity Democracies," trying to seek a balance between social mobilisation from below and conservative dominance at the top. Many nation-states in South Asia could be characterised by this model, as the respective governments are often tempted to adopt illiberal policies and extraordinary measures to ensure elite domination and tackle the resulting security-related threats.[14] Most states in Asia are also subject to societal conflicts originating from primordial instincts or loyalties (particularly ethno-religious sentiments) shared by groups or communities which often turn into major challenges for the states in the form of insurgency-dominated secessionist movements or into movements threatening to alter existing state structures.

Ultimately, the partition perhaps increasingly linked up the two independent nation states in their respective search of identity. While it is true that issues of identity have also played an important role in shaping Indian attitudes to Pakistan, especially in the wake of resurgent Hindu nationalism, the implications are quite different for India.[15] In reality, much of Indo-Pakistan bilateralism continues to be shaped by dominant perceptions of national identity. It has been argued, for instance:

Identity has been particularly central to Pakistan's politics and, more important, Pakistani identity has largely evolved not in terms of any indigenous cultural or civilizational values but in contradistinction to the idea of India. In India too, identity mattered […] *However, India does not depend on identity for legitimacy, stability, and survival in the manner that Pakistan does. Moreover, Indian identity is not dependent on Pakistan. Therefore the implications of identity for conflict and peace are somewhat different in the two countries; and identity plays a more central role in Pakistan than it does in India.*[16]

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[13] T.C. Sherman, W. Gould, S. Ansari, 'From Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947-1970,' *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2010), p. 3.

[14] For details, see B. Gills, J. Rocamora, 'Low Intensity Democracy,' *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (1992), pp. 501-523.

[15] F. Shaikh, *Making Sense of Pakistan*, New York 2009, p. 185.

[16] V. Nasr, 'National Identities and the India-Pakistan Conflict' in T.V. Paul (ed.), *The India-Pakistan Conflict...*, p. 179.

This has, however, led to Pakistan facing a series of crises, bringing the future of the nation state to a question. A sense of fatigue and despondency regarding the fate of the country seems to have gripped the nation. Roedad Khan, a retired senior diplomat in Pakistan, wrote in 1997:

Pakistan today presents an image of a country plagued by political, ethnic, and sectarian divisions. Never before has the public faith in the country's future sunk so low […]. The country as a whole appears to be adrift, lacking confidence about its future.[17]

CONCLUSION

According to David Gilmartin, if partition is not to be viewed as the end of South Asia's history, after which only the histories of separate nation-states have mattered, then historians must continue the search for a narrative of partition that defines it not just as a product of a deal between the Congress, the British, and the Muslim League, but as a key moment in a much longer and ongoing history linking the state and the arenas of everyday conflict.[18] But it has also been alternatively argued that the International Relations scholars making "occidental" attempts to explain conflict between India and Pakistan in terms of westernised models often end in failure as they do not analyse the indigenous issues and concerns in a proper manner.[19] While India projecting as a "rising power" continues to confront its own problems, her neighbour faces essential differences and contesting sub-nationalisms within Pakistan which could not be properly covered by the drape of statist Islamist project. As argued by Ashok K. Behuria, the force of centripetal Islamic appeal is offset by the centrifugal pulls of regional, ethnic and linguistic identities. The myopic management of politics of the state by the ruling elite complicates the process of nation-building and contributes to the fragility of the "Pakistani" nationhood.[20]

The process of partition led to internal discrepancies and evolution of regional dynamics, often competitive and conflict-prone in nature. While intermittent conflicts along with continuous tension and rivalry have been the main features of the bilateral relationship, it has not been a case of unrelenting hostility on both sides. There have been "bright spots" connecting the two countries at various official and non-official levels of engagement. The betterment of ties has become particularly important as regional dynamics has ceased to be a "zero-sum" game for either country in the post-Cold period as a "failed" or "radicalised and balkanised" Pakistan would

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[17]   R. Khan, *Pakistan, a Dream Gone Sour*, New York 1997, p. 201.

[18]   D. Gilmartin, 'Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative,' *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (1998), p. 1092, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2659304>.

[19]   A. Mattoo, 'India-Pakistan Relations: Towards a Grand Reconciliation' in S. Das, S. Chakrabarti (eds.), *Challenges of Nation-building in Developing Societies. Vignettes from West and South Asia*, Kolkata 2009, p. 103 (*Monograph (University of Calcutta. Department of History)*, 30).

[20]   A.K. Behuria, 'Myth of the Monolith: The Challenge of Diversity in Pakistan,' *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2005), p. 61.

not only jeopardise any prospects of peace and stability in South Asia but would also become a terrible global problem. The legacy of partition in this connection continues to affect identity formation in the subcontinent. While the memories shared by the survivors and victims of partition fade out with the passage of time, morphed versions of the legacy continue to get projected as a part of the South Asian nation-building exercise.

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