

# Different Political Trajectories: India and Pakistan

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MACEO BRUCE DARBY, AUG 9 2013

### Why Have the Political Trajectories of India and Pakistan Been So Different?

#### Introduction

At the stroke of midnight on the 14th and 15th of August 1947, both Pakistan and India exited British colonial rule and became newly independent nations. This shared timeline has often led to them being categorized or compared against each other, but they are, and have from inception, been two differing nations. Separated from each other along sectarian lines, both have undergone differing political trajectories ever since. Politically, India has been able to continue along its course with democracy intact, minus a brief state of emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi (1975-77). In contrast, empirical studies by Freedom House (cited in Lokniti 2008:13) express that Pakistani citizens (81%) are so disillusioned with democratic politics that they are much less averse to military rule than Indians (41%), as borne out by its history of military coups in 1958, 1969, 1977, and 2009 (Oldenburg 2010). Many commentators have explained these differences as being cultural and linked to the propensity of Islam towards autocracy and incompatibility with democracy (Huntingdon 1997), and others for Hinduism's affinity to democracy (Kothari 1988-155:156). This has led to much subsequent conjecture in regards to religion's role within the differing dynamics of both nations' trajectories.

Within this essay, I will argue that the differing political trajectories are not due to individual factors such as religion but an amalgamation of societal and economic contextual variances. This will focus on Pakistan's historical journey, using India's trajectory as a means to inform, contrast, and illuminate key variances and points of note. The narrative will focus on five key factors: 1) history leading to partition including cultural, geographic and postcolonial endowment, 2) the development of identity within the sub-continent, 3) leadership and political society, 4) security, and 5) the role of international actors.

#### Historical Narrative: Culture, Geography and Postcolonial Endowment

British colonialism's shaping of the boundaries of both Pakistan and India were major factors in the differing trajectories of both nations (Anderson 2012). The Indian subcontinent prior to British colonization was a disparate group of independent states, dominated by the rule of the Muslim Mughals. British colonialism of the region led to the Muslim community feeling a loss of primacy and later perceived subservience and oppression by Hindu dominance in the regional social hierarchy (Ambedkar 1945:Ch.III). From the offset of partition, both Pakistan and India felt aggrieved with their boundaries, as mass migration and the frenetic speed of change created a tumultuous and bloody period. Pakistan felt both resentful of its share of boundaries and the Indian occupation of Kashmir, Junagadh, and Hyderabad. This created a lasting fear, intensifying the divorce of the lands and people of India and sowing the seeds of mutual distrust which has shaped their relationship ever since (Anderson 2012, Jaffrelot 2004).

With the partition, Pakistan faced many economic, political, and structural impediments. Muslims within the Indian sub-continent were dispersed predominately in the North and East, these populations forming the bulk of West-Pakistan and East-Pakistan (now Bangladesh) (Brown 1985). As a result, this separated in two formations by not only language and ethnicity but also physical geographical distance at either ends of India without a direct land route between them. This separation required, as Cohen (2004:39) points out, "perfect Indian co-operation" in order to

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work. However, much of the re-allocation of resources failed to materialize as Indian leadership withheld the transfer, owing in part to mutual antipathy for one another (Cohen 2004, Anderson 2012).

Pakistan was faced with the creation of a new nation state and many of its institutions, be they civic or military, as it sought to create a new non-Delhi direction. India maintained much of its own bureaucratic apparatus, expertise, and capability within its civic and military institutions (Oldenburg 2010). The weakness of Pakistan's civic institutions affected its ability to carry out the rule of law and contain other powerful internal actors. Indian institutional strength in contrast was evident in regards to the fierce independence of its judiciary, as seen by the manner in which the courts overturned Indira Gandhi's emergency rule. This enabled India to maintain an institutional counterbalance to political parties and elites (Cohen 2004).

The political endowment, education, and experience of democracy inherited by Pakistan were not consistent with that which was adopted by India. Britain excluded Pakistan from most of the democratic practices that were being undertaken in India, due to its later subjugation and the role of the Punjab and North-West-Frontier Province (NWFP), as militarized buffers against other regional powers (Jaffrelot 2004). The British military recruited heavily from both the Punjab and NWFP as they were seen as "martial races." At partition, almost 97% of the Pakistan army was made up of Punjabis (77%) and Pashtuns (19.5%), whereas they represented 25% and 8% of the total population. The legacy of this securitization of large parts of West Pakistan impacted on its political culture, as it created familiarity with autocratic governance and an extremely influential military (Jaffrelot 2002, Cohen 2004).

India's political endowment was much more orderly with a much larger experience of democracy. Prior to Britain's exit, their policy from 1882 onwards actively focused on creating the devolution of power, ceding more and more autonomy to indigenous Indians, albeit under the oversight of their leadership. This led to the India Act of 1935, which established at the provincial level, a degree of parliamentary democracy. This laid the foundation of much of what was to be later codified into the Indian Constitution in 1950, with 250 of its 380 articles being drawn from it (Jaffrelot 2002). The Indian political discourse started much earlier than in Pakistan. The Indian National Congress (Congress) formed in 1885 and began to partake in the Indian political scene formally in elections and with other groups/individuals in creating a political discourse for Indian independence (Oldenburg 2010).

## Identity

Pakistan was carved out of India as a homeland for Muslims fearful of being under the perceived dominion of Hindu majority rule, excluding itself from basic democratic (majority rule) principles. Due to its lack of political, civic, and military capability in comparison to India, the need to unify and solidify the nation became critical. Jinnah (founder of Pakistan) recognized that religion on its own was not enough to overcome ethnic cleavages and also attempted to unify the nation through language (Urdu). In a region where language is often a key marker of ethnicity and culture this created further tensions on the locus of power, Bengali-East-Pakistan fearing Urdu-West-Pakistan hegemony over their own ethno-linguistic heritage (Jaffrelot 2002, 2011). Notions of identity were further complicated as the majority (55%) of the populace of post-partition Pakistan were based in East Pakistan. The elites in West Pakistan felt they could not maintain the balance of power through democracy without losing power to East Pakistan. For their own interests, centralization and authoritarianism came to be seen as more logical (Oldenburg 2010). These factors coalesced in playing a role on Bangladesh's succession from Pakistan (Cohen 2004).

Post-partition India in contrast had greater linguistic plurality with 40% speaking Hindi. They attempted to diffuse some of their ethnolinguistic tensions by recognizing a number of languages officially and redrew their own federal map. Administrative units were set up to follow ethnolinguistic lines (Oldenburg 2010); co-opting groups into their political pluralism, they reinforced their own democratic framework (Jaffrelot 2002, 2011)

## Leadership and Political Society

Another factor in the variant trajectories of India and Pakistan included the differing views and longevity of both their founding leaders. For Jinnah and Nehru, creating a post-colonial identity became a critical aspect of their respective leaderships. Jinnah sought to unify Pakistan through a centralized and autocratic government, language, and even

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dress. Jinnah's view of what Pakistan was to become was stated as being a "democracy type" of government as opposed to democracy in itself (Jaffrelot 2002). Both he and his successor adopted the title of Governor-General rather than Prime Minister, which underlined ties to the inherited autocratic British vice regal system. Both Jinnah and his successor died before the formation of the Pakistani Constitution in 1956, and without clarifying their vision for Pakistan, their deaths creating a leadership vacuum and political maelstrom within Pakistani politics (Jaffrelot 2011). Successive governments recognized the value of co-opting and promoting Jinnah's image as the founder/father of the nation in uniting and shaping Pakistani identity, even without a clear vision of what the nation was to look like (Oldenburg 2010).

Pakistan's ruling elite did not have the same levels of popular mandate and structure as Congress had within India. The Muslim League was made up of culturally migrant-Indian political elites who had, at times, collaborated with the British and subsequently lacked the grassroots prestige of "Indian revolutionaries" such as Gandhi and Nehru. The Muslim League's Pakistani grassroots representation and organization was limited while its popularity had come through its dominant political representation of Muslims in pre-partition India—a position it had aggressively maintained pre and post-partition (Ambedkar 1945, Jaffrelot 2002).

Without any major political rivals and with its focus on national security, development, and stability, the Pakistani Muslim League dissuaded political dissent and politicization of Pakistani society in contrast to India's pluralism. Pakistan continued to dissuade workers and others from becoming politically active and coalescing on alternative political views as they clamped down against unionization and communists in the 50s and 60s. It was only in the 1970s that a credible political alternative (Pakistani People's Party (PPP)) was formed (Jaffrelot 2002).

Within the Indian psyche, Gandhi's presence as a unifying force, during his life, struggle and posthumously, played a major role in providing Nehru and the Congress party with further legitimacy. Congress enjoyed popular, well organized, and long standing support within India. India was able to settle on a constitution and hold elections by 1951-1952 and started resolving language/ethnic issues shortly after. At a similar juncture, Pakistan took eight years to resolve issues on national language, religion's role within state, and federal structures by which time a quasi-coup and rigged-elections had taken place (Oldenburg 2010). The "halo-effect" of Gandhi on Congress and Nehru's longer tenure from 1947-1964, enabled him to carry out his vision of a democratic republic more fully than Jinnah. These founding ideals and vision still influence Indian politics via the ever-present Nehru-Gandhi dynasty's continued leadership and influence over Congress (Cohen 2004).

Another key factor in shaping Pakistan's political trajectory has been the impact of landed elites on politics and their effect on citizens as individual units of political economy. The dominant forces within Pakistani politics at partition included feudal landed (agrarian) elites, a bureaucratic apparatus made up predominately of muhajir/migrant Indian communities, as well as a powerful Punjabi dominated military (Cohen 2004). The Muslim League's power base within Pakistan came from the landed elites and bureaucrats; therefore, their representation followed their power base over peasantry and or other citizenry. These feudal elites still exert great influence over local politics through forming coalition/alliances with political parties, and the PPP still counts large swathes of rural Sindh as their voter heartlands through a traditional system of patronage termed locally as "biraderi" of tribal allegiance. This has had the effect of perpetuating clientelism between landed elites and subsistence farmers, creating a powerful means of mobilizing voters on mass and along uniform tribal lines. The landed elites are, thereby, still able to influence top-down resistance to agrarian reforms and prevent in part the politicization of peasantry (Jaffrelot 2002, Cohen 2004). The issue of land reform is also familiar to India, which still retains many issues around clientelism and land reform; however, its peasantry was allowed to unionize post-partition as Congress attempted to be more representative of its populace—furthering political pluralism and strengthening the ability of citizens to become politically active (Jaffrelot 2002).

### **Security**

The major characteristic that has shaped much of Pakistan's direction since partition has been its view of India as an existential threat (Oldenburg 2010). Following partition and the failure of much of the military transfer from India, Pakistan recognized itself as being militarily weaker than India. Security, therefore, became a central issue for

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national policy, economic focus, and identity. This created a focus on developing its armed forces during the 1950's, dedicating almost 40% of its GDP on its military (Cohen 2004). This has not changed significantly, as the military is still a major recipient of state finances, placing a major burden on the economy and the development of the nation. The Pakistani army, due to its perceived valour and effectiveness against India, was seen by the people of Pakistan in a much more favorable light than politicians. This public sentiment was fully utilized by the military for its own benefit. All of the military coups have been justified on the grounds of national security, with the army claiming to be Pakistan's ultimate protector over the incompetence or corruption of politicians (Oldenburg 2010:7). This, in conjunction with the militarization of the Punjab and the loss of Bangladesh, created a powerful military apparatus which has played a central role within Pakistani history, influencing the political discourse of Pakistan in its favoring of security over democracy. India inherited a much more powerful military and confidence with fewer regional adversaries. It saw itself as a projector of initially South-Asian and increasingly global power, exemplified by its placing itself firmly from partition as a non-aligned state throughout the Cold War (Jaffrelot 2002).

## **Role of International Actors**

International states played an influential role in the trajectory of Pakistan. Pakistan's existential fear and need for arms and protection swayed it to form alliances with global powers. The US utilized Pakistan's geographical location as a bulwark against both Soviet expansion and the Taliban/Al Qaeda in Afghanistan (Oldenburg 2010). Pakistan and China coalesced on developing friendly relations between neighbors, trade, and a mutually shared rivalry with India. Regional interests, stability, and acquiescence became a bigger concern for international powers than democracy in Pakistan, as seen by US support of military leaders throughout Pakistan's history (Cohen 2004). International interests never pushed what was a reluctant government towards a path of greater democratization and politicization of its civic institutions and populace.

Within the political context of Pakistan, US/Western support of its autocratic leadership aided military dictators in repressing domestic political opposition, freedoms, and pluralism. The impact of external influence on domestic politics is highlighted by the demise of President Musharraf under international pressure to firstly separate his role as both head of the military and nation and to later hold elections (Oldenburg 2010). This is not to say that external influence were the primary or only factors, but merely to draw attention to their potential impact, as without this pressure, it may have proven more difficult to remove Musharraf or re-enact elections.

External US/NATO influence and intervention has also created a domestic backlash, as citizens grow dissatisfied with continued war on their borders, use of drones, and perceived breaches of their sovereignty, leading to a growth in anti-Western sentiment within the nation which has been utilized by both pro and anti-democracy elements within Pakistan. From its inception, Nehru's vision of India as a Fabian-esque/progressive-socialist government was both more familiar and seen as being favorable by the post-WW2 British Labour government of 1947. This enabled the growth of its relationship and status from its creation with Britain and Europe in contrast to Pakistan (Anderson 2012). India's stronger presence, both regionally and globally, its non-aligned status, and its comparatively lessened fears over security have decreased the opportunity for external influence and intervention of its domestic matters (Oldenburg 2010),(Jaffrelot 2011).

Although it has been argued that Pakistan's trajectory have differed significantly from India's, there have been times where they have seemingly converged more closely (Jalal 1995). Whilst India had been under emergency law in 1975-1977, Pakistan elected Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (PPP) as head of state. More recently, the rise of the BJP within India has impacted on India's democratic and liberal credentials (Jalal 1995, Jaffrelot 2002). As a result, Pakistan's Supreme Court has become more active in maintaining the rule of law and balancing the power dynamics of civilian/state law with that of the military and political actors—recently impeaching Musharraf, as well as the subsequent PPP governments' Prime Ministers and President.

## **Conclusion**

Pakistan started its journey of independence and democracy with a greater number of liabilities and impediments than India. The idea of Pakistan was to shape the state; however, a combination of the early death of Jinnah, colonial

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legacy, weak political parties, social conservatism, and outside influences gave the Pakistani army an increasingly strong influence over the state (Oldenburg 2010). The strength of the army in comparison to the weakness of political society and the inability of politicians to resolve corruption, economic and identity issues created an environment where benign authoritarianism became more favorable to unstable democracy, especially in the face of Pakistan's perceived existential threat from India. These factors over those of religion and culture were prevalent in shaping its trajectory.

Pakistan has faced many challenges in line with the common narrative of post-colonial democracies, and although comparison with India is commonplace, it is prudent to remember that India is an exception rather than the rule, in regards to its continued survival as a post-colonial democracy. Pakistan is its own nation, with its own unique issues and pace in regards to democracy. In spite of its difficulties, Pakistan has for the first time in its history gone through a transfer of power without coup but via the ballot box.

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