

THE IDEA OF PAKISTAN

For millennia, ideas, people, and goods moved freely between the Indian subcontinent and what is now the Middle East, with routine trade well established by the sixth century A.D. In A.D. 660 the second caliph, Umar, sent the first Arab expedition to Sindh, and in 711 the province was conquered by Mohammad ibn Qasim. Along with advanced military power came missionaries and traders, and the process of conversion to Islam began. There are still important Muslim trading communities throughout South India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives—and farther east in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. These traders (and minor Muslim rulers) shared their knowledge of the sea route from East Africa to India with the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, the first European to make the long journey around Africa and across the Arabian Sea.¹ Parenthetically, just as Islam came to India in the seventh to eighth century, South Indian Hindu kingdoms began their exploration and domination over large parts of Southeast Asia.

Origins of the Idea of Pakistan

In the early eleventh century Muslim invaders arrived in India's northwest, with the Mongols following in the thirteenth. By then Indo-Islamic states had been established in north and northwest India. Some invaders were seasonal, based in present-day Afghanistan, and were influenced by Persian

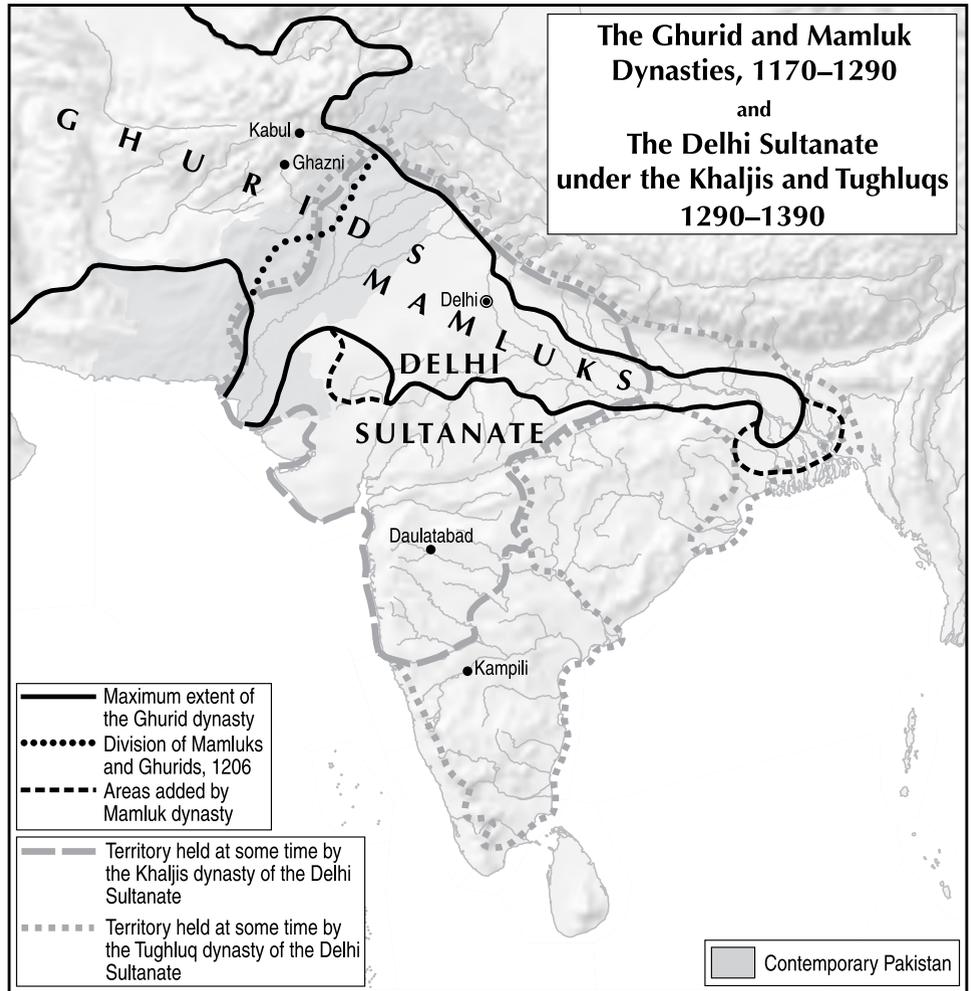
political and military models. These Central Asians came to loot and convert but eventually stayed on to rule.

By 1290 nearly all of India was under the loose domination of Muslim rulers. Two and a half centuries of internecine war among various Indo-Islamic, Hindu, and Sikh states followed, after which the Mughals established an empire in the early sixteenth century that stretched from the Northwest Frontier to Bengal and down to the Deccan (present-day Andhra Pradesh). The attempts of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb to extend his control to South India, coupled with his brutal treatment of his subjects, led to a crisis of empire.² The empire lasted until 1858, when it was finally eliminated by the British. A few major Muslim and Hindu principalities remained intact; these were all absorbed into India or Pakistan after the British departed India in 1947.

Islam, Conversion, and Mythology

As Islam moved eastward, it encountered Persian, Hindu, Buddhist, and eventually Chinese cultures, none of which was composed of “people of the book”—Christians and Jews. This encounter along the new Asian frontier led to considerable adaptation and change in Islam, a religion of the desert lands. In India, the caste system crept into Islam, and Hindu religious practices were incorporated in Islamic rituals. In turn, Islam had a profound impact on India, notably in transforming Sikhism from a pietistic Hindu sect into a martial faith. Further, those variants of Islam such as Sufism, which incorporated saint worship, mysticism, and piety, had a great attraction for India’s Hindus and Buddhists, and today Sufism is important in a good part of Pakistan, especially Sindh and Punjab.

Because of wide regional variations, the impact of Islam on India is difficult to summarize. In the south and the east, Muslim rule was relatively benign and inclusivist. In Hyderabad-Deccan and Bengal, Muslim rulers presided over vast Hindu populations, and conversion was extensive and peaceful.³ In some instances Hindu institutions received state patronage and there was extensive intermarriage between Muslim ruling families and their high-caste Hindu counterparts, as family ties were used to shore up political alliances. Gradually, many Muslim dynasties, especially the Mughals, became “Indianized” through the marriage of Muslim princes and Hindu princesses, with their children assuming prominent positions in the state apparatus. However, some regions experienced the militant,



exclusivist side of Islam, with the destruction of Hindu temples and attacks on the Brahmin-dominated Hindu social order taking place in such renowned pilgrimage destinations as Multan (in the Pakistani province of Punjab) and Somnath (in the contemporary Indian state of Gujarat). The most vivid account of these conquests is that of the Central Asian scholar Alberuni, who wrote in the early eleventh century: “Mahmud [of Ghazni] utterly ruined the prosperity of the country, and performed there wonderful exploits, by which the Hindus became like atoms of dust scattered in all directions, and like a tale of old in the mouth of the people. Their scattered remains cherish, of course, the most inveterate aversion towards all Muslims.”⁴ These sites are still politically sensitive, and that is why the Hindu nationalist politician L. K. Advani chose Somnath to begin his “Rath Yatra” on September 25, 1990, in an attempt to mobilize Hindu sentiment.

No question is more contentious, or of more contemporary political relevance, than that of how Islam spread *within* South Asia.⁵ The entire state of Pakistan rests on certain interpretations of that expansion, and in India conversion and reconversion to Hinduism are intensely divisive political issues. Remarkably, there is little objective scholarship on the subject, but there is an enormous amount of mythmaking and fabrication.

The fact is that Muslims constituted about one-quarter of India’s population around the time the British arrived, concentrated in eastern Bengal and Sindh, Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), and parts of Punjab. Muslims were a majority in East Bengal and parts of India’s northwest, although it took the British nearly a hundred years to recognize this. Their earlier estimates were that Muslims constituted no more than 1 to 10 percent of the total population, and not until the first census, in the late nineteenth century, were accurate numbers obtained. The British were also uncertain about how many Muslims were immigrant-descended (*Ashraf*) and how many were converts; further, it took them some time before they (and Indian scholars) came to understand that conversion to Islam was still taking place, in some places at a rapid rate, even in parts of India directly governed by the British.⁶

Of the many theories about the distribution and numbers of Muslims in India, one was that Muslim power rested on superior military technology and tactics, which enabled Muslim rulers to forcefully convert Hindus to Islam.⁷ Another (favored by some British writers) was that

The Mughal Empire

1556 – 1707



Islam, like Christianity, was a monotheistic religion, and pagan Hinduism could not withstand the moral arguments of either. According to some Muslim writers, the Sufi movement played an important role in recruiting converts to Islam, as indicated by the close linkage between Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sufism, a pietistic, mystical form of Islam.⁸ Islam, others point out, matched up well with the requirements of an expanding economic and demographic frontier in places like East Bengal. A large number of conversions took place there (as on the island of Java) because Islam was adaptable and effective in assisting the colonization of new lands.⁹

A significant factor in the west was the proximity to other Islamic societies and states, as well as the greater ease with which Sindh—which was more Buddhist than Hindu—could convert to an egalitarian Islam.¹⁰ In parts of Punjab, where for many hundreds of years differences between Hindu and Muslim were less important than differences of clan and tribe, conversion to Islam often occurred for economic and social reasons.¹¹ As in present-day India, families commonly designated one son for conversion to facilitate dealings with a Muslim ruler. Forced conversions, which occurred in parts of India as recently as the 1920s, should also be mentioned, although these have been exaggerated by both Hindu and Muslim historians. In sum, Islam thrived in India for a variety of reasons: intermarriage, conversion, the attractiveness of Islamic egalitarianism, and social and political advantages in a context of Muslim rulers.

Until the 1920s English-speaking Muslims were not too concerned about seeing Hindus, Buddhists, and followers of folk religions convert to Islam. Rather, the presence of masses of Muslim converts was a political liability, and educated Muslims focused on rescuing the noble families who had suffered under British rule. When it became evident that numbers counted, however, the upper-class Westernized Muslims of India began welcoming the *awwam* (Urdu for lower or uneducated classes).¹² They argued that the converted Indian Muslim had a distinctive political identity, as did some earlier British writers and scholars who had identified the “Mohammedans” of India as a distinct nation.

In the 1920s more and more Muslims and Hindus engaged in myth creation, a process that continues unchecked today in both India and Pakistan. On one hand, many Muslims, including the leaders of the Pakistan movement, saw India’s Islamic period as a golden age, an era of high culture and material and spiritual progress that was all but absent under the

displaced “pagan” Hindu regimes.¹³ To Hindu nationalists, on the other hand, the coming of the Muslims brought a new dark age, marked by the mass destruction of places of worship, forced conversions, and Muslim cultural imperialism. In fact, scholars have found little evidence of massive cruelty and cultural barbarism, or the wholesale destruction of temples, only some temple looting and capture of holy images by Muslim and Hindu rulers alike.¹⁴ Histories of this nature are manufactured by propagandists on both sides and are periodically refreshed by such events as the demolition of the Babri Masjid in India in 1992, the communal riots in the state of Gujarat in 2002, and attacks on Hindu temples and Christian churches throughout the subcontinent.¹⁵

The Company and the Raj

The first great encounter between Islam and the West took place between 711 and 1492, when Christian armies expelled the Muslims from the Iberian peninsula. The second occurred when Portuguese, Dutch, French, and British traders came to South Asia and warred with each other in the subcontinent, allied with various Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh regional powers. Eventually the triumphant British stayed on to rule.

The first British “government” in India was that of the crown-chartered East India Company. The Company gradually assumed responsibility for governance from the decaying Mughal Empire and layered a Chinese-inspired bureaucracy over existing Mughal and Hindu patterns. This was a major innovation in the history of South Asia. The role of the British-Indian bureaucracy, which had originally been established as a means of collecting revenue (the title of district officials in many parts of India is still “collector”), expanded to include administering law and order, disaster relief, and development projects. Until recently the collector also served as a magistrate, but now judicial and executive functions are separated at the district level in both India and Pakistan. Building upon the early canal system created by the Mughals, the British also helped India devise the world’s largest integrated irrigation system, which had to be divided between India and Pakistan in 1960, however, since it lay astride their frontier.

In addition, the British bequeathed a lasting military legacy to Pakistan. Emulating the French, the East India Company recruited Indians and trained them along Western lines. These “sepoys” (a corruption of *spahi*, the Persian-Turkic word for cavalryman) were led by British officers

selected and promoted largely on merit. Two hundred years later, the professional descendants of those British officers run Pakistan.

In 1833 control of India passed from the East India Company to Whitehall, although a powerless Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, continued to sit on Delhi's throne. This arrangement did not prevent massive discontent in India, culminating in the uprising of 1857 one consequence of which was that the dual pretext of Company rule and Mughal sovereignty was swept away. The events of 1857 are referred to as an uprising by Pakistani historians, a mutiny by the British, and the First War of Independence by nationalist Indians.

Whereas the Company had governed the many for the benefit of the few, namely, its shareholders, the new government of India, the Raj, was responsible to London and hence developed strategic and moral justifications for its rule retroactively. Strategically, the British saw India as the jewel in the crown of the empire, although by the 1930s the jewel had become less of an asset. Morally, they envisioned their rule as a mission: to elevate the Indian people to the point where they might, eventually, become independent of British tutelage. Rubbing it in, they carved the following inscription over an entrance to the Central Secretariat Building in New Delhi: "Liberty will not descend to a people. A people must raise themselves to liberty. It is a blessing that must be earned before it can be enjoyed."¹⁶

In sum, the Raj's approach was to adopt Persian and Mughal practices, but to denigrate its Indo-Islamic predecessors.¹⁷ Since the British considered themselves the tutors of India, the trustees of an empire, they sought no mass conversion or state-sponsored religion, although their cultural penetration—through the English language and Western education—was to be as deep and as lasting as that of the Muslims. The Raj endured because it was efficient and powerful, and because it appealed to higher instincts. It became the model for good government on the subcontinent, in Pakistan even more than in India.

The Loss of Power and Identity

By the mid-1800s northern India had significant numbers of Muslims, concentrated in the northwest and East Bengal, especially Awadh/Oudh, a princely state until it was absorbed into British India in 1856. Its capital, Lucknow, was a center for education and Muslim culture. After the

mutiny of 1857, many elite Muslim families went to the nizamate of Hyderabad in the south (some later migrated to Pakistan when Hyderabad was taken over by India after independence), which regarded itself as the legate of the Mughal Empire and remained outside of British India. Of the state's nearly 12 million residents, 12 percent were Muslims. Furthermore, it had not only a well-run administration but also higher levels of education and income than adjacent districts in British India. Hyderabad's Muslim elites included Persian and Arabic speakers, leaders of Turkish (Mongol) descent, and Urdu-speaking Muslims from North India.

Hyderabad was but one of the 500 or more princely states remaining after the breakup of the Mughal Empire, some others being Junagadh, Bhopal, Rampur, Bahawalpur, and Jammu and Kashmir (J & K). Unlike Hyderabad, which had a Muslim ruler but a largely Hindu population, Kashmir had a Hindu ruler but a largely Muslim population with Hindu and Buddhist minorities, the latter tucked away in the districts of Ladakh. India's subsequent forceful absorption of Junagadh, Kashmir, and Hyderabad became a major source of Pakistani grievances against New Delhi.

The dismantlement of the enfeebled Mughal court had a major impact on India's Muslims. After the mutiny and revolution of 1857, in the words of the Pakistani scholar-administrator Akbar S. Ahmed, the Muslims of India "lost their kingdom, their Mughal Empire, their emperor, their language, their culture, their capital city of Delhi, and their sense of self."¹⁸ Even the poorest Muslim could identify with the Mughal Empire, or with the smaller but still substantial Muslim princely states that had not been incorporated into the Mughal system. All this was swept away in an instant—and the fundamental political, social, and economic structure of India was reordered in a fashion that gave the Muslims little social space and no political power. In 1835 Persian was replaced as the official language of the East India Company, and after the mutiny "the Indian establishment switched entirely to speaking English. Muslim ways—dress, style, food—were also put aside. Muslims now felt not only politically vulnerable but concerned for their very identity."¹⁹

There is a rich polemic literature on the response of Indian Muslims to the decline of the Mughal Empire. Indian nationalist historians tend to argue that Muslims reacted like "Indians" to the creation of the Raj—both wanted to throw the foreigners out. To them, as already mentioned, the mutiny was India's First War of Independence, and subsequent demands

for a separate Pakistan arose from the machinations of the British, who were trying to divide the two communities in order to rule them.

By contrast, many Pakistani scholars and publicists see the dislocation of the Muslim community after 1857 as the *original* source of Muslim discontent, and they attribute it to malevolent anti-Muslim sentiments of the British. By favoring Hindus in education, administration, and other spheres, they tilted against Muslims culturally, economically, and politically.²⁰ And by promoting democratic institutions, liberal British authorities inadvertently bestowed a permanent minority status on Muslims in greater India, as they would always be outnumbered by the larger Hindu community.

Not surprisingly, the early Muslim leadership did not favor democratic elections, which from the Muslim point of view signified parliamentary democracy—where 51 percent forms the government—and thus would make Muslims a permanent minority. Another, more practical concern was the traditional relationship of dominance-subordination between the predominantly petit-aristocratic Muslim leadership and the large Muslim peasantry. Although some mass-based Muslim political organizations were present in East Bengal, there was no guarantee that they would be the chosen representatives of the Muslim population.

For all their distinctiveness, Muslims shared many interests with the other populations of India, and on the regional level their cultures were intertwined. Punjabis—whether Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh—had a similar worldview and approach to life. Likewise, many South Indian Muslim communities had more in common with their fellow Tamil or Malayalam speakers than with the Urdu or Punjabi speakers to the north. Even in Bengal, which had a huge minority Muslim population, the dominant culture was Bengali, although here the two communities were sharply divided along class and social lines. Hyderabad (Deccan) and the Vale of Kashmir (sometimes referred to as “the Valley” and site of the region’s largest city, Srinagar) saw rich fusions of Hindu and Islamic cultures. Much of the Hindu-Muslim tension in British India (and in India and Bangladesh today) stemmed not from religious but from class and social differences.

Still, certain issues had a particular appeal to India’s Muslims. One was the abolition of the Khilafat (see the next section) after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. Another was the disposition of Islam’s holy sites in

Arabia and Palestine. One hundred years ago these issues fomented riots throughout India, but even today, pan-Islamic concerns such as the Israel-Palestine conflict are still capable of stirring public passions throughout the subcontinent.

By the time of the Raj, India's Muslims had become a politically and culturally mixed population. They had a dispossessed court, narrow elite, and large poor peasantry. Filled with fresh memories of grandeur and glory, they grew increasingly frustrated and fearful as Hindus adapted more swiftly than Muslims to the Raj's new political and social order.

The Birth of an Idea

Though ideologues claim that Pakistan was born on the day that Muslims first set foot on Indian soil, the first person to systematically set forth the argument for what eventually became Pakistan was the jurist, author, and educator Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817–98).²¹ He respected—even feared—the British, tirelessly arguing that the only way for India's Muslims to resist the encroachment of Christian missionaries and the larger Hindu community was to become educated to a high standard and remain loyal to the Raj. In 1875 Sir Syed laid the basis for what would become Aligarh Muslim University, which in turn produced the scholars and professionals who staffed the Pakistan movement. Although Sir Syed was dedicated to Muslim modernization, Islam's destiny, and the idea of a pan-Islamic identity, he stopped short of advocating a separate state for India's Muslims.

Nevertheless, a separate *status* for India's Muslims was in the works and became an important milestone on the road leading to Pakistan. In the late nineteenth century the British began to examine more carefully the population they now ruled. Aware of the vast social differences in Indian society, they felt an obligation to protect its vulnerable segments and adopted the principle of separate electorates and quota systems, first for deprived Hindu castes—notably the “untouchables” and non-Hindu tribals.²² Then they acceded to Muslim demands for separate electorates.

The predominantly Hindu Congress did not oppose these seats for so-called Mohammedans and in 1916 came to an agreement with the Muslim League on the issue. The Congress and the Muslim League shared other policies as well. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi—later known as the Mahatma—afterward supported the Khilafat movement (the 1919–24 movement that attempted to restore the Ottoman caliph).²³ This was the

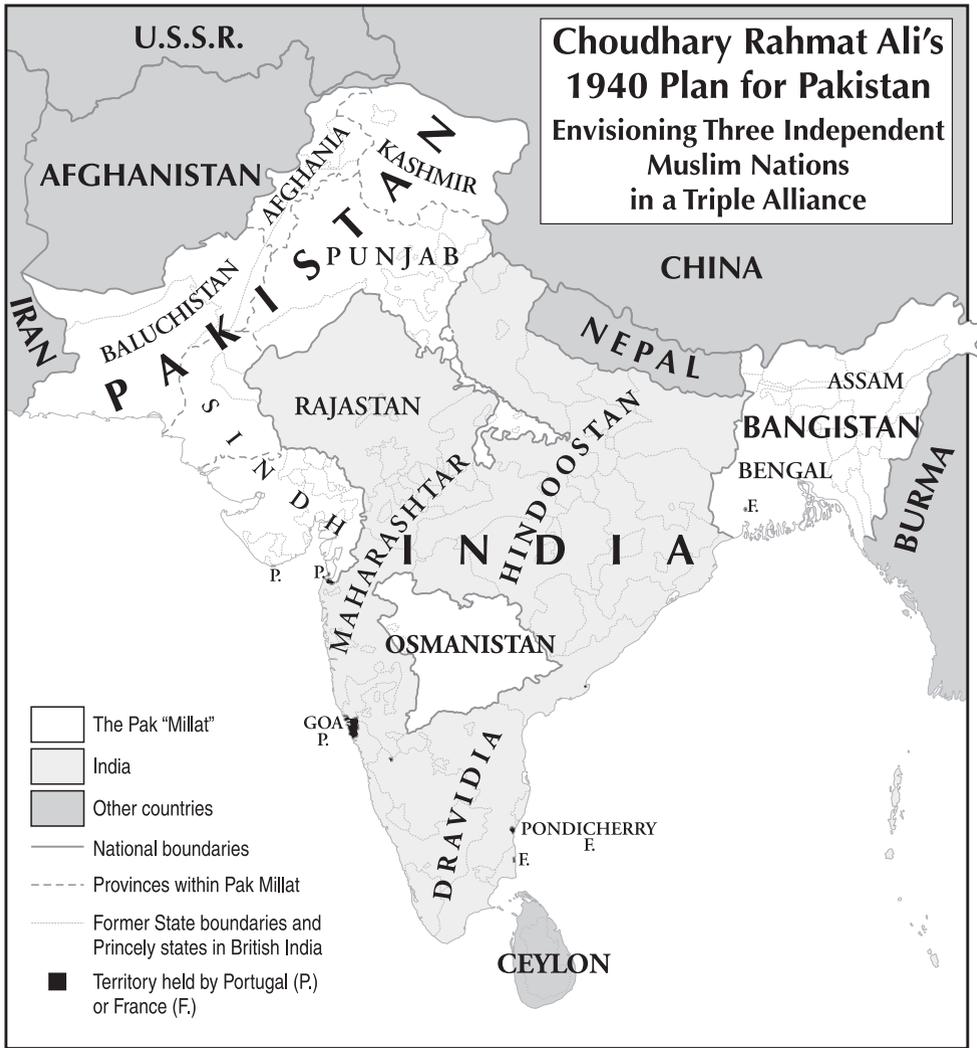
first time that a predominately religious issue had been introduced into Indian politics.²⁴ Interestingly, two of India's leading Muslims, Iqbal and Jinnah, were not involved in the Khilafat movement but were deeply impressed with Turkey's Kamal Ataturk and his regime.

Separate electorates soon became a highly contentious issue, one that remains politically significant today. India's Muslims, some reasoned, were descendants of peoples who had migrated to the subcontinent several centuries earlier and thus might be considered quite different from indigenous Indians—a separate “nation”—and as such deserving of protection and a separate electoral status. In the view of others, they were largely converts, their underlying culture, moral values, and social order not unlike those of the “sons of the soil,” which meant both groups could share an “Indian” political nationality in a common electoral arrangement.²⁵

Swayed by the latter argument, the Congress reversed its position on separate electorates for Muslims—although it continued to support them for disadvantaged Hindus and tribals. Troubled by this inconsistency, Indians debated whether there were valid reasons for differential treatment of religion, on the one hand, and language, ethnicity, or economic status on the other. To this day, India and Pakistan have been unable to reach a conclusive position on the question of quotas and reservations, as is the case in every state that tries to legislate political equality between economically or socially unequal groups.

As for the concept of a separate Indian Muslim political entity, it was first put forth in the 1930s by Choudhary Rahmat Ali, an Indian Muslim living in Cambridge, England. He and a group of Indian students outlined a plan for a federation of ten Muslim states, which they named Pakistan by drawing letters from the provinces that had a Muslim majority or close to it: Punjab, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Baluchistan.²⁶ In Persian, *Pakistan* also means “land of the pure,” an implicit gibe at the ritually “pure” high-caste Hindus who dominated the Indian National Congress. However, the name did not come into common use until 1945. Even the 1940 resolution of the Muslim League calling for a separate state for India's Muslims did not mention it.

Despite the increasing support for Pakistan—whether as a separate entity within India or as a state—many distinguished Indian Muslims rejected the idea, choosing to be loyal to the politically dominant Indian National Congress. Badr-ud-Din Tyabji, Zakir Husain, and Maulana Abul



Kalam Azad remained staunch members of the Congress to the end of their lives.

Jinnah of India

Mohammed Ali Jinnah, a Bombay lawyer, was the second great advocate of a distinctive Muslim Indian identity. He served as governor-general of the new state until his death in 1948. A secular lawyer-politician, he is revered in Pakistan today as the Quaid-i-Azam, or “Great Leader.” A brilliant political strategist and speaker, he was Pakistan’s Tom Paine and George Washington. He was not, however, a Jefferson, a theoretician or deep thinker. Jinnah was the first world-class political figure produced by Pakistan—in this case, by the idea, not the state.²⁷

After joining the secular Indian National Congress in 1905, he rose to a leading position as “the ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity.” Ironically, he became the individual most responsible for the merger of the idea of Pakistan with the state of Pakistan. He quit active politics in 1930 and went to London to practice law, but returned to India in 1934 to revitalize the Muslim League. Jinnah organized the campaign that compelled both the British and the Indian National Congress to concede to the demand for the state of Pakistan. He summarized his life’s struggle in a historic address at a mass meeting in Lahore on March 23, 1940, that set forth the logic of Pakistan, echoing Alberuni’s observation 900 years earlier:

The Hindus and the Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literatures. They neither intermarry, nor inter-dine together and, indeed, they belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. Their aspects on life and of life are different. It is quite clear that Hindus and Musalmans derive their inspiration from different sources of history. They have different epics, their heroes are different, and they have different episodes. Very often the hero of one is a foe of the other, and likewise, their victories and defeats overlap.²⁸

Jinnah turned the “two-nation” theory (the idea that India’s Muslims and Hindus constituted two “nations,” each deserving their own state) into an effective political movement. Because he had to weld together

disparate elements of the Indian Muslim community, Jinnah's arguments were deliberately vague. This vagueness brought both strength and weakness to the Pakistan movement, enabling it to muster support for independence and opposition to Hindu domination, but not to build a consensus on the kind of state Pakistan was to become. In addition, Jinnah's dominance left little room for second-tier leadership, which was to prove disastrous when he died shortly after independence.

The Two-Nation Theory and Iqbal

From 1929 onward, the Indian National Congress called for an independent state of India. The following year the Muslim League demanded not only that India become independent from Britain but that it consist of two "nations," one Hindu and one Muslim, with suitable protection for Muslims from what was envisioned as a Hindu-dominant India.

Indian Muslims were split on both questions. Some, such as the princes, had good working relations with the British and saw nothing to gain from an independent India or even a Muslim-dominated Pakistan. Many of the rulers of the princely states (Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh) opposed partition and only grudgingly gave in to British pressure to join one or the other dominions. A few, especially the nizam of Hyderabad, had sought independence. Other Indian Muslims, such as Maulana Azad, wanted a free but undivided India. Azad had arrived at this position after journeying in the opposite direction of Jinnah: he was originally a member of the Muslim League but then joined Congress in the 1920s.²⁹ Still others favored a separate Pakistan within India, or a confederation of India and Pakistan. Some pious Muslims (like some Jewish sects that deny Israel's legitimacy) even opposed the idea of Pakistan on the grounds that Muslims should not pay allegiance to any single state but to a larger community of believers, the *ummah*.

What percentage of Indian Muslims favored an independent Pakistan is still unclear, but there is no doubt that the most prominent community leaders wanted a separate state—or at least staked out a claim for Pakistan in the hope of winning concessions in the final round of negotiations. The third towering figure of this group was Allama Iqbal, who in his own way propelled the idea of Pakistan forward as effectively as Jinnah or Sir Syed.

An eclectic figure who was a great and influential poet from Punjab, Iqbal did not fall into any single category. Caught between cultural

conservatism and political reformism, his message was complex and subtle. He, too, began as an advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity, and one of his poems, *Tarana-e-Hind* (“Indian Anthem”) is still a popular song in India (it begins: “Our Hindustan is the best place in the world . . .”). At the same time, Iqbal, more than Jinnah, anticipated the rage of contemporary Pakistanis, and much of his poetry and writing is a lament for the poor condition to which India’s Muslims had fallen after their glorious past. Iqbal turned the idea of a separate homeland for India’s Muslims into a mass movement, drawing intellectuals, professionals, and community leaders into the fold. He heightened community pride—the community being defined as the Muslims of India—and credibly argued that this community desired and needed a separate state in which it could establish a South Asian counterpart of the great Islamic empires of Persia and Arabia. For Iqbal, this state—he did not call it Pakistan—would not only solve India’s Hindu-Muslim puzzle, it would awaken and re-create Islam, freeing it from both alien Hinduism and obsolescent Islamic encrustations. At first Iqbal did not advocate a separate country, but one or more distinct components in a federated India; if that was not possible, he declared in his 1930 presidential address to the Muslim League, then Indian Muslims should seek a completely separate state via “concerted political action.”

Iqbal’s idea of Pakistan was not based on a European model of a nation-state, but on “an acute understanding that political power was essential to the higher ends of establishing God’s law.”³⁰ Like many of his coreligionists, including those who set the stage for today’s Islamic parties, Iqbal saw territorial nationalism as a step toward a larger Islamic community, a vehicle for the perfection of Islam. By contrast, Jinnah envisioned Pakistan as a “nation” consisting of Indian Muslims.

By the late 1930s Hindus and Muslims were on a collision course. In 1940 the learned B. R. Ambedkar, leader of India’s scheduled castes and chief drafter of India’s constitution, anticipated the current India-Pakistan rivalry, noting the two were like hostile states in an arms race, competing in the establishment of militant groups, educational institutions, and political parties: “Both appear to be preparing for war and each is watching the ‘preparations’ of the other.”³¹ Even the idea of reform in one community threatened the other, he remarked: for Muslims, Hindu reform implied a weakening of the traditional alliance between Muslims and India’s untouchable population, while Hindus viewed Islam as a proselytizing

religion, like Christianity, luring Hindus away from their civilizational roots.³² These arguments echo today, as Hindu extremists launch a major reconversion movement in India, arguing that Pakistan-sponsored terrorists are merely continuing the civilizational war waged by Muslim raiders a thousand years ago.

Pakistan and the World

If there was any concern about South Asia's security after partition, it revolved around India's status, not that of Pakistan. Very little thought was given to the strategic implications of a new state of Pakistan. There were so few Muslim officers, the British observed, that India and Pakistan would have to enter into some form of military confederation, requiring a British presence in Pakistan for many years to come. Though widely held, the assumption that both India and Pakistan would remain dependent upon Britain was tragically wrong. No proponent of the Pakistan movement dreamed that Pakistan and India would become bitter enemies, or that the armed forces of Pakistan would dominate Pakistani politics.

Before 1947 the regional security debate revolved around *India's* security in the face of an independent Pakistan, which would stand between India and Afghanistan, on the one hand, and between India and the Soviet Union, on the other. Could Pakistan maintain a viable army? Would it serve as a bulwark for India against Soviet pressure or radical Islamic movements? Jinnah and Iqbal both believed that a new Pakistan would enhance the defense of the subcontinent precisely because of its Muslim and Islamic nature, arguing that security considerations strengthened the case for Pakistan. According to Iqbal, the Muslims of Punjab and the Northwest Frontier Province would "be the best defenders of India against a foreign invasion, be that invasion the one of ideas or bayonets. The Punjab with 56 percent Muslim population supplies 54 percent of the total combatant troops in the Indian army and (if the Gurkhas are excluded) the Punjab contingent amounts to 62 percent of the whole."³³

Iqbal disagreed that such a concentration of armed Muslims would put pressure on India, as was feared by a number of his coreligionists who supported the Congress. In a prophetic analysis of Pakistan's strategic future, a Muslim member of the Congress, Shaukatullah Ansari, argued that Pakistan would have insufficient resources to defend itself without outside help for it would face *three* conflicts involving two fronts.

In the west there was a potential threat from both Russia and Afghanistan, in the east from Japan and China, and in both the east and west from India. Further, a united India would be a great power, whereas a divided one would be as weak as Egypt, Burma, or “Siam,” and the British would use an independent Pakistan to control India (this idea later resurfaced in India, with the United States replacing Britain as the potentially controlling power).³⁴ Ansari failed to persuade the Congress to concede a substantial degree of autonomy to the Muslims of a united India, perhaps as a confederation.

In B. R. Ambedkar’s opinion, India actually stood to benefit from a separate Pakistan. For one thing, separation would leave most of the subcontinent’s wealth in predominately Hindu India and make Pakistan, with its poor resource base, a weak state. For another, India’s army would no longer be dominated by Muslims (the British had drawn most of their manpower from districts that would become Pakistan), and its primarily Hindu civilian government would not be vulnerable to the army. “A safe army,” Ambedkar commented, “is better than a safe border.”³⁵

One of Pakistan’s many ironies is that neither of its two greatest leaders correctly foretold its strategic future. Iqbal wrongly believed that the Islamic nature of a new Pakistan would give it inherent strength. Instead, Pakistan has had to draw power from its relationship with other states and thus lacked the capacity to prevent the breakup of 1971. Jinnah, too, was excessively optimistic in thinking that the minorities in Pakistan would be hostages to good behavior, and that natural cultural and economic linkages would strengthen relations between its various groups. As Ambedkar correctly observed, Pakistan has always lacked the industrial base to sustain a modern army, let alone the technological capacity to develop a modern air force or navy, yet historical circumstances have enabled its predominately Punjabi army to dominate Pakistani politics. Meanwhile, India’s highly pluralistic officer corps remains both apolitical and professional, and New Delhi can draw upon superior fiscal and material resources.

A Tragic Victory

Though vaguely conceived, the idea of Pakistan did tie together the three major Muslim communities of British India: those of East Bengal, Punjab,

and the United Provinces. The Pakistan movement was not strong in the Northwest Frontier Province or Sindh, or in India's south. For seven years, from the passage of the Lahore Resolution demanding a separate Pakistan in 1940 to independence in 1947, the differences between these groups were contained by Jinnah's leadership. He negotiated both with the British and with the Indian nationalists, winning enough victories at the polls to make the claim for Pakistan credible.³⁶

Jinnah was fortunate in that the other two players in the drama were, at their core, liberal. The Raj was a far cry from the brutal French regime in Algeria, the Dutch in Indonesia, or the Portuguese in Africa. The Indian National Congress, too, was a liberal organization—like the Muslim League, it was led by a lawyer, and its firebrands were marginalized. While the League's fight for Pakistan has been mythologized as a titanic battle against two implacable foes, the Raj and the Congress, it was in fact not much of a struggle. This has contributed a great deal to Pakistan's later inclination toward constitutional structures and the rule of law—even when it has been unable to sustain them.

As the economist-scholar Shahid Javed Burki notes, "The new state was meant to achieve different things for different people: emancipation from the Hindu landlords of the peasantry of Bengal and Assam; the creation of new economic and political opportunities for the frustrated urban Muslim classes of Delhi, Bombay, and the United and Central provinces; and the establishment of an Islamic state" for the religiously minded in Sindh, Punjab, and the Northwest Frontier Province.³⁷ Pakistan as an idea was successful enough to command support from many, but not all, of India's Muslims; as a blueprint for a state it was to founder on the rocks of these different interests.

Ironically, a decision by the Indian National Congress helped turn the idea of Pakistan—a longshot or a negotiating tactic, at best—into reality. Whereas the Congress had supported Britain in World War I, in 1942 its members, led by Gandhi, decided to launch the "Quit India" movement and sat out the war in prison, demanding a promise of independence in exchange for their support. Some prominent members even sympathized with the Axis powers. As a result, the British relied on the Muslim League to help them recruit soldiers to the Indian army—Punjabi Muslims were the single largest recruitment class in the army—and gather Indian Muslims to its own cause.

The Congress's nonparticipation in the war made the British wary. Those in military and strategic circles in particular had to look after post-war British imperial interests and vastly distrusted Gandhi and the Congress Party. Though India was no longer the jewel in the imperial crown, Britain still had colonies to India's east and precious oil reserves to its west. There was also some concern that India, led by the "leftist" Nehru, might fall under Soviet influence.

The idea of Pakistan as an independent, pro-Western state remaining under Western (that is, British) tutelage was thus quite attractive. For many British strategists, the most secure foothold would be in an independent Pakistan, with its loyal army and Western-leaning Muslim League leadership.³⁸ Whereas Pakistanis tend to emphasize the injustices and discrimination that made separation necessary, Indian historians tend to regard Pakistan as partly the product of this British imperial strategy, not the result of a legitimate demand. The historical record is complex and rich enough to support both interpretations, and as with so many other events that conceptually divide the two states, debate continues to surround the partition of British India.

The Idea of Pakistan

When two cultures collide, does one flee from the other, accommodate it, ignore it, absorb it, yield to it, or try to destroy it?³⁹ Most Muslim rulers on the subcontinent eventually *accommodated* their Hindu subjects, but the coming of the British opened up the question once again, particularly for Muslims. Since Hindus took to British education more readily than Muslims, many Muslim elites felt overwhelmed by a devastating coalition of British power and renascent Hinduism, which had been energized by the tools of learning and power acquired from the British. Not only had the Hindus transformed themselves but their numbers were so great that Muslims could not even hope to maintain normal relations with them, which could only be realized if Muslims had equal status or access to skills, positions, and assets that would protect their special position in India. Perhaps, there was also some fear of Hindu revenge for crimes chronicled by Alberuni and others.

Though Iqbal may have considered Pakistan part of a larger Islamic rebirth, the spirit behind it also resembled the nation-state movement of the nineteenth century, as reflected in Zionism or the Armenian national

movement. More recent comparisons would include the Chechnyan, Bosnian, and Palestinian movements, which also seek homelands for oppressed minorities, and which have been strongly supported by Pakistanis. The Indian National Congress, which made the comparison with Israel, noted that both Zionism and the Pakistan movement identified their members by religion and professed tolerance for religious minorities within the borders of the new state. Where they differ is that Israel opens its doors to all coreligionists while Pakistan restricts entry of Muslims from India and even Bangladesh. Even Jinnah did not foresee Pakistan as a homeland for *all* of India's Muslims.⁴⁰

By making religion the basis for a separate nation-state, argued Pakistani nationalists, the new Muslim homeland would also be a progressive state because Islam, unlike Hinduism, is a modern religion with a proud position in history as the faith that brought to perfection the religions of the modern, advanced, scientific West, Judaism and Christianity. Islam is part of this tradition, whereas Hinduism belongs to another world, that of the complete nonbeliever. In the extreme view, Hindus lack even the revelations of the other "people of the book"; their accomplishments were historically interesting but are not to be regarded as modern or progressive.

This distinction between the world of Islam (in Arabic, world of submission or peace) and the remainder of mankind is central to Islamic political thought. As discussed in subsequent chapters, Pakistani ideologues believe that the acceptance of Islam and proper guidance enable man to create a society of peace and justice on this earth. By contrast, they contend, Hindus believe that Islam offers no hope of perfection, for the world is in an era of decay and destruction—*Kaliyug*. In this scheme of things, individual redemption through death and rebirth is a difficult and slow process. Hindus profess no real faith, only a cynical opportunism and a crude and misguided devotion to a thousand gods. As some Muslims argued at the time of separation, if they could not rule over Hindus, then they had to be shielded from Hindu influence, not by becoming a separate but equal society, but a separate and superior one.

For the more ardent supporters of Pakistan, the structure of the Hindu caste system was further empirical evidence of the incompatibility between Islam and Indian culture and of the need for a separate state. Like many non-Hindus, they associated caste with *varna*, Hinduism's theoretical four-fold social hierarchy. At the same time, some Pakistanis prided themselves

on Rajput or other high-caste origins, although a great number were converts to Islam from lower Hindu castes. Thus they harbored a special resentment toward “Hindu Brahmin” dominance and arrogance flowing from being at the top of the system. Equally important in elite Pakistani circles was the view that regional discord stems from the “Hindu mind,” which is often characterized as scheming and devious, and compelled to expand.⁴¹

Another distinctive component of faith that shapes the view Pakistanis have of their own country, its claims on Kashmir, and its relations with India is *Izzat*, meaning pride and honor. Islam calls on individuals to live honorable lives in accordance with their religious and moral principles. The Pakistan movement and subsequent relations with India (and other powers, especially the United States) suggest that Pakistan’s honor, and therefore the honor of its citizens, is at stake in such issues as Kashmir, India’s dominance, and Pakistan’s autonomy.⁴² Any prospective normalization of India-Pakistan relations and Kashmir affairs must address this factor, just as it must reckon with India’s national identity.

Thus the idea of Pakistan rests on the elite Indian Muslim sense of being culturally and historically distinct. This view descends in part from the original Muslim invaders of the subcontinent, and in part from the willingness of some to abandon corrupt Hinduism for a peaceful and just Islam.

Although Islam is an egalitarian religion, the leadership of the Pakistan movement had difficulty accepting the democratic norm of one man, one vote. Jinnah and others tirelessly argued that without some restraint on majority power, Muslims would always be outvoted. Once the British left, who would check the majority Hindu community? Jinnah strongly opposed independence if it meant representative government based on numbers: “three to one,” three Hindus for every Indian Muslim. Who, he asked, would interpret and enforce the terms of the transfer of power from Britain to India? “We come back to the same answer: the Hindu majority would do it, and will it be with the help of the British bayonet or Mr. Gandhi’s ‘Ahimsa’ [strategy of nonviolence]? Can we trust them any more?”⁴³ Unyieldingly, Jinnah’s answer was no, no, and again no. Sarcasically, he threw back Gandhi’s claim that the two men were brothers, that Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Harijans are all alike: “The only difference is this, that brother Gandhi has three votes and I have only one vote.”⁴⁴

As far as Jinnah was concerned, “a thousand years of close contact, nationalities which are as divergent today as ever cannot at any time be expected to transform themselves into one nation merely by means of subjecting them to a democratic constitution.” And, Jinnah added, Muslims were not even minorities as the term is “commonly known and understood,” since they were a majority in four of eleven British Indian provinces.

Majoritarian democracy had no attractions for a minority divided by language and sect, and with many coreligionists in the Congress Party itself. This fundamental structural objection to democratic politics explains why many Pakistanis of an older generation have strong reservations about democracy and democratic politics as an end in itself. Democracy threatened the minority Muslim community, forcing it to establish its own political order, Pakistan. But proponents of the idea of Pakistan had not looked too closely at the contradiction between the educated, Westernized leadership of the Pakistan movement (many of whom claimed descent from the original Muslim invaders) and the much larger numbers of the poor and the converted. Pakistan’s leadership eventually split on the question of democracy—guided, basic, and otherwise—when the poorer (but more populous) half of Pakistan claimed its right to rule the whole state.

Glorious Past, Glorious Future?

The Pakistani movement bequeathed to the state of Pakistan a number of identities. First, Pakistan was clearly “Indian,” in that the strongest supporters of the idea of Pakistan identified themselves as culturally Indian, although in opposition to Hindu Indians. This Indian dimension of Pakistan’s identity has been systematically overlooked by contemporary Pakistani politicians and scholars. Even Pakistan’s Buddhist heritage is ignored, even though a good number in both East and West Pakistan converted to Buddhism, and present-day Pakistan has many impressive Buddhist pilgrimage sites.

Second, the idea of Pakistan implied that Pakistan would be a modern extension of the great Islamic empires of South Asia, whose physical remnants still dominate the subcontinental landscape. From the Red Forts of Delhi and Agra to the Taj Mahal and the spectacular ruins of Golconda

in southern India, there was compelling evidence of recent Islamic greatness. Many prominent Indian Muslim families traced their lineage back to particular invasions of the subcontinent, or to a distinguished ancestor's conversion from Hinduism to Islam.

Third, Pakistan was also a legatee of British India, sharing in the 200-year-old tradition of the Raj. This itself was a complex identity, as British India had incorporated Turkish, Persian, and Hindu practices into its own structure.

Fourth, because of its cultural links with Central Asia, strategists such as Jinnah viewed Pakistan as a boundary land between the teeming masses of India and the vastness of Central Asia. Such a Pakistan, with its strong military tradition, was to serve as the guardian of South Asia. In subsequent years Pakistani strategists and their American and British counterparts came to see Pakistan as a balance to both the Soviet Union and the pro-Soviet government of India (eventually, China came to hold the same view).

Fifth, since Pakistan was also to be part of the Islamic world, it would share in one way or another the *ummah*'s destiny. As a result, it had a special interest in the persecution of Muslim minorities in the rest of the world. Pakistan was, in brief, blessed with many assets, several great traditions, and a number of potential identities. It was Jinnah who wove these attributes together, arguing that without a separate Muslim homeland, South Asia would be mired in conflict and vulnerable to outside pressure. For him, the past pointed to the future. Pakistan would be a democratic, liberal, and just state. It would live peaceably with its minority Hindu population, and relations with India would be normal, possibly encompassing regional cooperation. How was this vision realized during the subsequent fifty-plus years of Pakistan the state?