

ISAS Insights

No. 460 – 31 August 2017

Institute of South Asian Studies
National University of Singapore
29 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
#08-06 (Block B)
Singapore 119620
Tel: (65) 6516 4239 Fax: (65) 6776 7505
www.isas.nus.edu.sg
<http://southasiandiaspora.org>



India and Pakistan Today: Still Living in the Shadows of 1947

There were many who believed that the Partition of British India in 1947 into independent India and the new state of Pakistan would lead to the resolution of Hindu-Muslim communal issues. They were gravely mistaken. Today, 70 years after the Partition, communal tensions continue to plague relations between the majority and minority communities in both India and Pakistan.

Amit Ranjan¹

The month of August 2017 marked the completion of 70 years since the Partition of British India and the birth of Pakistan (which, in 1971, had its eastern wing liberated as the sovereign state of Bangladesh). Even seven decades after the boundaries of independent India and Pakistan were demarcated by a line drawn by Sir Cyril Radcliffe in 1947, their inter-state relationship and inter-communal ties between the Hindus and Muslims, to a large extent, reflect the outcomes of the British colonial project and the memories of violence related to the Partition in 1947.

¹ Dr Amit Ranjan is Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), an autonomous research institute at the National University of Singapore. He can be contacted at isasar@nus.edu.sg. The author bears full responsibility for the facts cited and opinions expressed in this paper.

The State and the Partition: Tensions Continue

The flag retreat ceremony at Wagah, a border town straddling the line between India (Punjab) and Pakistan (Punjab) perhaps provides a glimpse of the basic nature of the India-Pakistan relationship. Describing it, Jisha Menon in *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* writes, “The border ceremonies inadvertently reflect popular Partition discourse that casts the event in the image of twins, violently separated at birth by the nation’s founding fathers.”² During the ceremony, which the author has attended once, Indian and Pakistani soldiers, joined by the spectators from their respective countries, as a ritual, raise nationalistic fervour against each other.

Within the borders of the two countries, certain norms have been introduced by the proponents of the respective dominant version of nationalism to define the other. Any deviation or expression of dissent against such a set pattern often leads to abuses by the trolls on the social media circuits and even, in some cases, calls for violence or violence itself. In India, such a recent case was that of a Delhi University girl, Gurmehar Kaur, whose father, an army officer, was killed during the Pakistan-India Kargil war in 1999. When she came out with a poster saying “Pakistan did not kill my Dad, War killed him”,³ she was labelled by many as an “anti-national”⁴ and trolled by the so-called nationalists, including a former cricketer and a film actor. However, on the positive side, there were also many individuals who came out in her support.

In Pakistan, the dominant narrative on nationalism is based on anti-India rhetoric and constructions. Here, more than trolling, there are reports of individuals disappearing on even the slightest suspicion of engaging in, what is thought to be, “anti-national activities”. One such recent case was that of a television journalist, Zeenat Shehzadi, who “disappeared” in August 2015. On her disappearance, human rights lawyer Hina Jilani said, “We are convinced that this is the work of the secret government agencies because, when someone is

² Menon, Jisha (2013), *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* Delhi: Cambridge University Press. p 49.

³ “Freedom of Expression under Threat”, *Times of India*, 7 June 2017. Retrieved from <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/topic/Gurmehar-Kaur>. Also see ‘Trolling of Gurmehar Kaur reveals our utter disregard of a woman’s own mind’, Saha, Abhishek, *Hindustan Times*, 28 February 2017. Retrieved from <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/trolling-of-gurmehar-kaur-reveals-our-utter-disregard-of-a-woman-s-ownmind/storyWTdMq4xoCFnDIgnRsQ3KnI.html>.

⁴ Saha, Abhishek, *ibid*.

detained by them, the police can be quite helpless, and we have seen that in this case.”⁵ Apparently, she was working on the case of an Indian citizen, Hamid Ansari, who went missing in Pakistan in November 2012.⁶ Zeenat was due to appear before the Commission on Enforced Disappearances, Pakistan, on the Hamid Ansari case two days after the day of her disappearance.⁷ On trolling, journalist Sehryr Mirza says , “Trolling has happened with me, with many of my friends working for Ind-Pak [India-Pakistan] peace. It is quite common.”⁸ Yet, like in India, in Pakistan too, there are members of the civil society who, despite all odds stacked against them, are engaged in promoting the peace agenda.

The Partition of British India also defined the successor-states’ relationship with their respective minorities. Constitutionally, in secular India, the state maintains a “principled distance”⁹ from religion and it has, to an extent, managed to build an inclusive political system and institutions. Theoretically, the minorities in India enjoy equal political, civil and all other rights, without any form of constitutional discrimination against them.

Unlike India, Pakistan turned into an Islamic state, soon after its birth, where the minorities have not been able to share political rights and status with the Muslim majority on an equal footing. Article 41(2) and 91(3) of Pakistan’s Constitution, for example, reserves the offices of the President and the Prime Minister only for the Muslims¹⁰ although there are no constitutional restrictions and prohibitions on the members of non-Muslim communities occupying other public offices.

The Communities and the Partition: Issue of Trust Deficit

More than the inter-state ties, it is the inter-communal relationships which have been affected by the religion-based Partition. In colonial India, there was a significant debate on why

⁵ ‘Zeenat Shahzadi: Fears for missing Pakistani Reporter’, Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36149315>.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ She had sent this to the author in a text message.

⁹ See Bhargava, Rajeev (2002) ‘India’s Secular Constitution’, in *India’s Living Constitution: Ideas, Practices, Controversies* ed Zoya Hasan, E Sridharan and R Sudarshan, New Delhi, Permanent Black, pp 105-133.

¹⁰ See The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Retrieved from http://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1333523681_951.pdf.

Hindus and Muslims could not live together – they were considered to be two different nations.¹¹ In many instances, such differences were constructed by the political and social groups from within both communities.

The Partition was demanded by the All-India Muslim League with the belief that the establishment of a separate Muslim-majority nation-state would meet the aspirations of the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent. It was also expected that the Partition would resolve the inter-communal differences and put an end to the tensions between the two groups. However, this did not happen. Apparently, the Partition did not lead to the demarcation of India and Pakistan based on religion alone. A large number of Muslims preferred to stay in India while a section of the Hindu population remained in Pakistan.¹²

Even 70 years after the Partition, the two successor-states have failed to manage communal relations and inter-religious issues. Instead, the demographic composition has been used by various social and political groups in both countries over the years to their benefit. As a result, much of the colonial-era debate continues to exist between the various groups in India and Pakistan.

There are several issues which have caused or are continuing to cause inter-communal tensions in India and Pakistan. The author has decided to focus on a couple of them – these may be sufficient not just in presenting the state of inter-communal relations in the two countries which have their roots in British India, but also in highlighting the sensitivities in trying to address them. These are cow slaughter in India, and conversion or re-conversion in both India and Pakistan.

In India, although violence or lynching in the name of cow protection used to take place even before 2014,¹³ they were not a regular affair as in recent times. In 2015, on the mere suspicion of possessing and consuming beef, a mob lynched Mohammad Aklakh in his village Dadri in Uttar Pradesh. Since then, several other such cases have come to light; the

¹¹ Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, a well-known Indian Muslim pragmatist, Islamic reformist and philosopher of 19th century British India, was the first to raise this issue.

¹² The reasons for this vary from one respondent to another, especially in Pakistan, which unlike India, was demanded as a religion-based state.

¹³ Many political commentators blame the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance government which came to power in 2014 for the beginning of such brutalities in India. What has happened after 2014 is that the fringe elements have often become “mainstream” actors.

latest being the lynching of two persons in a village in the Dhupguri block of West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district on 27 August 2017 under suspicion of stealing cows.¹⁴ In June this year, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi repeatedly warned against mob attacks on cattle traders, beef eaters and dairy farmers.¹⁵ He said that killing people in the name of protecting cows was unacceptable.¹⁶ Earlier, referring to those engaged in cow protection activities, in August 2016, Modi said, "I get so angry at those who are into the *gau-rakshak* (cow protector) business. A *gau-bhakt* (cow devotee) is different; *gau-seva* (cow service) is different. I have seen that some people are into crimes all night and wear the garb of *gau rakshaks* in the day...70-80% will be those who indulge in anti-social activities and try to hide their sins by pretending to be *gau rakshaks*. If they are true protectors, they should realise that most cows die because of plastic, not slaughter. They should stop cows from eating plastic."¹⁷

Commercially, India exports around 19 per cent of the total beef consumed in the world. Although there are caste-based and regional differences over the status of the cow in India, both the slaughter and consumption of beef are primarily associated with the Muslims. However, lower-caste Hindus have also been beaten up for skinning dead cows.¹⁸ According to the last consumer expenditure survey carried out by the National Sample Survey Office in 2011-12, out of 80 million Indians who consume beef or buffalo meat, around 12.5 million are Hindus.¹⁹ Caste-wise, more than 70 per cent of the beef-eating population is from the constitutionally-recognised Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 21 per cent from the other backward castes and seven per cent belong to the upper castes.²⁰ The number of Muslim beef consumers is 63.4 million. This is about 40 percent of the total Muslim population in

¹⁴ "Two Lynched over suspicion of cow theft in West Bengal's Jalpaiguri district", *The Hindu*, 28 August 2017. Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/two-lynched-over-suspicion-of-cow-theft-in-west-bengals-jalpaiguri-district/article19570965.ece?homepage=true> Accessed on 28 August 2017.

¹⁵ <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/jharkhand-man-accused-of-carrying-beef-beaten-to-death/story-3fuowiHpgloxAbERlouZ4M.html>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/pm-modi-hits-out-at-cow-vigilantes-says-most-cows-die-after-eating-plastic-1441079>

¹⁸ "Gujarat: 7 of Dalit family beaten up for skinning dead cow", *The Indian Express*, Gopal B Kateshia, 20 July 2016. Retrieved from <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/gujarat-7-of-dalit-family-beaten-up-for-skinning-dead-cow-2910054/>.

¹⁹ The author has taken the data as published in *The Mint*, "Who are the Beef Eaters in India?", *The Livemint*, Roshan Kishore, 20 October 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/RhPVLUFmclIDWRIiSoTC7N/Who-are-the-beef-eaters-in-India.html>. Also see 'The Myth of the Holy Cow' by Professor D N Jha. This can be one of the essential reads on the religious side of the cow issue.

²⁰ Ibid.

India.²¹ Constitutionally, Article 48 under the Directive Principles of State Policy calls upon the Indian state to take certain measures to protect the cows in India. Under its guidance, almost all Hindu-majority states in India have passed an anti-cow slaughter law under their respective jurisdiction.

Secondly, conversions and re-conversions catalyse tensions between the two communities in India and Pakistan. In India, there is almost a negligible number of cases of conversions of members of the minority religious communities to Hinduism.²² One such case occurred in December 2014, when the re-conversions (*ghar wapsi*) of Muslims were carried out in Agra in Uttar Pradesh. A family of four brothers, their wives and children – 17 members in total – converted back to Islam a few weeks after the *ghar wapsi* ceremony. Although it was alleged that the re-conversion was carried out by prominent Hindu groups, the priest who performed the ceremony denied having any links with groups such as Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or Bajrang Dal,²³ variously associated with the Bharatiya Janata Party which rules at the Centre.

In Pakistan, there have been cases of girls from the Hindu-minority community being abducted by Muslim men, who then illegally marry and convert the girls to Islam. This is especially so in upper and northern Sindh. One such case was that of Rinkle Kumari who was abducted in 2012 and forced to marry her abductor, Abdul Haq (aka Mian Mithu), then a Pakistan People's Party parliamentarian (he was denied the party ticket to stand in the subsequent election). Rinkle's family fought the case in the court. However, "the case ended badly for Rinkle's family, with the Supreme Court finally sending her off with the man her parents said had abducted her."²⁴ The Court ruled in Haq's favour despite the fact that Rinkle "said clearly in open court that she wanted to go with her mother."²⁵ A recent case was that of Ravita Meghwar, which came to light in June 2017. Appearing before the Court, Ravita's father, Satram Das Meghwar, said that his daughter was illegally married to Syed Nawaz Ali Shah "after having been kidnapped from her village near Nagarparkar Town (Sindh) on June

²¹ Ibid.

²² The practice of *Shuddhikaran* (purification) was started by Dayanand Saraswati to convert people to the Hindu religion, but it is less practised in present times. The Hindu groups mainly appeal to Hindu couples to have more children.

²³ "After '*ghar wapsi*', now re-conversion to Islam", *Times of India*, Mishral, Isha, 1 May 2015. Retrieved from <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/agra/After-ghar-wapsi-now-reconversiontoIslam/articleshow/47124941.cms>.

²⁴ 'Bring Back Our Girls: Pakistan Hindus Struggle Against Forced Conversion' *The Wire*, Veengas 14 January 2017, Retrieved from <https://thewire.in/99522/pakistan-minorities-girls/>.

²⁵ Ibid.

6.”²⁶ In 2016, the Sindh Assembly had passed the Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Act 2015 to protect the rights of the minorities. However, its effectiveness is yet to be tested.

One of the plausible reasons for the continued existence of colonial-era debates over religious issues, inter-religious violence and unequal relationship between the communities is the apparent decline in inter-communal trust over the years.²⁷ Partition-related violence in 1947 shook a significant amount of the trust the Hindus and Muslims had in each other, and that lack of trust continues to be present in today’s India and Pakistan. In many cases of violence at the time of the Partition, neighbours turned into “killers” although there were also examples of neighbours turning into saviours who provided shelter as well as helped in the safe passage of people from the other community.²⁸ In post-Partition India and Pakistan, over time, the trust deficit further increased. The occurrence of communal riots, particularly in India, where there is a large religious minority, as well as the rise of militancy, which, sadly, has been associated with religion, were among the reasons for the further increase in distrust between the communities.

Expressing his views on the present situation in the country, former Vice-President of India, Hamid Ansari, on his last day in office, cautioned the people on the danger of exclusive and assertive nationalism in India.²⁹ In an interview with *The Indian Express*, Ansari said that, “India is secure. But the ‘idea of India’ is a matter of very considerable debate. To my mind, the idea of India which was crafted (is) one that is multi-layered, which accommodates a great deal of diversity. So one can’t say that there is this one ‘idea of India’, there are multiple ‘ideas of India’ and they all fit into each other. Sanguine? The ‘idea’ is being challenged with a certain frequency which makes me uncomfortable.”³⁰ In reaction, the current Indian Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu said that, “India is the most tolerant

²⁶ “‘Forced Conversion’: Police told to produce Ravita in Sindh High Court on June 22”, Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1340717>.

²⁷ The level of communal trust is mainly measured and checked during the time of riots. Although there are many examples of Hindus saving Muslims and vice-versa during such clashes, a majority number of people from side with their respective religious communities.

²⁸ See Ahmed, Ishtiaq (2014) *The Punjab Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed: Unravelling the 1947 Tragedy through Secret British Reports and First-Person Accounts*, Karachi: Oxford University Press.

²⁹ See <https://thewire.in/166419/asserting-nationalism-day-day-unnecessary-hamid-ansari/> and <https://thewire.in/165357/hamid-ansari-pluralism-secularism-democracy/>.

³⁰ “Hamid Ansari interview: ‘Idea’ of India being challenged with a certain frequency which makes me uncomfortable”, *The Indian Express*, Seema Chishti, 10 August 2017. Retrieved from <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/pms-slogan-impeccable-sabka-saath-sabka-vikas-but-then-sabkasaath-means-sabka-saath-says-hamid-ansari-as-he-prepares-to-demit-the-office-of-the-vice-president-4789845/>.

country...Unfortunately, some people are trying to blow it [intolerance] out of proportion and trying to defame India, raising it to [the] national forum.” He added that India “is the best model of secularism.”³¹

In Pakistan, this trust deficit is clearly visible in the state’s affairs and in the behaviour of a segment of the majority community towards the minorities. For example, after a gap of 25 years, a Hindu member of the National Assembly, Darshan Punshi, was finally inducted into the government in August 2017. He is a minister of state in the present government headed by Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi.

More than the state, it is the society with which the members of minority communities have to interact on a daily basis. Such forms of interactions are not always pleasant – some are based on discrimination and, in a few cases, subject to violence. In India, film actress Shabana Azmi claimed in 2008 that she was denied a flat in Mumbai because she was a Muslim.³² Later, a few other film actors like Saif Ali Khan and Emran Hashmi were reported to have faced similar ordeals while buying their respective flats in Mumbai.³³ In Pakistan, due to fear from their immediate neighbourhood, a large number of its Hindu population, mostly from the Sindh province, have crossed into the Indian side of the border³⁴ mainly, since 1965.

In an effort to present Pakistan as an ‘inclusive’ country under his leadership, then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif attended the Hindu festival of *Diwali* (Festival of Lights) in Sindh. In his address to the community members, he said that, “Every community living here whether Hindu, Muslim or Parsi, everyone belongs to me and I belong to them. I am prime minister of all communities.”³⁴ In March 2017, he also attended the *Holi* (festival of colours) in Sindh.³⁵ However, it is difficult to deduce what impact these overtures would have had on inter-communal relations in the country.

³¹ “Minority issues being used for political purposes, says Venkaiah Naidu after Hamid Ansari talks about Muslims ‘uneasiness’” Retrieved from: <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/venkaiah-naidu-vice-president-minorities-muslim-democracy-tolerance-hamid-ansari-4790633/>

³² ‘Indian Democracy unfair to Muslims: Shabana Azmi’, *Times of India*, 17 August 2008. Retrieved from <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Indian-democracy-unfair-to-Muslims-Shabana-Azmi/articleshow/3371893.cms>; and “No Muslims please!”, *The Hindu*, Tehsin, Arefa, 2 June 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.thehindu.com/features/magazine/no-muslims-please/article3482963.ece>

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ “PM vows to protect rights of all religious communities”, *The Dawn*, Ghor, Habib Khan, 12 November 2015. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1219105>.

³⁵ <https://www.samaa.tv/pakistan/2017/03/pm-to-attend-holi-festival-of-colours-in-karachi/>.

Conclusion

Even after 70 years following the Partition, debates around the division are still important because they continue to define the India-Pakistan relationship, and shape modern-day inter-communal relations in both countries. These debates cannot be settled unless an attempt is made to shape inter-state and inter-communal relations on the basis of post-Partition realities – both countries need to get out of the shadow of the Partition. This appears to be an almost impossible task because nations, in reality, need a history to define themselves, which, is often interpreted (and re-interpreted) to suit the interests of the power elites.

.