

‘Two Nations’: The Religious and the Secular Dimensions of Muslim Nationalism in Colonial India

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between the secular and religious dimensions of Muslim nationalism in colonial South Asia. Although the Muslim League under Jinnah argued that Muslims in South Asia constituted a distinct nation and laid claim to territorial sovereignty on the basis of religion, it sought to simultaneously deny its salience to the construction of the new nation after the Muslim ‘homeland’ of Pakistan was established in 1947. This makes a separation between the secular and religious dimensions of Muslim nationalism difficult to make. A distinction, however, can be more profitably made between territorialized and transnational narratives of Muslim identity. Part of the tragedy of the Muslim League’s position in seeking to territorialize Muslim identity through the demand for Pakistan was that it divided the very community it sought to represent, leaving those Muslims most in favour of a separate Muslim state trapped in India as a permanent minority.

Keywords:

Islam, Nationalism, Pakistan, Partition, *Umma*.

By the time, Nehru assumed the title of independent India's first Prime Minister, the nationalist dream of a united, sovereign secular India had been shattered by the creation of a South Asian Muslim state with its two disparate wings in Punjab and Bengal. Nehru found that he was not the only South Asian leader invoking the legacy of the great Mughal Emperor, Akbar.¹ If, as has been argued elsewhere², a clear distinction between secular and religious conceptions of the nation is difficult to sustain when examining the development of Indian nationalism as seen through the eyes of its predominantly Hindu leaders, this is even more the case when we consider the development of Muslim nationalism. Pakistan's founder, the *Quaid-i-Azam*, Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948), believed that South Asia's Muslims constituted a separate 'nation' with a single culture and language. In the Lahore session of the Muslim League in March 1940, Jinnah claimed that Islam and Hinduism were 'not religions in the strict sense of the word' but were 'different and distinct social orders'. Since both communities belonged to 'two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literatures', any attempt to 'yoke together two such nations under a single State, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to a growing discontent and the final destruction of any fabric that may be so built up for the government of such a state'.³

However, Pakistan, like India, was envisaged as a secular, sovereign state. In inaugurating Pakistan's new Constituent Assembly in 1947, Jinnah told the Pakistani people that they were all 'equal citizens of the state' and could belong to any 'religion or caste or creed'.⁴ Why then did the Muslims require a separate homeland? It will be argued here that Muslim nationalism in South Asia was a predominantly *reactive* phenomenon. The imagination and then articulation of a Muslim nationalism may be seen as a reaction to the development of a distinct Hindu ethno-religious or 'communal' identity as espoused by the *Arya Samaj* and *Hindu Mahasabha* in particular and the perceived 'communalization' of the

1) Akbar (r.1556-1605) succeeded in uniting the diverse religious and ethnic groups of the subcontinent under Mughal rule. Nehru famously invoked his legacy, and commitment to religious toleration, in his *Discovery of India* (1944). For a very brief introduction to Akbar's political thought, see Black (2001:239-50).

2) See Shani (2005).

3) Jinnah cited in Jaffrelot (2002:12).

4) Jinnah cited in Alavi (2002).

nationalist movement led by Congress, reflecting, as Nehru correctly identified, the fears and material interests of the Muslim elite, particularly in the United Provinces where the Muslims were in a minority. The fact that these fears took the form of a demand for a separate state reflected the prevalence, at least in elite circles, of the language of nationhood in colonial India and the centrality of state sovereignty to the nationalist discourse. The nationalist discourse served to territorialize⁵ Muslim identity in South Asia with disastrous consequences. Two problems in particular remained unresolved by the demand for a separate state: the borders of the new state and the fate of Muslims in minority provinces.

The idea of a separate Muslim homeland in South Asia was first articulated by the great poet, Mohammad Iqbal (1876-1938) in his speech as President of the Muslim League in December 1930. The state he envisaged centred on the Punjab, comprising also of neighbouring Muslim majority provinces to the west, Sindh, North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Sindh. Significantly, Iqbal conceived of a Muslim state *within* India. Iqbal saw no contradiction between anti-colonial nationalism and what may be termed communalism. Although, like other Muslims, he declared himself to be prepared 'to stake his all for the freedom of India', he pledged his love to 'the communal group which is the source of my life and behaviour and which has formed me...by giving me its religion, its literature, its thought, its culture and thereby recreating its whole past as a living factor in my present consciousness' (Iqbal [1930] 1998: 155). For Iqbal, the creation of a consolidated North-West Indian Muslim state was justified given the organization of Indian society along communal lines. India, for Iqbal, was, in true primordialist fashion, 'a continent of human groups belonging to different races, speaking different languages and professing different religions' (Iqbal [1930] 1998: 155). The formation of a consolidated Muslim state was, he considered, in the best interests of both Islam and India:

For India, it means security and peace resulting from an internal balance of power; for Islam an opportunity to rid itself of the stamp that

5) This clearly illustrated by Jinnah's insistence in 1941 that the Muslim 'nation must have a territory...must govern land, and must have a territorial state' (Metcalf 1999:135-emphasis mine). It was as if Jinnah could not conceive of a distinct Muslim national identity without a state.

Arabian imperialism was forced to give it, to mobilize its law, its education, its culture, and to bring them into closer contact with its own original spirit and with the spirit of modern times. (Iqbal [1930] 1998: 156)

Iqbal's demand for a consolidated Muslim state within India was supported by the Aga Khan who suggested that Muslim-majority regions in the north could act as a check upon the power of a centre in a federal United States of Southern Asia (Jalal 1985: 52). However, it was left to a young Cambridge student, Chaudhri Rehmat Ali, to give the imagined state a name. He proposed that the name of the new state should reflect its different regions. 'Pakistan' would be comprised of all the Muslim majority provinces in the North West: 'P' for Punjab, 'A' for 'Afghan' (the 'Afghan' Pathans of the NWFP), 'K' for Kashmir, 'S' for Sindh and 'B' for Baluchistan. The Lahore Resolution of 1940, however, made no mention of this new state, demanding instead that 'the areas in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority, as in the north-west and eastern zones of India should be grouped to constitute independent states in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign' (Jaffrelot 2002:12). It was not clear from the Resolution whether the Muslim nation would comprise of one state or two. The Muslim majority states of Punjab, where sixteen million Muslims comprising of 57% of the population, and Bengal, where 33 million, 55% of the population, lived were separated by a thousand miles of Indian territory (Jalal 1985:2).

Secondly, it was unclear what the relationship between the Muslim minorities inside India and the new Muslim state would be. Presumably, any demand to encompass Muslim-majority provinces into a Muslim state would necessitate abandoning Muslim minority provinces and relinquishing the right to demand separate electorates and proportional representation on their behalf within overwhelmingly 'Hindu' India. This would seem all the more surprising given the strength of Muslim separatism within the minority provinces and the absence of nationalist sentiment within the majority provinces until the 1940s. Indeed, the origins of Muslim nationalism in South Asia lay not in the Muslim majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal where regional parties were strong, but in the United Provinces where the eight million Muslims accounted for less than fifteen percent of the population (Jalal 1985: 2). Although the All-India Muslim League was established in Bengal in 1906, representing the interests of

loyalist Muslim landowners, a modern Indian Muslim identity had been previously forged in the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College established by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in Aligarh in 1869. The pivotal role played by Aligarh alumni in both the Muslim League and Khilafat movement reflects the importance of UP Muslims in the genesis of Muslim separatism in India. Why did the Muslim minority in this populous province in particular feel the need to articulate an identity which their co-religionists in Muslim majority provinces to the west either did not share until the 1940s or else took for granted?

Two contending thesis have sought to explain this. The first theory, put forward by Paul Brass, contends that there were little objective differences between Hindus and Muslims in the UP in terms of language and culture and that secular, Indian nationalism threatened the status of the traditional Muslim landed elites. According to Brass, 'Muslim leaders in north India in the late nineteenth century did not recognize a common destiny with the Hindus, because they saw themselves in danger of losing their privileges as a dominant community'. Therefore, they chose to stress 'a special sense of history incompatible with Hindu aspirations and a myth of Muslim decline into backwardness' (Brass 1974: 124). Muslim separatism resulted from the 'conscious manipulation of selected symbols of Muslim identity by Muslim elite groups in economic and political competition with each other and with elite groups among Hindus' (Brass 1991:76).

Brass cites three such symbols over which Muslims and non-Muslims clashed: the cow, the *Shari'a* and Urdu. Whilst the slaughter of cattle was not a central concern of Muslim political elites, the preservation of the *Shari'a* was. The body of laws which make up the *Shari'a* are binding for all Muslims and regulate most areas of social interaction including marriage, divorce and inheritance. Brass maintains that its interpretation and application by the *ulema* is one of the principal mechanisms whereby the latter maintain their control over Islamic society and is the main symbol of conflict between religious and secular elites (Brass 1991:81). It is a symbol which, Brass argues, Muslim religious elites use to constrain Muslim political elites who, in turn, have found it useful as a symbol in their conflicts with Hindu elites for political influence in the Muslim community (Brass 1991:82). Brass cites the example of the *Jami'yat-al-ulama-i-Hind*, a Muslim group founded over the sole purpose of safeguarding the *Shari'a*, which chose to form a strategic alliance with Congress, thus constraining

the Muslim League's freedom of manoeuvre and contesting its claim to speak on behalf of all Muslims. The secular league was thus forced to include in its demands the protection of Muslim personal law, and with it, to accept the continued influence of the *ulema* over the Muslim masses.

The adoption of Urdu as a symbol of Muslim identity by Muslim political elites in North India is perhaps Brass's most poignant example. Brass quite rightly points out that both Muslims and Hindus in the UP communicated on a day to day basis in Hindustani in the nineteenth century. Hindi and Urdu were mutually intelligible and Persian or Arabic, not Urdu, was taught in Islamic schools. However, Urdu became a symbol of Muslim identity when the British, under pressure from Hindu elites, decided to admit Hindi as a language of administration in the UP. According to Brass, the Muslim elites mobilized to defend Urdu as its replacement by, or use in conjunction with, Hindi would threaten their interests by making it more difficult for Muslims to seek government employment. Thus, the choice of Urdu as a symbol of Muslim identity had a material basis, 'arising out of elite competition for economic advantage' (Brass 1991:84).

The weakness of this theory, as with the instrumentalist approach in general, is with the disproportionate weight given to elite actions. Although Brass later acknowledges that 'elites are indeed limited and constrained by the cultures of the groups they hope to represent' (Brass 1979:54), his theory fails to explain why the Muslim masses later responded as enthusiastically as they did to the appropriation of religious symbols by the Muslim League after the 1940 Lahore Resolution. The religious dimension of Muslim nationalism is emptied of all significance becoming merely a marker used by self-interested elite groups claiming to represent Muslim interests. Thus, in Robinson's words, 'Muslims who write about the history of Islamic civilization rather than that of the Mughals, who move to defend Urdu rather than let its cause go by default, who direct their thoughts to men of their faith rather than to the Indian nation, are made to do so not because it might have been religious instinct, or at least a cultural preference, but because, from a choice of possibilities, they saw these policies as the best mobilizers of support for their interests' (Robinson 1979:91).

The second thesis, put forward in response to Paul Brass by Francis Robinson, contends that there were very real cultural differences between

Hindus and Muslims in the nineteenth century. These differences, particularly on issues to do with idol worship and cow protection were 'fundamental' and constrained the possibilities of Hindu-Muslim cooperation in the UP. The Muslims of that province 'feared that the Hindu majority would not interfere with their religious practices such as cow sacrifice, but also...discriminate against them' (Robinson 1974:13). For Robinson, 'Islamic ideas and values, then, both provide a large part of the framework of norms and desirable ends within which the UP elite take their rational political decisions, and act on occasion as a motivating force' (Robinson 1979:82). UP Muslims shared with their co-religionist a sense of belonging to a universal 'community of believers', the *umma*, which overrode the regional and ethnic ties which bound them to their Hindu neighbours. This sentiment reached its peak during the *Khilafat* movement, 'the greatest mass movement India had yet seen' (Robinson 1979:96). Launched by graduates of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College, the *Khilafat* movement was primarily designed to prevent the dismemberment of the Ottoman Caliphate (ruled by the 'Caliph' or successor of Mohammed) by allies after the World War I.

The sense of community is fostered by the rigid monotheism of Islam, by the *Qu'ran*, by the custom of alms giving, by *Ramadan*, by the performance of the *Haj* and above all by the existence of a body of Islamic law, the *Shari'a*. Allied with this kinship was a sense of superiority which had been instilled by their faith as can be seen in the treatment of non-Muslims who were divided into *dhimmis*, 'people of the book' (i.e. Christians and Jews) who were allowed to maintain their religious identities and allowed to administer their own personal law, and *kafirs*, polytheists and non-believers, who were to be brought forcibly within it. This sense of superiority was reinforced by the political conquest of much of South Asia. In Islam, unlike in traditional Hindu thought, there was no division between the temporal and spiritual domains. The Prophet states clearly in the *Qu'ran* that 'to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth' (Robinson 1979:88). It was the fact that, after centuries of Islamic rule, Muslims in South Asia still constituted 'a small minority in a population that was Hindu and polytheistic, *kafir* by the strictest tenets of the faith' (Robinson 1979:87), that most troubled the Muslim UP elite. It was the fear that, after the British left, Muslims would be swamped by a *kafir* majority that was a motivating factor behind

the rise of Muslim separatism. This helps explain Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's attempt to rehabilitate the Muslims in British eyes after the 1857 revolt and his unswerving loyalty to the *Raj*.

Although Francis Robinson's primordialist account provides an explanation why Muslim minorities inside India chose to support the creation of a Muslim state in Muslim majority areas which patently did *not* serve their own material interests, it *essentialises* Muslim identity and fails to explain the diversity of ways it was expressed in colonial India. Not all devout Muslims flocked behind the Muslim League and many chose to remain within India after partition. Congress continued to attract many Muslim followers even after the *Khilafat* movement collapsed as Brass's example of the *Jami'yat-al-ulama-i-Hind* illustrates. Indeed, Maulana Ab'ul Kalam Azad (1858-1958), served as Congress President from 1940 to 1946. Furthermore, as Robinson himself acknowledges, the *ulema* were against the creation of an Islamic state in South Asia. The demand for Pakistan *territorialized* Muslim identity and qualified the very universality upon which the *umma* was founded. It is difficult, therefore, to read into the pan-Islamism of the *Khilafat* movement a demand for a separate state for Muslims within India.

Brass makes a very clear distinction between secular and religious Muslim elites and their differing conceptions of Muslim identity. For the religious elite, the *ulema*, the Muslim community was defined in terms of religious beliefs, ritual practices, and adherence to the *Shari'a*. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *ulema*, in competition with Christian missionaries and later Hindu and Sikh revivalist and secular Muslim modernists, sought to construct boundaries between the 'faithful' and the *kafirs* along religious lines. They worked to impart to Muslim masses a consistent understanding and practice of Islam and to extend the enforcement of the *Shari'a* among Muslims who had not been fully subject to it. Although primarily concerned with the elimination of non-Islamic religious practices among Indian Muslims and the protection of the *Shari'a*, the *ulema* helped promote the spread of Urdu written in Persian and Arabic script through its network of *madrasahs* and religious schools, the most prominent of which was at Deoband in the UP. Urdu thus became a secondary symbol of Islamic identity, even though it was not understood by Muslims in Bengal, the NWFP or the south. This enabled the UP *ulema* to emerge as the *national* religious elite. However,

sovereign statehood remained unnecessary as long as Muslims constituted a religiously and legally autonomous community (Brass 1991:100).

For the secular political elite, on the other hand, the Muslim community was primarily a *political* community. The Muslim League in particular viewed South Asia's Muslims as constituting a nation defined not only with reference to a common religion but also a common history, culture and language. The origins of this secular elite lie in the graduates of the 'Aligarh' school, many of whom claimed to be descendant of the landed *ashraf* classes which administered the Mughal empire. Brass sees the secular elite as being motivated by the pursuit of power and the maintenance of their privileged status in the *Raj*. The creation of separate electorates in particular was seen as the key Muslim demand following the introduction of a limited franchise in the early twentieth century. The Urdu language became a secondary symbol of Muslim identity only when its position as an administrative language was threatened by the government under pressure from Hindu revivalists. The demand for a separate Muslim state may be seen as a logical extension of the concession of separate electorates which were threatened by the onset of a Congress government after independence. Secular elites were more interested in the achievement of sovereign statehood than in the implementation of the *Shari'a* and the fate of the *Khilafat*. Indeed, the secular elite disliked those aspects of the *Shari'a* that constrained their own freedom of manoeuvre and were generally more interested in securing material advantages from the British than fighting them overseas.

Brass's distinction between 'secular' and 'religious' conceptions of Islamic identity in India overlooks the degree which, as Robinson points out, 'religious values still penetrate the consciousness, still form part of the subjective orientation to the world, of men who may no longer practice their faith' (Robinson 1979:103). These religious values, however, inform political practice in different ways and cannot be essentialised in such a way as to teleologically legitimise the creation of a religious state. Islamic identity took many different forms and was expressed in many different ways by diverse groups, some of which opposed the creation of an Islamic state in South Asia.

Indeed, Ayesha Jalal has gone as far as to claim that Jinnah himself did not want an independent Pakistan but attempted to use the threat of the creation of an Islamic state to extract greater concessions for Muslims

from Congress *within* India. For Jalal, Jinnah sought to be the 'sole spokesman' representing Muslim interests at an All-India level. 'What Jinnah was clamouring for was a way of achieving an equal say for Muslims in any all-India arrangement at the centre' (Jalal 1985:241). By denying that Indian Muslims were a minority and asserting that they were a nation, Jinnah hoped to achieve sovereign status for India's Muslims once the British departed. The assertion of an absolute right to territories in the North-West and North-East of India on the grounds of a religiously informed national identity was merely 'a tactical stance necessitated by Congress's insistence on representing the whole of India' (Jalal 2000:387). This did not rule out the possibility of negotiations leading to a mutually acceptable accommodation. For Jalal, Congress, as well as the British and the Muslim League, share a considerable responsibility for the way in which the subcontinent was partitioned. By February 1947, with the principle of Pakistan conceded but its territory still undefined, the British decided to quit India as quickly as possible. To do so, it needed the support of the Congress which sought a strong, unitary government rather than a federal arrangement which would have given considerable autonomy to Muslim-majority provinces. Jinnah, meanwhile, hoped to play a 'long, slow game with Congress to secure the substance of his demands on behalf of Muslim India' (Jalal 1985:243). By offering Jinnah a 'mutilated and moth-eaten' Pakistan, the borders of which, shorn of non-Muslim populations in East Punjab and West Bengal, were not known until *after* independence, both the British and Congress were able to achieve their objective of ejecting Jinnah and the 'communal' Muslim League from the centre, clearing the way for a strong, unitary government as favoured by Nehru which could safeguard British interests. The fact that the birth of the new sovereign states was accompanied by what can only be termed ethnic-cleansing compromises *both* leaders secular credentials.

Seen from this perspective, continuity emerges in Muslim thought between the *Khilafat* movement and the demand for a separate homeland. Both may be seen as movements which sought to define and then defend a distinct Muslim cultural identity, ostensibly from the forces of 'secular' nationalism. According to Jalal, the attachment to the *umma* by Muslims in the early twentieth century 'aimed at stressing Muslim cultural distinctiveness in the maelstrom of an Indian nationalism that was becoming increasingly suffused with the ethos of Hindu majoritarianism' (Jalal

2000:193). When Ataturk formally brought an end to the Ottoman Caliphate, Muslims had to find different ways of articulating this cultural distinctiveness. The demand for a Muslim homeland was one way of doing so. Jalal has seen in Chaudhri Rehmat Ali's original demand for a Pakistan which would be part of a Muslim commonwealth of nations as 'nothing less than the territorial embodiment of the Muslim notion of the worldwide *umma*' (Jalal 2000:393). However, to do so misses perhaps the most salient point: that the *umma*, a *transnational* community of believers, can not be territorialized without qualifying its claims to universality.

It is here where a distinction can perhaps be made between those nationalist narratives which sought to territorialize Muslim identity and those which sought to emphasise its transnational aspects. Barbara Metcalf provides an example of the latter in her study of the *Tablighi Jama'at*, a seemingly apolitical, pietist movement whose main purpose, at least according to its founder, Maulana Ilyas, was to ensure that the '*umma* be shaped by the full intellectual and practical system (*nizam*) of Islam' (Metcalf 1999: 132). The *Tablighi Jama'at* eschewed political activity preferring to devote its attentions to the maintenance of Islamic religious and cultural distinctiveness in everyday life, particularly adherence to the canonical prayer and 'Islamic appearance and demeanour'. However, Metcalf notes that the apoliticism of the *Tablighi Jama'at* was 'not all that unlike the high politics of Muslim activists on the national stage' (Metcalf 1999:134). For the *Tablighi Jama'at*, like other Islamic movements, was 'grounded in the context of Indian nationalism and modernity' (Metcalf 1999:137). Although they may have conceived of themselves as apolitical in contrast with the Muslim League, groups such as the *Tablighi Jama'at* helped shape India's Muslims into a visible and culturally distinct 'ethnicity' which could lay claim to nationhood. However, their 'marked aterritorialism' (Metcalf 1999:140) as illustrated by their attachment to the *umma* and indifference to nationalist politics constituted a profound challenge to the Muslim League's nationalist narrative which focused on the *qaum*, the nation of Indian Muslims, based upon a territory, the *watan*.

In the Punjab, the demand for a separate state initially failed to make any significant inroads into the landed Unionist party hegemony. The *Raj* had attempted to construct a loyalist, super-communal regional identity in the Punjab which would serve its interests counterbalancing the clarion

call of trans-regional 'nationalism', whether of the Congress or Muslim League variety. This strategy, despite widespread support for the non-cooperation, *Khilafat* and Gurdwara reform movements amongst the non-elite classes, proved to be successful given the hold of the rural, *zamindari* elite over the countryside and the restrictive nature of the franchise.⁶ The Unionist party, founded by Sir Fazl-i-Husain and supported by the Muslim landed classes, sought dominion status within the British Commonwealth by constitutional means, by demonstrating to their colonial masters that they were capable of assuming increasing responsibilities for self-government. Following the extension of the franchise by the Government of India Act, the Muslim League managed to win just one seat in the province in the 1937 elections, dominated by the regional Unionist party, led by Sir Sikander Hayat Khan, which won ninety-nine out of 175 members of the assembly, including seventy-one out of seventy-five rural Muslim votes. Jinnah swore that he would 'never come to the Punjab again' yet the Unionist party felt sufficiently threatened by the Congress dominated centre to enter into an alliance with the Muslim League. The Sikander-Jinnah Pact of 1937, signed during the Lucknow session of the All-India Muslim League was a breakthrough for Jinnah and a vindication of his strategy of seeking to expand the League's support in Muslim-majority provinces.

However within less than three years of signing the pact, Jinnah 'was able to rally South Asian Muslims around the creed of an independent nation-state with *Muslim* providing a larger and cohesive identity to them' (Malik 1995:319). In the 1945-6 Provincial elections, the Muslim League managed to capture 75 seats, more than Congress and the Unionist Party combined (Jalal 1985:150). Jalal attributes the major transformation of Muslim public opinion in favour of Pakistan in the Punjab to the changing allegiances of the landed, *zamindari* elite. The Unionist cause in particular suffered from the departure from the scene of powerful regional leaders, such as Sikander who died in 1942, and the League was able appeal to the material interests of the new generation of Punjab's traditional landowning families, including Sikander's son, Shakaut Hayat, who, sensing an imminent British withdrawal, feared a strong centre dominated by

6) The Punjab, given only thirty seats in the aftermath of the Morley-Minto Reforms, was underrepresented on the Imperial Legislative Council in comparison with other regions (Malik 1995:308).

Congress would enact land reform which would be detrimental to their interests (Jalal 1985:143-4). However, Jalal's explanation, like that of Paul Brass, pays too much attention to elite actions and fails to take into account the emotional appeal that the demand for a Pakistan had among the Muslim masses and how this constrained the freedom of manoeuvre for the *zamindari* elite which stood little to gain from the partition of the province.

Following Robinson and Metcalf, it is possible to conclude that a strict separation between the secular and religious dimensions of Muslim nationalism is difficult to sustain. Jinnah and the Muslim League argued that Muslims in South Asia constituted a distinct nation and laid claim to territorial sovereignty on the basis of religion, yet sought to simultaneously deny its salience to the construction of the new nation. This was evident in his speech of 1947 when he told the Constituent Assembly not only that the citizens of Pakistan were free to belong to any religion and creed, but also that, 'in the course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense...but in the political sense as citizens of the state'.⁷ Constitutionally and legally, Pakistan has subsequently struggled to resolve this fundamental ambiguity: failing either to separate or combine the secular and religious dimensions of the Muslim nationalism which gave birth to the new state. When a constitution was finally agreed upon almost a decade after the establishment of Pakistan, it declared the new state to be an Islamic Republic where no law repugnant to the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* could be enacted, yet did *not* make Islam the official religion of the state. Indeed, Islam only became the state religion of Pakistan *after* the more populous East Wing had seceded following a bloody and intense civil war marked by the use of systematic brutality by the mainly west Pakistan army against Bengali-speaking supporters of the Awami League (AL) who had emerged victorious in the recent elections.⁸

Subsequent events in both Pakistan and Bangladesh suggest that Islam continues to play a deeply ambivalent role in the political and constitutional make-up of both societies. Whilst the military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq sought to 'Islamicize' Pakistani society through the

7) Jinnah cited in Alavi (2002).

8) The 1973 Constitution declared Islam to be the state religion of post-Bangladesh Pakistan (Brasted 2005:112).

selective use of the *Shari'ia* laws in an attempt to legitimise his military regime after his decision to overthrow the civilian administration of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, consecutive general elections have led to victories for 'secular' political parties, such as the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Muslim League, and the rejection of religious-based political parties, such as the *Jamiat-i-Islami* and *Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam*. However, both Benazir Bhutto, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's daughter and leader of the PPP, and Nawaz Sharif of the Muslim League, served as prime ministers without being able to complete their respective terms of office as a result of military and judicial intervention. Indeed, the civilian period saw the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) recruit and fund the *Taliban* from the *madrasas* of the *Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam*, the most fundamentalist and sectarian of Pakistan's Islamist parties, following the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. The authoritarian military regime of General Pervez Musharraf has done little to resolve the fundamental ambiguity surrounding the status of Islam in Pakistani politics. Musharraf has succeeded in projecting himself as a subcontinental Atatürk to his western allies eager to enlist him in the frontline of the 'war on terror', while making vital concessions to religious-based political parties which continue to shore up his rule domestically.

In Bangladesh, Islam continues to be invoked to legitimize the state despite its bloody separation from Pakistan three decades ago. Tension however remains between the Bengali and Muslim components of Bangladeshi nationalism: the Bengali attachment to a distinct culture based on language being counterbalanced by an increasing Islamisation of society. To a certain extent, these tendencies are represented by the Awami League which under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (known to his followers as 'Mujib') led Bangladesh to independence, and the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) created by the military regime of General Zia ur Rahman who engineered the coup in which Rahman was assassinated. While 'Mujib' envisaged Bangladesh ('the homeland of the Bengalis) to be a democratic, socialist and above all *secular* state, General Zia ur Rahman restored the Islam as the basis of national ideology. A year after discarding secularism (along with democracy) as a fundamental principal of state policy, Zia changed the national identity of the new state from 'Bengali' to 'Bangladeshi' thus redeploying Jinnah's seemingly discredited 'two nations' theory to the region. If Bengali nationalism emphasised the secu-

lar tradition of the state, Bangladeshi nationalism highlighted its Muslim roots (Brasted 2005: 116). These roots were officially recognised with the official proclamation of Islam as the state religion in 1988. The return to democratic rule in 1991 has furthermore done little to resolve the fundamental contradiction lying at the heart of Bangladesh's national identity since power has alternated between the AL and BNP.

In conclusion, Muslim nationalism successfully mobilised the Muslim masses behind the movement for a territorially-defined Muslim homeland within South Asia, yet once the goal of Pakistan was achieved and the new state established, it was found difficult to maintain a sense of national identity on religious grounds alone. With the subsequent disintegration of the 'moth-eaten' state separated by ethnicity, language and over a thousand miles of hostile territory, Jinnah's dream of 'two nations' defined by religion living side by side in South Asia was shattered. However, Islam continues to provide South Asians from different ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds with a coherent and cohesive politico-religious identity. This suggests a distinction can be more profitably made between territorialized and transnational narratives of Muslim identity. Territorial notions of Muslim identity emphasise the cultural distinctiveness of the Muslim *qaum* within an all-India context whereas transnational narratives focus more on the ties that link individual Muslim communities within South Asia to the wider *umma*. Part of the tragedy of the Muslim League's position in seeking to territorialize Muslim identity through the demand for Pakistan was that it ostensibly divided the very community it sought to represent, leaving those Muslims most in favour of a separate Muslim state trapped in a Hindu dominated India as a permanent minority.

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