Freedom at Midnight? The Origins of the Divergent Politico-Military Trajectories in India and Pakistan

BY
Malik Neal

Malik Neal graduated from College of the Holy Cross in 2013 with a Bachelor of Arts in History with a concentration in Asian Studies. He is currently a Fulbright Junior Research Scholar in Sri Lanka. This paper was taken from his thesis for the Spring 2012 Holy Cross Washington Semester Program, where he interned in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, specifically with then Ranking Member, Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN).

Introduction

At the stroke of midnight on August 14-15, 1947, India and Pakistan emerged as two independent states from the wreckage of the British Indian Empire.[1] In spite of their shared colonial past as part of one unified British India, and the aspirations on the part of both their respective early leaders for democracy,[2] both countries have taken markedly different political-military trajectories in the aftermath of independence. While India, albeit with brief bout of authoritarian rule,[3] has managed to uphold parliamentary democracy and its military has remained on the periphery of power, Pakistan has suffered four military coups and has had a persistent inability to successfully transition to democracy and consolidate civilian democratic institutions.

The purpose of this essay is to find *an alternative* answer—and not necessarily *the comprehensive* answer—to the following query: Despite deriving from the same political entity, why has Pakistan been

1 Pakistan celebrated independence on August 14, 1947, while India celebrated it the following day.

2 While Jawaharlal Nehru's democratic aspirations are widely acknowledged, Muhammad Ali Jinnah's are not. One early example of the democratic aspirations of Pakistan is the Jinnah's own words following independence: "I do not know what the ultimate shape of this constitution is going to be, but I am sure that it will be of a democratic type…" Speeches and Writings of Mr. Jinnah, vol. 2, ed. Jamil-ud-Din Ahmad (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf), 463.

3 From 1975-1977, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency, wherein she ruled by decree and forcefully silenced political dissent. For a more detailed examination of the state of emergency in India, see Norman D. Palmer, "India in 1975: Democracy in Eclipse," Asian Survey 16, no. 2 (1976): 95-110.

unable to sustain a successful transition toward democracy while India has by and large been able to consolidate democracy? Many historians and political scientists alike have provided insightful answers to this vexing question, but their answers are partial and do not account for the lasting effect of factors prior to partition in 1947. By examining two often overlooked factors— (1) the different colonial experiences of the regions of British India which were to become India and Pakistan and (2) the contrasting interests and mobilization strategies used by the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress to foster support for the creation of the two countries—this essay contends that the origins of the different politico-military trajectories of India and Pakistan must be sought in factors prior to partition. These factors have, in effect, caused India and Pakistan to be "historically locked-in" along two divergent paths from their inception as independent states.[4]

The essay is divided into four parts. The first situates the essay in the broader scholarly debate by detailing explanations offered by various scholars on the divergent political trajectories of India and Pakistan. The second part analyzes the explanations offered in an effort to highlight their limitations. The third part examines the hypothesis that factors prior to partition help explain the different paths India and Pakistan took, underscoring the importance of their different colonial experiences and the contrasting interests and mobilization strategies of their respective independence movements. The final part draws some broader conclusions.

Existing Theoretical Explanations

There is a small, yet significant body of scholarship on the origins of the different politico-military trajectories of India and Pakistan. Several scholars have attempted to explain the contrasting political developments in India and Pakistan by emphasizing the most glaring difference between the two countries: religion. Hinduism, some Indian scholars have interpreted, is more suitable for democratic development. Hinduism, they point out, is unlike Islam: it has no single deity whom all must worship, no conception of theological orthodoxy, and no single universally accepted ethical code of conduct and thus is less prone to entrenched divisions. Such qualities are more attuned to democratic development, they argue, since democracy, by its very nature, requires compromise and tolerance by

4 On the theory of "historical lock-ins" and its correlation to path dependency, see James Mahoney and Daniel Schensul, "Historical Context and Path Dependence," in Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis, eds. Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 454-71.

the polity.[5] Conversely, while some scholars have underscored the affinities between Hinduism and democracy, others have stressed the basic incompatibility of Islam with democracy. John Anderson, in his article "Does God Matter, and If So Whose God: Religion and Democratization," articulates such a viewpoint. As he writes,

[Islam's] reliance on a fixed religious text and quasi-legal ordinances, the emphasis on divine sovereignty, and the supposed lack of distinction between the religious and the political realm, all worked against democratic development.[6]

Simply put, these scholars contend that the chief explanation for the different political paths of India and Pakistan is the respective religions of each country—India's democracy is attributed to Hinduism and Pakistan's autocracy to Islam.

While several scholars have placed emphasis on abstract concepts of religion as an explanation for the divergent paths of India and Pakistan, others have concentrated on the more concrete, that is, the disparities in resources and different levels of economic development between the two countries. Historian Ayesha Jalal offers a compelling example of such a viewpoint. Jalal's argument is three-pronged: Pakistan's authoritarianism can be credited to the disproportionate allocation of military and civilian resources from India; the looming threat of a larger and more powerful neighboring India; and the use of that threat by the Pakistani military to assure its place as the ultimate protector of Pakistan's survival.[7] In addition to Jalal, numerous scholars have argued that higher levels of economic development are casually related to democratization and regime stability because of the establishment of a viable middle class.[8] According to this view, India was more prone to democratic rule than Pakistan.

A myriad of scholars have also linked the outcome of democracy in India and Pakistan to the mass appeal and leadership of the respective independence movements. Manjeet Pardesi and Sumit Ganguly have noted the striking differences between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. Unlike the Muslim League, which according to

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5 See Rajni Kothari, The State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance, (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1988), 155-56.

6 John Anderson, "Does God Matter, and If So Whose God? Religion and Democratization," Democratization 11, no. 4 (2004): 197.

7 See Ayesha Jalal, The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence (Lahore: Vanguard, 1991), 25- 55.

8 See Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi, "Modernization: Theories and Facts," World Politics 49, no. 2 (1997): 155-183 and Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization," World Politics 55, no. 4 (2003): 517-549.

Pardesi and Ganguly, was a "party of the Muslim elites, with most its support drawn from the erstwhile Muslim aristocracy," the Indian National Congress was transformed into a mass movement thanks partially to the activism of Mahatma Gandhi.[9] This mass appeal and legitimacy the Indian National Congress enjoyed, Pardesi and Ganguly point out, is responsible for India's successful transition to democracy. The Muslim League, an elite-based organization, did not have such legitimacy or mass appeal in the areas that were to become Pakistan. A similar argument centers on the role of leadership as the key differentiating factor between India and Pakistan. The argument claims the early deaths of Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan resulted in the obstruction of democracy in Pakistan, thus leaving a vacuum for the military to fill.[10]

While most scholars have primarily focused on internal factors in India and Pakistan to explain the divergent outcomes in each country, a small number of scholars and commentators have cast blame on external influences. International support for specific regimes, such scholars contend, can be a determining factor in whether a state democratizes or not.[11] In the specific context of India and Pakistan, such scholars emphasize the strategic alliances each country formed with international partners. While India opted for non-alignment, rejecting the alliance system of the early Cold War, Pakistan formed an opportune military alliance with the United States. Accordingly, such uneven support for the military in an already new state greatly weakened the civilian sector and consequentially perpetuated authoritarian tendencies in Pakistan.

Limitations of Explanations

Though the bulk of the existing explanations provide important insights, each is ultimately incomplete in its own respective way because it neglects other highly influential factors. The argument that religion is the root cause of the different outcomes in India and Pakistan is a reductionist approach—it fails to treat the issue with the complexity it deserves. First, this explanation assumes religions are monolithic, which they seldom are. Each religion has core doctrines, which are subjected to various schools of interpretation, and its teaching and practices are in no way immutable. In Islam in particular, not only are there different sects in Islam—*Shiites, Sunnis, Sufis, Ismaelis, Ahmadiyaa*, etc.—but the religion is also practiced

9 Manjeet S. Pardesi and Sumit Ganguly, "India and Pakistan: The Origins of Their Different Politico-Military Trajectories" India Review 9, no. 1 (2010): 44-45.

10 See Zoltan Barany, "Why India, Why Not Pakistan? Reflections on South Asian Military Politics" Manekshaw Paper, No 11 (2009): 10.

11 On the link between external influences and democracy, see Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "Linkage versus Leverage: Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change," Comparative Politics 38, no 4 (2006): 379-400.

differently depending on the geographical area. Ultimately, political, historical, and ideological factors within the respective countries are of much greater importance in forecasting the likelihood of democracy. Second, democratic governments do exist in Muslim majority countries such as in Turkey and Indonesia. Third, Islamic concepts such as *shura* (consultation), *ijma* (consensus), and i*jtihad* (independent reasoning) provided some intellectual basis for development of democracy in Muslim countries.[12] Fourth, there are particular elements of Hinduism that are antithetical to democratic values. The classical Hindu belief in kingship as an ideal system and Hinduism's toleration of the caste system are two examples contrary to democratic values.[13]

Though it certainly cannot be denied that divisions of assets between India and Pakistan from the British Indian Empire were considerably less than equitable, this factor alone is insufficient in explaining the different political outcomes in both countries. First, the limited comparative data available presents a more nuanced picture. Despite inheriting significantly less than India, Pakistan's post-independence growth rates nearly paralleled India.[14] Second, a reliance on economic disparities alone to explain the divergent paths of both countries fails to fully explain the structural problems that led to Pakistan's current militarized state. Why, for example, were civilian institutions in Pakistan unable to adequately control or provide oversight over the military establishment? Also, why were certain powerful groups and entities so opposed to democratic practices? Questions such as these are crucial to explaining the different politico-military trajectories in India and Pakistan, but are ultimately left unanswered by those relying on the economic/resource disparities argument.

Many scholars identify the dissimilar organizational structures and appeals of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League, but none explain how certain social classes came to dominate the movements. Instead, scholars tend to accept the historical reality of both independence movements without delving deeper to explain the motives of these

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12 See John Eposito and John Voll, Islam and Democracy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 17.

13 See See Prataph Mehta, "Hinduis and Self-Rule" Journal of Democracy 15, no. 3 (2004): 114.

14 For an in-depth comparative study of the economic growth of both countries and a detailed examination of Pakistan's development, see Angus Maddison, Class Structure and Economic Growth: India and Pakistan Since the Moghuls (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971) and Parvez Hasan, "Learning from the past: A Fifty-Year Perspective on Pakistan's Development" Pakistan Development Review 36, no.4 (1997): 355-402.

movements and the adverse effects. Furthermore, the argument that the early deaths of the leaders of the Pakistan's independence movement, particularly Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Liquat Ali Khan, obstructed democracy in Pakistan is faulty in many respects. For one, it fails to account for the authoritarian trend Jinnah set in the early stages of the Pakistani state—appointing himself Governor-General, expanding his powers particularly in the Punjab area, and dismissing the government in the North West Frontier Province. Such "centralizing authoritarianism" began under Jinnah and continued after his death.[15]

Finally, while one cannot deny the influence of external influence, it is easy to overstate such influences. The argument that Pakistan's authoritarian outcome is a result of United States military support is such an example. The U.S.- Pakistani military alliance began in 1953, but by then, the civilian institutions had already proven inadequate and the military had to be called to quell civil unrest.[16] Moreover, the fact the Pakistani military was able to successfully persuade the United States to provide substantial funds and was subsequently able to enjoy free rein to such funds shows the power and influence of the Pakistani military before the military alliance. Ultimately, the United States did not cause the authoritarian trends in Pakistan—it merely exacerbated them. Thus, the explanation for the different politico-military trajectories of India and Pakistan must be sought in factors pre-partition, particularly in the different colonial experiences of the areas that were to become India and Pakistan and the interests and mobilizations strategies of the respective independence movements.

Toward an alternative explanation

Different Colonial Experiences

From a purely macro level, comparing India and Pakistan would appear to be a seemingly easy task—both countries, after all, derived from the same political entity. Indeed, one reputable scholar notes that both "shared a political past under the British Raj and were subjected to similar

15 Christophe Jaffreolt, ed., A History of Pakistan and its Origins (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 62, quoted in Pradesi and Ganguly, "India and Pakistan," 51.

16 Interestingly, in 1951, the Pakistani Army attempted a coup d'état against the government of Liquat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan. Known as the Rawalpindi Conspiracy, the coup d'état was planned because of the military's frustration about Pakistan's failure to occupy Jammu and Kashmir. The conspiracy was foiled after confidantes informed the government.

political and military institutions during the colonial period." [17] A closer examination of the administrative structure of the British Raj reveals that such an historical assumption is obsolete and ultimately misleading. The respective regions which were to become India and Pakistan were administered in markedly different ways.

In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the British began what Indian Secretary of State of Edwin Montagu described as "the gradual development of governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire."[18] The real starting point, however, can be traced to Lord Rippon's famous resolution in 1882. The resolution called for local, elected boards and granted the boards some degree of power. Such a system was soon replicated on the provincial level in 1909. Subsequently, in response to growing pressure from the now well established Indian National Congress and externals factors from the First World War, the British passed the Government of India Act, 1919. Under this Act, the provinces were accorded responsibility for local government, education, public works, public health and greater legislative autonomy. Finally, the Government of India Act of 1935, the most meaningful reform, provided for provincial elections and fuller governing responsibilities for the provinces. Importantly, the British, for reasons that stem from political realities and geography, did not aggressively pursue such reforms in the North-West Frontier Province and Punjab, two provinces that would make up the bulk of the Pakistani state.[19]

Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province, from their very inception into British India, were already an exception since they were among among the last areas to be conquered in the subcontinent. Conquered after a resistance and lying on the edge of Central Asia during the Great Game,[20] these provinces were set apart from other Indian provinces. For one, they were Non-Regulation Provinces, meaning they were exempted from Indian Government regulations and governed under the central authority of a Commissioner. Such an administrative system

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17 Pradesi and Ganguly, "India and Pakistan," 38.

18 Edwin Montagu, "The Secretary of State's Announcement, 20 August 1917" in Select Documents of the History of India and Pakistan, ed, C.H. Phillips, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 264.

19 Until 1901, the North-West Frontier Province was a part of the Punjab Province. The province was divided as a result of a "divide and rule" tactic on the part of the British to avoid potential unrest.

20 The 'Great Game' is a common expression used to describe the intense imperial competition between the Russians and the British in Central Asia during the nineteenth century.

differed greatly from other Indian provinces and had enormous consequences. As Bin Sayeed writes,

The people in the countryside depended almost entirely upon the goodwill and leadership of the Deputy Commissioner. This seriously undermined the role of the politician for he could neither put forward vigorously the interests of his constituents, nor was much patronage available to him at the district level.[21]

Conversely, the Regulation Provinces had carefully delineated rules relegating the rights of subjects and the powers of the administrative officials. Such a system promoted political participation and awareness, which was unavailable in Punjab and the North- West Frontier Province Both provinces were also more militarized than others as a result of heavy military requirement in those regions and its geographical location. The 1857 Mutiny in Bengal had the adverse effect of shifting military requirement in the British military from Bengal to Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province of British India. During this time, the colonial theory of 'martial races'—the idea that certain races were better and braver than others—was commonly accepted, and the Punjab, not surprisingly, was claimed to be "home of the most martial races of India" and the 'nursery' of the best solider.[22] In 1857, Punjabis made up 44% of the Bengal Army, but just one year later, comprised over 93%.[23] In addition, as a result of new army requirement policies, Punjabis made up 62% of the entire British Army in 1929.[24]

The tilt toward a Punjabi army and the strict oversight of the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province was also directly related to the perceived threat from Russian expansion into Central Asia, particularly Afghanistan, which bordered modern day Pakistan. The Simon Commission of 1930 ominously observed that the area of Punjab and the North West Frontier were "not only the frontier of India," but "an international frontier of the first importance from the military point of view for the whole empire."[25] Consequently, the British adopted a "frontier policy," which included blocking reforms, political parties, and

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21 Khalid bin Sayeed, Pakistan, the Formative Phase, 1857-1948, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 281-82.

22 Shriz Maher, "Ties that Bind: How the Story of Britain's Muslim Soldiers Can Forge a National Identity," Policy Exchange (2011): 14.

23 Tan Tai Yong, The Garrison State: Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab (New York: Sage Publications, 2005) 54-55.

24 Kaushik Roy, ed., The Indian Army in the Two World Wars (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 2011), 448, fn. 8.

25 "The Simon Commission Report, 1930" in C.H. Philips, ed., Select Documents, 289.

newspapers, and banning movement to the rest of India.[26] In addition, in order to defend the area against external threats, over half of the Indian Army was stationed in the region.[27]

In the final analysis, both the Punjab and the North West Frontier Province were highly autocratic and militarized provinces, where the devolution of political power was considered a threat. While many of provinces that would eventually become India had some experience with democratic practices, Pakistan had no such experience. This reality laid the groundwork for the country's autocratic tendencies.

Interest and Mobilization Strategies of Nationalist Movements

In order to adequately understand the different interest and mobilization strategies of the respective nationalist movements, it is instructive to first provide a historical overview of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. In the early half of the nineteenth century, the British adopted a strategy to form a Westernized Indian social class that would act as "interpreters" between the British and the Indians.[28] This newly educated middle class of high-caste individuals were essentially educated as Englishmen, which prepared them well to serve in the British colonial administration. As the number of educated middle class grew steadily, the British soon discovered a problem: many of those in this new educated middle class could not find the employment for which they had prepared for. The problem was even more ominous because these individuals had already defied traditional customs to pursue colonial education and employment and were unfit for menial jobs because of their high-caste position. These individuals began to aggressively lobby for more Indian participation in British colonial administration, which bolstered their own upward mobility. The founding members of the Indian National Congress were from this new educated middle class. Though the Indian National Congress eventually became more populist and mass

26 See P.N. Chopra et al, "British Policy Towards India's Neighbours: Frontier Policy," in A Comprehensive History of India, Volume 3 (Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2003), 127-133.

27 Importantly, local police normally dealt with internal disputes. The Army's primary responsibility was to intervene in tribal warfare and defend against foreign invasion.

28 Thomas Macaulay, "Minutes on Education (1835)" quoted in History of British Rule in India, Volume 1, Edward Thompson and G.T. Garrett, (Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 1999), 315.

based, the principal motives for their interests in democratic reform should not be overlooked.

Unlike the new Hindu middle class, the relative minority Muslim population in the United Provinces (UP), where the Pakistan independence movement was created, already held a powerful position in society. Descendants of the Mughal rulers, they were more English literate than their upper-caste Hindu counterparts and tended to reside in urban areas.[29] Moreover, they held disproportionate power in three influential sectors: landownership, trading, and government administration. Muslims, for instance, held many powerful positions in government civil service: 56 percent were government servants in the High Court and 42 percent worked with either the deputy commissioner and commissioners of the province.[30] Thus, despite being a minority, they held disproportionate power and influence.

The passage of democratic reforms and the inclusion of more in the government sector eroded their prized position in public sector.[31] Thus, while the Indian National Congress stood to gain from the adoption of reform based on democracy and meritocracy, the Muslims in the United Provinces did not. Consequently, in 1906, a collection of Muslim aristocrats founded the Muslim League to protect their position in government. The members of League were limited to the landed aristocracy in the United Provinces and their primary goals were to prevent democratic reform by being loyal to the British and to bargain for Muslim representation. At the Decca Session in 1906, the Muslim League aims revealed such sentiments. Their goals were:

To promote, among the Musalmans of India, feelings of loyalty to the British Government…and to protect and advance the political rights and interest of the Musalmans of India, and to respectfully represent their needs and aspirations to the Government.[32]

Thus, from the beginning, both movements began with contrasting interests: while the promotion of democratic, egalitarian reforms aided the new Hindu middle class, it was ultimately detrimental to the influence of Muslims in the United Provinces. While both independence movements evolved slightly over time, their respective interests did not completely vanish and had effects in the lead up to independence.

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29 Francis Robinson, Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13.

30 Ibid., 20-23.

31 Whereas Muslims held 64% of the judicial and executive jobs in the United Province in 1857, they only held 35% in 1913. Conversely, Hindu participation in these jobs rose 36% during the same time period, see Ibid.,63.

32 Ibid., 228.

One of the unanticipated consequences of the contrasting interests of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League was the divergent democratic and egalitarian nature of their respective independence movements. While the Indian Congress was mass based, the Muslim League remained an elitist organization. [33] Such a lack of popularity was shown in the 1937 election, in which the League only managed to win a small number of seats. The primary cause of such a result was that the League did not have support in Muslim majority areas because, unlike the Muslims in the United Provinces, Muslims in these areas were in the majority in their provinces and thus did not fear Hindu domination in an independent India. Jinnah and League thus had to craft a strategy that would be able to win over the elites in those predominantly Muslim areas. As Jalal notes, "A socioeconomic programme aimed at mobilizing the rank and file could hardly enthuse the landed oligarchs who dominated Muslim politics," so Jinnah had to entice them with a number of inducements.[34] Consequently, the League managed to win decisively in the1945-1946 elections. Importantly, while Jinnah's skillful use of religious nationalism did help bring about success, his inducements to elites in the Muslim majority areas had a tremendous effect as well. Thus, instead of building a stable, democratic party structure, Jinnah developed anti-democratic practices within the party in the years immediately before independence.

Conclusion

As noted at the outset of this paper, the purpose of this essay was not to offer the comprehensive explanation of the democratic divergence between Indian and Pakistan. Rather, this essay sought to serve as a corrective to existing claims and, in the process, offer a compelling alternative explanation. The existing theoretical explanations for the different political outcomes in India and Pakistan are at best incomplete, and at worst, conspicuously simplistic. For instance, the argument that disparate allocation of resources is the root cause of the problem fails to explain why the military had the strength to fill the civilian void and why such a void existed in the first place. Moreover, casting the blame on the United States, though tempting, is ultimately exaggerated.

This essay rests on two alternative and interrelated explanations. The first challenges a common historical assumption, namely—that both

33 For a more detailed examination, see Zahid H. Zaidi, "Aspects of Development of Muslim League Policy, 1937-47" in The Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives, 1935-1947, eds., C.H. Phillips and M.D. Wainwright (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), 246.

34 Jalal, The State of Martial Rule, 17.

Indian and Pakistan derived from the same political entity, British India, and therefore were governed the same. Whereas India inherited provinces that had experience with democratic practices, the provinces that would eventually formed the bulk of Pakistan—Punjab and the North West Frontier Provinces—were heavily militarized and were governed with autocratic power. In the aftermath of independence, such authoritarian rule only continued with the already powerful and influential military.

The second explanation expplores why the Indian nationalist movement pursued democratic reforms and the Pakistani nationalist movement did not pursue such reforms as aggressively. Ultimately, members of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League were motivated by their own economic interest, which was either conducive or contrary to democratic reform. Whereas greater democratic reform would have aided members of the Indian National Congress, it would have been detrimental to members of the Muslim League. In addition, due to the fact that the Pakistan nationalist movement was not mass-based and the very idea of Pakistan was exceptionally vague, the Muslim League and Jinnah had to induce elites in Muslim majority provinces to support the party instead of garnering support through the democratic process.

In short, while many scholars attribute the divergent politico-military outcomes in India and Pakistan to factors after independence, this essay concludes that such factors were already in place before the clock struck at midnight on those solemn days of August 14-15 1947.