Partition – Different Narratives

By Prasura

Preview- Elite Muslims of pre-partition India such as the landed gentry, professionals and Government servants were at the forefront of the demand for Partition of India and, constituting the “establishment”, they and their successors continue to shape the policy of Pakistan towards India. The only plausible explanation for bad blood between India and Pakistan is that certain fundamental factors were at work in the demand for Partition and they continue to be at work in the relations between India and Pakistan. In broad terms, the factors which influence the mind of elite Muslims, then and now, can be summarised thus:

1. Islam’s meteoric rise made Muslims feel exceptional and supremacist.
2. After the fall of Moghul and Ottoman empires, Muslims felt that they were victims of conspiracies or uncontrollable circumstances. The inexorable law of rise and fall of empires was ignored.
3. Hindu and Muslim world-views are antithetical.
4. Muslims had a low opinion of Hindus judging them by the ease with which they were defeated in battle and by their social practices. They were unaware of the profundity of Hindu philosophy and metaphysics – Hindu ‘high culture’.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Partition of India in 1947 and the continuing animosity between India and Pakistan is an enigma which defies any understanding.

Several accounts from different perspectives – British, Indian and Pakistani – do not give a definitive and incontrovertible reason for the division of India or for the tension between the two thereafter.

If one ignores the British versions for the moment, the Indian and Pakistani narratives are so diametrically opposite to each other that, as the eminent Pakistani writer Muneeza Shamsie observed, normal relations between the two countries will be problematic till there is a degree of convergence between the two narratives. Indians view Partition as a needless tragedy; Pakistanis see it as delivery from thralldom.

II. DIVIDE AND RULE

The British are often accused of having practiced a policy of Divide and Rule – divide the Hindus and Muslims in order to perpetuate their rule. There is a grain of truth in this even while agreeing with the Khilafat leader Mohammed Ali that, “Indians divide and the British rule”. In January 1940, while countering Lord Zetland’s view that Dominion status should be promised to India at the end of the Second World War, Churchill asserted that Hindu-Muslim feud should be used as a bulwark of British rule. To be fair, British accounts of Partition concede that Muslim League was used as a counterweight to Congress.

The first employment of this policy was the reply Lord Minto, Viceroy, gave to a delegation of Muslim worthies led by Aga Khan in 1906:

“You justly claim that that your position should be estimated not merely on your numerical strength but in respect to the political importance of your community and the service it has rendered to the Empire. I am entirely in accord with you . . . .”

Separate electorates were introduced which lasted for forty years and created a formidable barrier between the two communities. What one may term ‘Minto Declaration’ for Indian Muslims proved to be the equivalent of ‘Balfour Declaration’ for the creation of Israel. The seed for partitioning India was laid.

Towards the end, however, the British tried their best to preserve the unity of India as a lasting legacy of their rule. Attlee’s instructions to the last Viceroy Mountbatten were: Keep India united if you can. If not, try to save something from the wreck. Whatever happens, get Britain out.

III. MUSLIMS – SEPARATE NATION AND SEPARATE HOMELAND

The overarching Pakistani explanation is that Hindus and Muslims are separate nations and therefore could not coexist. Jinnah had famously declared in March 1940:

Hindus and Muslims belong to different civilisations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. The difference is deep-rooted and ineradicable. We are a nation with our own distinctive culture and civilisation, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of value and proportion, legal laws and
moral code, customs and calendar, history and traditions, aptitudes and ambitions.

While there is truth in this maximisation of differences, it begs the question as to how the two communities managed to share the same space for hundreds of years. It is as if Hindus and Muslims could be one nation as long as Muslims were rulers of India but become two nations on British departure. Moreover, since it was inconceivable that all Muslims would move to Pakistan, does it mean that those who do not move to Pakistan would become non-nationals of India?

If the theory of ‘different nations’ was advanced in order to demand parity in negotiations with the British, it was a fair enough ploy. For partitioning the country, however, the argument is flawed. Or perhaps not entirely, if we go by the definition of a Nation according to some political theorists: “a group of people united in a mistaken view about the past and a hatred of their neighbours”.

The demand for a Muslim ‘homeland’ flowed from the two-nation theory. Nations are defined by geographical boundaries and sovereignty. Muslims and Hindus, as two separate nations, cannot share the same boundaries and sovereignty and therefore there must be two separate sovereign states. This argument again raises the question: wasn’t India a homeland for Muslims in the past?

How would an abode of Islam (dar ul islam) overnight become an abode of the Infidel (dar ul harb) when the British leave? Is one to conclude that India was a homeland as long as Muslims were in power (some Muslim Ulema opined that India under the British was still a dar ul islam because Christianity was also an Abrahamic religion), but would no longer be so when Hindus assume power? What would happen to the Muslims who cannot or do not want to leave India. Would they be condemned to live in a dar ul harb? Again, an untenable argument.

IV. Muslim Culture & Way of Life will be Under Threat

Another argument for Partition was that in India, under the majority rule of Hindus, Muslims would not be able to practice freely their distinctive way of life, language and culture.

In this context, one is reminded of the observation of the Turkish journalist Ms. Halide Edib who spent a few months in India in 1935 at Gandhi’s invitation. Edib found it “utterly incomprehensible that Islam had failed to convert the majority of Hindus into Muslims, while Hinduism, in turn, had been unable to absorb Islam into its fold”. There was no danger of the latter as long as Muslims were the rulers but what of the future?

One cannot rule out the possibility that under the juggernaut of Hinduism, Muslim elites may gradually lose their distinctive ethos. The question is why safeguards were not sought instead of demanding Partition. After all, one does not amputate a limb fearing future infection. Moreover, Islamic culture is not identical in all Muslim countries. There is little in common between an Indonesian Muslim and an Iraqi Muslim.

India, however, is exceptional in one respect: there is no other big country where Islam has spread in which Muslims are a minority. This uniqueness created an anxiety and insecurity among Indian Muslim elites that has no parallel. Loss of identity, oppression and suppression, denial of fair share in political power by the majority was assumed as inevitable. As Hamid Dalwai characterised the fear, Hindus being in majority was itself a great injustice to Muslims.

Nevertheless, the question is why the Muslim League did not accept Congress assurances that iron clad safeguards could be built into the Constitution to protect their religion and culture. In fact, the Muslim League refused to join the Constituent Assembly in May 1946. Did Muslims doubt the sincerity of Congress or did they fear that Constitutions can always be amended under compulsion of electoral politics? To allay such fears, provision could have been made to seek the intervention of International Court of Justice in such an event. It is probable that Muslims felt that all safeguards would only amount to being ‘Cinderella with trade union rights and radio in the kitchen but still below the stairs’, as noted by HV Hodson.

In truth, most Muslims had little empathy for Gandhi. His ascetism, celibacy and nonviolence were at best eccentricities. Non-violence is alien to Muslim thought. Few in Pakistan acknowledge that Gandhi fought for a fair deal for all Muslims till his last breath. Upon Gandhi’s death all that Jinnah could say was that he was a great Hindu leader.

Perhaps, the more fundamental fact is that there was no precedence of Muslims living under the authority of non-believers and therefore they utterly dreaded the prospect. And Islam gives no guidance as to how Muslims should conduct themselves in a realm of the Infidel. (Murad Ali Baig))

V. Religious Differences

There is a fundamental incompatibility between Hinduism and Islam. Hinduism has no Founder, no Prophet and no Holy Book. It has no core and no periphery. It encompasses a wide range of beliefs – from atheism to nihilism. It does not confront other belief systems but learns to live with them and transforms itself over time if necessary. It is amorphous and difficult to define.

Islam is the exact opposite. As a revealed religion, Islam is categorical. Islam in its basics is a simple religion: follow a few tenets, entry to Heaven is guaranteed.
Its meteoric rise after the death of Mohammed also gave Muslims a self-image which has not weakened with time – a sense of being superior to followers of other faiths, of being born to rule, of a duty to convert non-believers and lift them out of their ignorance.

The Koran is inerrant, the whole truth and final truth. Everything before it and after it is Untruth. The Koran, Sunnah (doings of Prophet) and Hadis (sayings of Prophet) are infallible guides. Sharia, Islamic jurisprudence, is meant to regulate state and society. Islam thus lays down a complete code of conduct for every aspect of life for all times. It reaches into every corner of private and public domains.

Such rigidity and certitude is foreign to Hindus. The spiritual and temporal are different domains. God (if He exists) has no business to prescribe how many times one should pray, what to eat and when to fast.

VI. Rise and Fall of Islamic Empires

Muslims in general have been amazingly successful rulers. They brought peace, stability and prosperity; encouraged trade and commerce. In 1700AD, under Moghul rule, India was the richest country with 27% wealth of the world.

The early Muslims were eager to learn and translated Greek and Latin texts on mathematics, astronomy, medicine and philosophy into Arabic. They had no hesitation in co-opting Jews in tax administration, treasury management, trade and commerce, medicine, mathematics and science as long as they did not question Muslim supremacy.

Undoubtedly, non-Muslims were treated as second-class citizens. Many converted to escape discrimination and to gain favour with their rulers. Many others took to Islam to escape the inequities and indignities in their lives. Sufis played a major role in conversion, particularly in Bengal and Kashmir. Forced conversions were few – perhaps about five percent.

Muslims excelled in architecture, calligraphy and landscape gardening. They evolved elaborate court etiquette which was adopted by non-Muslim rulers too. The British largely followed Mughal taxation on agriculture for a number of years. Muslim rulers in some instances gave support to Hindu arts which were in danger of disappearance due to lack of patronage. Muslim orthodoxy, however, frowned on such accommodation and Muslim rulers had to tread carefully. The fate of Dara Shukoh is well known.

The astonishingly rapid spread of Islam and its magnificent achievements justifiably made Muslims proud of their religion and culture. However, Muslim empires too suffered reverses like all empires before them. The loss was unbearable; that civilisations rise and reach a plateau, only to experience hubris leading to decline is a rule without exception, has largely escaped the Muslim mind.

Muslim rulers were largely victims, not to uncontrolable circumstances as they believed, but of their own complacency. The Moghuls, who came in contact with Europeans from the 16th Century, were delighted with gifts such as mechanical clocks and watches, but never bothered to learn how to make them. Nawabs of Lucknow imported steam-driven pumps to power water fountains of their pleasure gardens but sent no delegations to Europe to acquire modern technology or to study science in their universities. Britain sent an Ambassador to Jahangir’s court but Jahangir sent no emissary to Queen Elizabeth’s court.

Even more surprising, Ottoman Turkey showed little curiosity about the path-breaking technological advances taking place next door. They were comfortable with their luxuriant lives and saw no need to learn anything new.

VII. The Muslim Dilemma

Unalloyed memories of Islam’s glorious past kept Muslims tied to illusion of grandeur even as the world changed around them. Loss of power to the British was a shattering blow and their response was to retreat into a shell and shun modernity. For Hindus it was replacement of one rule by another and, untrammelled by orthodoxy, they readily adopted certain modern values of their new masters. As a result, Hindus advanced and won international recognition: C.V. Raman won the Nobel Prize in Physics and Tagore won it for Literature. Several Hindu scientists became fellows of Royal Society. In industry and business too, Hindus showed enterprise.

Some Muslim leaders realised that their community would continue to lag behind Hindus if they did not acquire Western education and learn modern concepts. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan started the Aligarh Muslim University in 1875 to bridge the gap.

The rise of Congress and British willingness to allow a small political role at the local level to Indians through elections, however, caught Muslims on the horns of a dilemma. The dilemma was whether to make common cause with Congress in the fight for freedom from British rule and face the consequence of being ruled by the majority (Hindus), or to abstain from the freedom struggle and face being branded as unpatriotic, or embrace modernity and compete with Hindus on equal terms.

Expectedly, the response was mixed. Some like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad joined Congress. Some like Sir Syed Ahmad Khan wanted to develop closer ties with the British and seek special favours. He went further and preferred continuation of British rule and urged Muslims not to join the Congress. Democracy was unsuited to India, he felt. The Ulema chose return to orthodoxy arguing that abandoning it was the cause of Muslim downfall. The idea of a separate homeland for Muslims was yet unborn.
Unsurprisingly, by mid-1940’s, the prospect of British withdrawal from India heightened Muslim apprehensions about preserving their identity and culture. When Congress assured Muslims that they need have no fear in a democratic India, Jinnah’s retort was: but ‘brother’ Gandhi has three votes to my one!

VIII. Hindus and Muslims – Mutual Perceptions & Misconceptions

Although Hindus and Muslims lived as neighbours for centuries, perceptions of each other are by and large negative. There is an element of truth in the remark of Fazli Ahmed Khan, Deputy Commissioner of Baramulla District in 1970, that every Muslim and every Hindu bears a small corner of hatred in his heart for the other (quoted by Wajahat Habibullah in his book “My Kashmir”).

“Hindus believe that Muslims are cruel, intolerant and supremacist. For a Hindu, one statement of the Khilafat leader Mohammed Ali says it all:

“However pure Mr. Gandhi’s character may be, he must appear to me from the point of religion inferior to any Mussalman, even though he be without character”. When questioned later if he really meant it, he reiterated, “Yes, according to my religion and creed, I do hold an adulterous and a fallen Mussalman to be better than Mr. Gandhi.” (Thoughts on Pakistan, B.R. Ambedkar)

In turn, Muslims believe that Hindus are cowards, perfidious, devious and casteist. And worst of all, idol worshippers.

Their self-perceptions are equally contrary. Hindus believe that they are tolerant, open to contradiction, and peace-loving. Muslims believe that they are truthful, valorous, rightly-guided and superior to Hindus.

While there is no meeting ground between such views, it is amazing that the two communities managed to co-exist for centuries.

An enduring grievance that Hindus hold against Muslims is that they destroyed ‘thousands’ of temples. The facts are more multi-faceted.

First, temple desecration was not the monopoly of Muslim rulers. Looting, seizing of idols or destruction of temples housing the state-deity (rashtra devatha) by Hindu rulers was not uncommon since they were considered as symbols of the defeated ruler’s legitimacy. Two instances: Peshwas looted Sringeri temple. Shivaji razed the temples of Baroda ruled by Gaikwads. Second, plunder and loot was more often the objective of Muslim raiders than idol-breaking since gold and jewelry was believed to be hidden under the idols. Third, Muslim rulers also destroyed mosques of rival Muslim kingdoms: Aurangzeb demolished the Jama Masjid of Qutb Shahi kingdom when he invaded Golconda in 1687. Fourth, between twelfth and eighteenth centuries spanning a period of five hundred years, literary and other evidence studied by Richard M Eaton shows that eighty temples were desecrated, not ‘thousands’ as claimed by Hindu protagonists.

Religious bigotry was not the sole reason for temple desecration. One should not go entirely by the rhetoric of Muslim court historians whose tendency was to exaggerate the Islamic fervor of their patrons. For instance, Dr Ram Puniyani, who made a deep study of Aurangzeb’s rule, has opined that the razing of the Kashi Viswanath temple was not a wanton act of bigotry; it was to avenge the molestation of a noblewoman inside the temple premises by a temple priest.

Such half-truths and untruths apart, what was inexcusable was the wanton destruction of Hindu and Buddhist libraries in Nalanda, Vikramshila, Takshasila and other centres of learning. A painted board, “This is what Allah does to Infidels: Reduce them to ruins” stands at the entrance to the ruins of Taxila in Pakistan today. Oddly, this vandalism is not among the Hindu animus against Muslim rulers.

Muslim perception of Hindus was again simplistic. Since Islam makes no distinction between the spiritual, social and temporal, Muslims did not realise that Hinduism regards them as separate domains. Muslims assumed that Hindu social practices, some of which are no doubt abhorrent, were sanctioned by Hindu religion. Far from it, Hindu saints were at the forefront of condemning evil practices such as untouchability and questioning brahminical supremacy. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are revolts against Brahmin supremacist and prevalent iniquitous social systems and practices.

Societies are not static organisms. They change when they come in contact with other civilisations and the environment is right as it happened when Hindus came in contact with the British. While such changes sometime take generations, a traumatic event such as World War I brought rapid transformation in European society. During the centuries of Muslim supremacy, however, Hindus, particularly in north India, developed a siege mentality and went into a shell giving further credence to Muslim perception that Hindus were incorrigible. Creativity, adventure and exploration ceased to flower. Not surprisingly, it was in this period that bhakti philosophy – total surrender to the Omnipotent - gained momentum and produced some of the noblest and soul-stirring music and poetry.

Muslims, on the whole, were ignorant of the great sophistication of Hindu philosophy, metaphysics, mysticism, mythology and its achievements in mathematics, astronomy and medicine. Of course, there were notable exceptions, particularly in the Deccan. Ibrahim Adil Shah II, a contemporary of Akbar, knew Sanskrit better than Persian, wore a rudraksha mala, preferred the title of Jagatguru, loved Hindu music and built a new suburb of Bijapur by the name...
off according to whim. No Muslim noble embraced Hinduism or married his daughter to a Hindu ruler. While Upanishads, Ramayana and Bhagavad Gita, etc. were translated into Persian, the image of Hindus as heathens did not change.

Music was perhaps the only field where Muslims adopted the Hindu tradition and embellished it to produce the great genre of Hindustani Classical music. The sonorous Urdu language is the other gift of Hindu-Muslim cultural fusion.

IX. MUSLIM INSECURITY

Increasing representation of Indians in government starting with Minto-Morley Reforms heightened the sense of deprival among the Muslim elite. Sir Fredrick Puckle, a distinguished Punjab civilian, noted in 1946: “In addition to the decline in their material fortunes, Muslims had the mortification of playing second fiddle to the despised Hindus in political importance and in influence with the British rulers in India. This rankled perhaps more than anything else”. Or, as Ambedkar phrased it: “fall from masters to fellow subjects under the British was bad enough; from fellow subjects to subjects of the hated Hindus would be unbearable humiliation.”

As historian WC Smith noted in his study (Modern Islam in India, 1946), Muslim separatism was in many cases strengthened and heightened by a sense of economic grievance against the Hindus. Industry, trade and commerce were largely in the hands of Hindus even in Muslim-majority provinces like Punjab, Bengal and Sind and generations of Muslim peasants were indebted to Hindu moneylenders.

M. Mujeeb, former Vice Chancellor of Jamia Millia, attended the inaugural session of the UP Legislative Assembly in 1937 when he was a student in college. No sooner had the session started when he left in panic and disgust after seeing dhoti-clad ministers holding forth in Hindi. Of 66 Muslim MLAs, 56 were from Nawabi families or Khan Bahadurs, the class that Mujeeb belonged to. If this is what democracy would bring, they could do without it; the prospect of being under the rule of such uncouth politicians was unthinkable. To these nobles, it was confirmation that power was the prerogative of Muslims and that Hindus were unfit to govern.

Such visceral feelings were far beyond the comprehension of Hindus. For seven centuries Hindus had lived as second class citizens (dhimmis - tolerated unbelievers). Now that the wheel had turned full circle, Hindus felt that, in Sardar Patel’s words, Muslims should be ready to live as equal citizens in a democratic India.

Worse still for Muslims in India was that they were not united. Apart from All India Muslim League, Muslims of Muslim-majority provinces such as Punjab, Sindh and Bengal had their own political parties with divergent objectives. The landed aristocracy of the United Provinces had their own party. There was no single party which could speak with one voice on the behalf all Indian Muslims. They had no leader of the stature of Gandhi or Nehru who commanded respect of the populace, and no one to give expression to their fears in constitutional terms.

X. MOHAMMED ALI JINNAH

That was the vacuum that Jinnah filled. Without him there would be no Pakistan. Understanding Jinnah is the key to understanding Partition.

Jinnah entered politics at an earlier age than Gandhi or Nehru. And he found it exhilarating. He was a highly successful lawyer but legal practice was no comparison to the thrill of politics. He was a staunch nationalist and was hailed as the “ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity”. He was against separate electorates but realised that it was needed because Muslims were weak; they needed it as a temporary remedy to ensure that they get a fair share of political power. He strove hard to bring Hindus and Muslims together to fight the British – the common adversary.

Jinnah would have been a strong pillar of Congress but the chemistry between Gandhi and Jinnah proved incompatible. Their methods were different: Jinnah believed that freedom should be won by gentlemanly discussion and constitutional methods. Gandhi believed in mobilising the masses. In addition, Nehru and Jinnah openly detested each other– adding another dynamic to the already acerbic political climate.

When Gandhi made common cause with Muslims for the restoration of Caliphate, Jinnah warned him that he was “playing with fire” by mixing religion with politics. Jinnah left the Congress when Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience movement, but he did not accuse it of being a Hindu body.

The First Round Table Conference in London in 1930 was the last straw. Jinnah cut no ice with the British, Muslims or Hindus. He was a lone figure and felt disillusioned with Indian politics. His self-esteem, his pride and feeling of hurt embittered him and he decided to withdraw from politics and settle in London. India had nothing to offer. His estranged wife Ruttie had died in
Bombay in 1929 and his daughter Dina was already a student in London. He asked his sister Fatima to join him and resigned himself to practicing law in which he enjoyed substantial success.

But life was too tranquil and dull. There was ‘nothing to tax his talents, no challenge left to his life, no sums to win, no opponents worthy of his genius to vanquish’ (Stanley Wolpert). Political life had always fascinated Jinnah. When Liaquat Ali Khan implored him to return to India, urging that Muslims needed him, Jinnah decided to end his three years in self-exile. Muslims needed a leader. Jinnah needed a platform that he could dominate to fulfill his political destiny. There was thus convergence between personal need of ambition and needs of the Muslim community. The fit was perfect.

Jinnah returned to India in early 1934. But the Jinnah who returned home was a changed man. He abandoned the principles on which he had built his reputation as a consensual and conciliatory politician. He was not the man who proclaimed, just a few years ago, that nothing would please him more than the end of distinction between Hindus and Muslims in political life. In his stead was a man who vowed that as President of Muslim League, he would not seek any accommodation with Congress except on his own terms. As Khalid B Sayeed observed, politics means power and not relying only on cries of justice or fair-play or goodwill. He would be the ‘sole spokesman’ for Muslims.

He would make the regional parties in Punjab, Sind and Bengal irrelevant. He would insist that Congress represents only caste Hindus and no one else. He would demand parity with Congress in negotiations with British. He would invoke religion and abandon constitutional methods and be fanatic if need be. The contrast was stark.

What can be the explanation for the transformation of Jinnah from a Dr. Jekyll to Dr. Hyde? Psychologists believe that power-seekers pursue power as a means of compensation against deprivation. Kanji Dwarakdas, who was with Jinnah at the funeral of Ruttie, recorded: ‘never have I found a man so sad and so bitter. …… Something snapped in him. The death of his wife was ……… taken by him as a failure and personal defeat in his life…… ’. In the words of Khalid B Sayeed, who was quoting psychoanalysts, severe deprivation relatively late in life may result in furious concentration upon power; power is expected to overcome low estimates of self, by changing either traits of the self or the environment in which it functions.

XI. Partition

In the same week of March 1940 when the Muslim League at its meeting in Lahore demanded Pakistan, Azad made a passionate plea for preserving the unity of India in these words:

I am a Muslim and proud of that fact. Islam's splendid traditions of thirteen hundred years are my inheritance. In addition, I am proud of being an Indian. I am part of the indivisible unity that is Indian Nationality. It was India's historic destiny that many human races and cultures and religions should flow to her, finding a home in her hospitable soil. 'Nothing to tax his talents, no challenge left to his life……' (Islam) came here and settled for good. This led to a meeting of the culmination of two different races. Eleven hundred years of common history have enriched India with our common achievements. Whether we like it or not, we have become an Indian nation, united and indivisible. No fantasy or artificial scheming to separate and divide can break this unity. We must accept the logic of fact and history……

There were few takers among Muslims for such sane advice from a staunch Muslim. Indeed, in the following five years Muslim League went from strength to strength and became a formidable foe of the Congress.

The spectre of being a permanent minority under the heel of vengeful Hindus haunted the Muslim elites. It was the reaction of this class to the outcome of freedom from British rule – democracy that ultimately led to Partition. How were they to know at that point in history that the dynamics of universal franchise in a heterogeneous society would leave the Congress to contend with myriad regional parties in the future, with minority votes becoming crucial in the outcome of elections?

At the end of the Second World War, Britain realised that freedom for India could no longer be delayed. The question was on whom the mantle should be transferred. The Cabinet Mission Plan (1946) was the final effort by the British to keep India united. It envisaged a confederal structure by dividing India into three Groups – Hindu majority Provinces, Muslim majority Provinces and Princely States – each Group having its own constitution and enjoying a high degree of autonomy and a weak centre responsible for only foreign affairs, finance and defence. An option for any Group to separate from the Union after ten years was built-in as a concession to the Muslim League. In other words, Partition in principle was conceded.

Congress rejected the plan as it always believed that what enabled the British to rule effectively was a strong central government and without it India would be 'balkanised'. This was not just a quirky view of the Congress: Sir Penderel Moon, an experienced ICS officer from Punjab, also felt that a weak Federal Centre would be paralysed by its own internal communal divisions. The experience of the Congress in running an Interim Government in 1946 with Muslim League members in the cabinet was frustrating. Congress felt that an unborn Pakistan with a long gestation period of ten years would not only be a nightmare in governance but hobble the consolidation and economic development of free India.
When interminable negotiations led nowhere and Jinnah cried ‘Islam in Danger’, violence erupted in various parts of the country while the British watched helplessly. The absurdity of Islam in danger was never questioned. Was it even in the realm of possibility that ninety million Muslims could have been eliminated in one fell swoop or converted? Be that as it may, according to Khalid B Sayeed, the idea of Pakistan appealed to some of the deepest yearnings in the hearts of the ordinary Indian Muslim.

Given the combustible atmosphere of the latter half of 1946 and early 1947, partition or civil war were the only alternatives. Jinnah was unequivocal: We shall have India divided or we shall have India destroyed. Even assuming that, as Ayesha Jalal argued, what Jinnah really wanted was not Pakistan but equal or at least equitable share of power with the Congress (read Hindus), a stage had been reached by early 1947 when it was impossible for Jinnah to dismount the monster of communalism that he was riding.

Partition, of course, brought with it its own horrors which still haunt India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Religion became a feature of South Asian political contestation. And, loyalty of Indian Muslims became suspect. And most ironically, instead of ending the rift, as the eminent Bombay lawyer Sir Chimanlal Setalvad predicted, the division of India has laid the foundations of interminable quarrels and chaos which would bring untold suffering to generations yet unborn has become prophetically true.

That Pakistan which Muslims finally won ‘ill served’ (in Ayesha Jalal’s memorable phrase) the interests of minority Muslims of Hindu-majority areas who were in the forefront of agitation for a ‘homeland’ is the ‘pity of partition’ (again Ayesha Jalal) and one of the great ironies of history. It was a pyrrhic victory no doubt, but Pakistan (Muslims), as a sovereign nation, is now on par with India (Hindus). For Jinnah it was a personal triumph.

Another poignant outcome of Partition was that the birth place of Hinduism (Chitral, Swat and Gilgit region) lies in Pakistan while the heart of the treasured Muslim culture (Ganga-Jumna tehszeeb) lies in India. No one emerges with honour in the end: Jinnah, an admirable man warped by his ambition; Nehru, an idealist culpable by his impetuosity and Patel, the realist by his indifference. All had sullied themselves with bloodied hands. Gandhi alone comes out clean, mourning the ‘vivisection’ of the subcontinent.

As to who was to blame for the division of India, Sir Penderel Moon’s verdict was that ‘Congress leaders were responsible for partition though unwittingly’ and that ‘Congress passionately desired to preserve the Unity of India but they acted consistently to make partition certain’. Kanji Dwarakdas, a close friend of Jinnah, was more blunt: Jinnah did not win Pakistan. The Congress leaders, Gandhi, Nehru and Patel lost Pakistan to Jinnah. Stanley Wolpert quotes from a rueful letter written by Nehru to Nawab of Bhopal after the departure of Lord Mountbatten: “It has been our misfortune…… that evil impulses triumphed…… I know that we have been to blame in many matters …… Partition came and we accepted it because we thought …… we might have some peace. Perhaps we acted wrongly…..”.

One defining event among the chain of events that led to Partition was the exclusion of Muslim League representatives from the UP cabinet in 1937. Although in conformity with parliamentary practice – no need for coalition when one party has absolute majority - it was viewed by Muslims as Congress (Hindu) intent of monopolising political power. However, in any long drawn-out struggle, there will be some tactical errors, but it is unlikely that that mature men would allow them to influence their decision on a momentous event such as partition of a country.

The only plausible answer is that there were more fundamental forces at work.

XII. Unfriendly Neighbours

Three days before Pakistan was born, Jinnah exhorted to members of Pakistan Constituent Assembly: “You are free to go to your temples; you are free to go to your mosques or any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan…… In the course of time, Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims will cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state.” (In subsequent Pakistani official accounts, reference to religion having no role in the business of state was deleted. Jinnah too became more ambivalent by declaring six months later that Shariat shall prevail in Pakistan).

Regardless whether Jinnah’s vision of a secular Pakistan was atonement for the horrors of partition or a late assertion of his true self, one would expect that after the creation of a Muslim ‘homeland’, Indians and Pakistanis would live like normal neighbours. Sadly, Gandhi’s prophecy that partition will only increase bitterness has come true. That peaceful coexistence is elusive even after seventy five years deserves honest analysis.

Most Pakistanis harbour a deep sense of being wronged by India and that India has not ‘accepted’ Partition as a historic necessity, observed Madhu Kishwar after a visit to Pakistan in 1990. Further they believe that the Kashmir issue comes in the way of normal relations. But is it the problem or is it only a symptom of a deeper malaise? In his recent book “India vs Pakistan, Why Can’t We Be Just Friends”, Pakistani diplomat Husain Haqqani asserts that Kashmir is only a manifestation of the psychological divide. Robert Wirsing, a knowledgeable scholar of Security Studies, is
also of the same view: In my judgment, the near certainty is that the Kashmir dispute today .......... is as much symptomatic of the broadly constituted malaise influencing India-Pakistan relations as it is a cause of it.

The deeper cause may be that the factors that led to Partition of India have not disappeared and continue to bedevil the relations between the two countries.

In addition to the hitherto mentioned factors which dominated Muslim psyche - Islamic supremacist; unalloyed pride in their past; contempt for Hindus; insecurity about their religion and culture under Congress dispensation; doubt that constitutional guarantees would save them from oppression by Hindus who nurse a historical grudge - there was also a strange psychology noticed by Halibe Edib during her interaction with Aligarh students. To quote, "In the minds of certain of the students the obstacle to an understanding between the Hindus and the Muslims was, I think, a curious inferiority complex. I saw the fear of losing their Islamic identity, of being assimilated by the Hindu. What was incomprehensible to me was how any Muslim in India could think it possible".

To this complex but potent mixture of religious supremacist and sense of inferiority vs Hindus in material fortunes, in Mushirul Hasan’s words, Jinnah promised a solution which represented, “power of past glory and the possibility of future glory ...... and ...... that he would somehow create a better world for them”.

Having taken to English education earlier, advances by the Hindus in civil service, professions and business during British rule caused a sense of inferiority among Muslims although in the military and police they had a higher representation. Without the balancing hand of the British, Muslims felt that they would be further disadvantaged in a free India; a permanent inferior status would be their fate. Congress assurances that India would have a secular constitution and everyone would have equal opportunity under universal franchise were discounted.

A more primeval fear rose from the realisation that Muslims were as vulnerable as any to lures of power, pelf and patronage. After all, their self-image and resentment of the British for being the cause of their fall from power, elite Muslims adopted the dress, table manners and social etiquette of the British and sent their children to study in England. In the process, they became ‘demuslimised’ to an extent.

If ‘hinduisation’ were to occur in conjunction with ‘demuslimisation’ under Hindu majority rule, Muslims feared a total loss of stature in India. Although Muslims acknowledged that Hindus did not have a history of foisting their culture and customs on non-Hindus, they however saw the danger of creeping ‘hinduisation’ over the course of time. Such a transformation would be unintended, unforced, and voluntary. Historical evidence shows that mores of the ruling class are adopted by the ruled to an extent regardless of the strength of their own customs and behavioral patterns.

It is this fear of subtle and imperceptible ‘hinduisation’ that impels modern-day Pakistan to continue keep a good distance from India. The Pakistani establishment realises that India possesses seductive power with its Bollywood films, larger economy, progressive schools, greater freedom for women, secular Constitution and its robust democratic institutions.

There was a historical precedent to fear ‘hinduisation.’ In East Pakistan, Bengali Muslims venerated Tagore and resented the imposition of Urdu. They were thus not ‘sufficiently’ Muslim in the eyes of the Pakistani establishment. Pakistanis inherently fear they too will become ‘diluted’ Muslims like those in Bangladesh if there is free movement of people, trade and cultural exchanges with India. To interact with India on such a scale would also irrevocably negate the raison d’etre of the creation of Pakistan.

When considering the example of Britain and Republic of Ireland, two neighbouring nations driven apart by religious difference and communal tension - a situation not that dissimilar to the one shared by India and Pakistan - we can see what the outcome is when two sworn adversaries maintain unrestricted travel, trade and cultural exchanges.

Ireland was a British colony and won its freedom in 1924 but with the exclusion of Northern Ireland (Ulster) which had a hair thin majority of Protestants. An underground movement began harassing Britain over this injustice. But free movement of people and trade was not interrupted. Lacking employment opportunities in Ireland, many Irish joined the British Army and worked in British factories. Ireland eventually joined the European Union and its economy prospered. After 80 years it felt confident enough to reach a modicum of settlement with Britain.

Relations between China and Taiwan is another case to learn from. China claims sovereignty over Taiwan but allows status quo to prevail. According to Husain Haqqani, ‘all weather friend’ China long ago advised Pakistan to put aside the Kashmir issue for the time being so that it does not affect normal state-to-state relations with India.

The anti-Hindu foundational basis of Pakistan is reinforced in Pakistani history text books: Pakistan came into existence in 712 AD, the year of first Muslim foray into Sind. No effort is spared to highlight India's foreignness in terms of religion and culture and the existence of a pre-Islamic past of Pakistan is denied. The decline of Taxila as a centre of learning is attributed to the wrath of Allah.

According to Krishna Kumar, Pakistan educates its children to explicitly suspect Hindus and feels vindicated when Hindu-Muslim riots erupt in India. To be
fair, India does only slightly better; Jinnah is portrayed as devil incarnate and his sterling character is completely ignored.

Pakistan believes that subservience to India is the only basis on which India will accept Pakistan. The perception of Hindus as devious justifies dealing with them with similar deviousness. (Husain Haqqani). In reality, therefore, the Kashmir problem is only a pretext for more subliminal aversions. If by some miracle, the Kashmir problem were to be resolved today, it would be fanciful to think that estrangement between the two nations will end.

When Natwar Singh was about to take up his appointment as India’s High Commissioner in Islamabad in 1980, he called upon Abdus Sattar, Pakistan High Commissioner in Delhi for advice on how to conduct himself. “Never say that we are the same people. We are not. If we are, why did we part company in 1947?” was the candid answer. British historian Dr. Peter Hardy had put the same sentiment in different words: “things which they did not share with their non-Muslim neighbours were more important than the things which they did share ….”

Pakistan has an existential compulsion to be the ‘other’; the narratives will continue to differ and, as long as they differ, the divide cannot be bridged.

**XIII. Way Forward**

Yet, current debilitating standoff should not be allowed to continue for the good of the people of the sub-continent. It is incumbent upon India as the larger of the two countries to take the *initiative and act unilaterally* and not seek or expect any reciprocity. “Out of box thinking” is necessary since any act of seeming generosity or magnanimity will be resented as condescension. It should be a gesture which would be seen patently as *rectification* of a long-pending wrong of India.

From Pakistan’s perspective, strident assertion of Hindu identity to the detriment of minorities in recent times could be viewed as justification (if needed) for partitioning the country. Yet this Orwellian scenario provides the perfect opportunity: India’s overtures to Pakistan will not be mistaken by its people as capitulation or appeasement. And, the government is headed by a supremely self-confident Prime Minister who, from all signs, would like to be remembered by history as the Bismarck who transformed the country out of recognition.

One such act which will make a huge impact is the transfer of ownership of Jinnah’s house on Mount Pleasant Road in Mumbai to Pakistan and allowing them to use it as the residence of Pakistani Deputy High Commissioner or whatever other legitimate use. Jinnah was very fond of his house ‘South Court’ which he lovingly built in 1936 and hoped he would be able to spend at least a month in it every year even after Partition. As the revered Founder of Pakistan, whatever would have pleased Jinnah would elevate Pakistanis.

To encourage people to people contact, India should institute Visa on Arrival policy. Fear of hordes of terrorists entering India and causing havoc is unwarranted as terrorists don’t need visas. Resumption of sports and cultural exchanges will help correct blinkered views of each other. India should also renew Most Favoured Nation status to Pakistan and facilitate trade across the border.

Lastly, India should urge revival of the Four Point Formula worked out during back-channel talks and accepted by Dr Manmohan Singh and General Musharaff as the basis for resolving Kashmir problem and make Dr Manmohan Singh’s dream of breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore and dinner in Kabul a reality.

Finally, there will be hiccups and unexpected twists and turns while moving forward on the above lines as it often happened in the past. On its part, India should vow that it will not be deterred by such setbacks and that the way forward is uninterruptible.

**References Références Referencias**