



# The Religiously-Inspired Political Polarization of South Asia the Genesis of the Creation of Pakistan

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## Abstract

In 1880, Sir William Patrick Andrew published "Our Scientific Frontier", a book containing the essence of his colossal work stretched over four decades of career as the father of British India Railways. Conceding to his recommendations, dogged by obsessive fear of the Russian invasion of India (Thorburn, 1894), the northwest frontier region of the Indian Peninsula, popularly known as the "Borderlands" was separated from the mainland India and, created as an independent state; named Pakistan in 1947 to serve as a "Frontline State" juxtaposed to the "Buffer State" of Afghanistan (Andrew, 1880) under the garb of an independent homeland for Muslims in India on religious grounds (Wink, 1991) (Chandra, 1997). However, being suspicious of imminent revolt by the local population, especially the Punjabi peasantry resulting from the British purge during their rule, Sir Andrew strategized the concept of fragmenting the "already polarised" Muslim community into two distinct segments; the elite class as the ruling component unflinchingly loyal to the British and the non-elite segment, though in majority but clutched by "the devised mechanism" of the religion of Islam. Conceiving the idea of "Bigoted Fanaticism", he envisaged an impenetrable demographic defensive line against any invader from the northwest (Afghanistan) and the west (Iran) (Andrew, 1880). Based on his conclusion that "in these border lands (Pakistan) to have a rival in prestige and power would be dangerous; to have a superior would be impossible", the British nurtured the chosen elite to rule the country but, geo-strategically serve the western interests. This is how the legacy of the British rule is still entrenched in which "the Religio-Populist Dogmatism" plays the most crucial role in the national politics.

A study had been conducted to investigate the genesis of the religio-populist dogmatism in Pakistan which has always been employed as the most potent instrument in political campaigns in Pakistan by every political party irrespective its religious inclinations.

**Keywords:** Concept of Bigoted Fanaticism; Inculcation of Sectarianism in Pakistan; Religious Fundamentalism; Radicalization of Society; Religious Terrorism as an Existential Threat to National Security

## Prelude: The Pre-Islamic Indo-Arab Integration in India Leading to Hindu-Muslim Fraternity

The Arabs can claim to be the pioneers of maritime trade in the Indian Ocean. It is historically established that navigation in the Indian Ocean for trade stretching from the shores of

Africa to the fringes of the Pacific was mastered by the Arabs as the dominating power in the region. Maritime trade was their top priority occupation throughout the history. Evident from the Sumerian historical data that around 2000 BCE, lumber (forest wooden logs) was being transported from the Indian sub-continent to the Arabian Peninsula in the region of Majan [Megan (geographical region of present United Arab

Emirates and, especially the Sultanate of Oman). According to shipwrights of Majan cargo ships were being built there in the Sumerian era (Tibbetts). By virtue of the geographical proximity augmented by the accessibility to the Indian sub-continent as the most preferred maritime destination, it is plausibly convincing that ownership of merchant shipping supported shipwrights; all constituting a towering industry was owned as well as crewed by the Arab merchants hailing from the Majan region and / or even beyond into the Arabian peninsula.

The critical analysis of the historical records of the Sumerian civilization amply ascertains that the Greeks and the Persians acquired their high-technological knowledge based expertise of maritime trading especially the navigation from the Arabs. It is also established through well authenticated historical references that the Persians did not embark upon far-distance voyages until the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE while the Greeks did not undertake long-distance trade-expeditions until the Hellenistic time (323 BCE -32 BCE)<sup>1</sup> [1]. This historical account proves that the Arab merchant were extensively in contact with their counterparts in the Indian sub-continent during their prime time which existed more than 4000 years ago. The religion of Islam which emerged in Hejaz; the coastline region of the Red Sea in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE reached the Indian region with the fast flow of mercantile. Subsequently, it spread the message of justice, equality, peace and harmony which strengthened the socio-economic bondages augmented by mental harmony and accommodation between the Arabs and their business brethren in India. Summing up, it is convenient to claim that during an “uninterrupted period” of Islamic proliferation through the peaceful means of trade and commerce in the eastern part of the Indian Ocean, the Indian peninsula emerged as the hub of marvelous economic prosperity and technological development in the entire world while “the Middle East and China as its two dynamic poles”.

The social history of the Arab- Indian communities asserts that India benefitted unprecedentedly by the sustained rather ever- escalating socio-economic and socio-cultural integration with the Arabs into ever expanding patterns under the patronage of Islam [2]. Within the context of the Indo-Arab harmony, it must not be ignored that the term, “Islamisation” was positivistically interpreted as an integrating phenomenon. There exist undeniable evidences that long prior to the entrance of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean, the geographical regions from East Africa to the

Arabian Peninsula extending in the far East encompassing Persia, India and the Indonesian Archipelago, acquired

The distinctive Islamic identity that converted the region into the largest cultural continuum of the world which further converged in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a process that can be attributed exclusively to the pragmatic approach prospered by Islam. It must not be ignored that by this time European expeditions; spearheaded by the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French and finally the British have no contribution in this process<sup>2</sup> [2].

### Aim of the Study

The aim of this article is to explore “those religious causes which by augmenting with the populist trends in the national political arena” have irrecoverably polarized the society in South Asia especially Pakistan, thus posing an existential threat to the geographical as well as demographic boundaries of the state.

### Focus of the Study

The prime focus of the study is exclusively on the ideological aspects of the religion of Islam coupled with populist trends basing on which the nation of Pakistan came into existence in South Asia, thus becoming one of the only two states in the world emerged on ideological grounds alongside the state of Israel; both sandwiching the Middle East. The most important aspect in this study is the evolutionary process of the religion of Islam itself in South Asia which gradually lost its towering status amidst disunity and, subsequently fragmented into a number of sects which paved the way for irreconcilable and violent sectarianism; especially after the creation Pakistan. The national political scenario since the state coming into being in 1947 was gravely compounded by thrusting the populist tendencies into the arena which have impacted the national psyche devastatingly. There must not be any ambiguity that the recipe of non-purist (non-Quranic) religion of Islam augmented with the herd-like populism has literally destroyed the moral fibre of the nation which undoubtedly, serves as the foundation self-respect, sense

<sup>2</sup>Undoubtedly, one of the most prominent Indologists of the world, emeritus professor of history Dr André Wink (1953) at the University of Wisconsin, Madison (the United States) is an authority on Indology, specializing on the Indian sub-continent and the Indian Ocean’s geographic and demographic region, specifically covering the period of the medieval (from the late 5<sup>th</sup> to the late 15<sup>th</sup> century AD) and early modern age (from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD). He authored three volumes on “al-Hind” (India); an Arabic term in the Arab history referring to the Islamized parts of the Indian subcontinent and neighbouring regions. A graduate from Leiden University who earned PhD in the Indian history under the supervision of one of the greatest Indologists of his time; Johannes Cornelis Heesterman (10<sup>th</sup> November 1925- 14<sup>th</sup> April 2014).

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Neville H. Chittick (18th September, 1924 – 27th July, 1984) was a renowned British historian, scholar and a prolific archaeologist with expertise in the socio-cultures of Northeast Africa (African countries located around the Red Sea). He researched on the Swahili Coast (the coastal area of the Indian Ocean shored with the eastern coastline of Africa).

of duty and responsibility, prestige and honour as nation state in the world. However, this peculiar environment was systematically developed to keep the nation polarized under the aegis of a truncated state; a conveniently exploitable instrument by the world powers.

### Scope of the Study

This study constitutes the first of fourteen sessions under the domain of “International Security” pointedly relevant to the geographical and demographic boundaries of Pakistan which will be taught to undergraduate students at the University. However, a common reader can also benefit from its passionate reading. Primarily, the study focuses on the condition of the religion of Islam and Muslims in the pre-partition India during the British rule and its impact on Pakistan.

### The Religion of Islam and Muslims in the Pre-Partition Era; Especially During the British Rule

Dr Wink has categorized the Muslim history in the Indian Ocean region into five distinct phases dilating upon their magnificent rise and subsequent decline to almost oblivion in the face of European onslaught in the 18<sup>th</sup> century especially in the Indian sub-continent.

- The first phase was the period encompassing from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries which was the medieval era during which the Arabs hailing from the Arabian Peninsula (Middle East) achieved economic ascendancy and established new relations to act as a link between the Mediterranean nations and the Indian Ocean region.
- The second phase covered the span from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries when the Arabs (the Middle East) started experiencing their gradual decline while the European nations and China ascended. Central Asia was unified under the Mongols, and Islamic geographical boundaries expanded far into the Indian subcontinent which then assumed its core position in the Indian Ocean. But, it was the era when the Central Asian (Turkish origin) the Ghaznavids and Ghurids extended their armed expeditions (in the garb of holy war) to the plains of India. In the process, Islam gradually expanded in North India during the Turks’ reign but not by the Arabs. During this span of Islamic augmentation, the Indian subcontinent, by virtue of its unprecedented accumulation of wealth enjoyed legendary reputation. This scenario created a conflictual situation when the Turkish Muslim attacked temple cities in the North India disrespecting the local religions which the Arabs always avoided. The Central Asian Turks capitalised on the Indian wealth to establish

an eastern- Persian/Turkish state incorporating the North Indian region. In fact, the unbridgeable rivalry between the Central Asian Turks and the Middle Eastern Arabs stretched over centuries laid the foundation of the “Purist Form of Islam” in the Indian subcontinent.

- The third phase comprises of the period from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries; the most crucial era during which the Indo-Muslim synthesis was acquired and Islamic power was consolidated in substantial stretches of the subcontinent coupled with the coastal belts of the Indonesian Archipelago.
- The fourth phase encompassed the 16<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries during which new Muslim empires were established by different dynasties all around the Indian Ocean shores having highly divergent geo-political interests despite common faith of Islam. By this time, the Portuguese and different European expeditions emerged to play their dominant role in the deep-distances in trade of the Indian Ocean region.
- The fifth phase covers the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the Islamic empires dismembered into innumerable polities colossally depleted by resources constraints due to redistribution. This was the particular period when the core prominence of the Indian subcontinent was subdued by the British; thus destroying the Indo-Muslim integration nexus [2].

### Confronting the Claim by Sindh to be Bab-ul-Islam (Gateway) of the Indian Sub-Continent

The historical accounts explored by Dr Neville H. Chittik and Dr Andre’ Wink; both outstanding Indologists of the world have proved that the Arab merchants were the first preachers of Islam in the sub-continent of India whose ancestors sailed to Kerala since centuries even prior to the advent of Islam; a region located on the tropical Malabar Coast of India which is approximately 600 kilometres from the Arabian Sea shoreline. One of the greatest historians of the British Empire, George H. Rawlinson claimed that the Arab merchants established exceptionally conducive relations with the local population of Malabar and, subsequently chose to settle there in the last years of the 7<sup>th</sup> century [3]. Another renowned British colonial administrator (1875-1937) corroborated with Rawlinson’s historical account in more elaborative form [4]. Haridas Bhattacharyya proceeded even farther in praising the Arabs and the religion of Islam [5]. These well-researched historical accounts convincingly prove that Kerala (Malabar Coastline of India) is the genuine and an authentic Gateway to the Indian Sub-continent which the Arabs chose India as their homeland as settlers, but not as invaders.

However, Sindh can be considered as the strategic base form where the Muslim dynastic conquests were spearheaded by an Umayyad General Muhammad bin Qasim in 712 AD (nearly after 80 years of Prophet Muhammad's demise). This military operation was, in fact, one of several minor expeditions commencing from 644 AD to 710/712 AD which were undertaken by the Umayyad dynasty to expand its geographical boundaries. Its accounts remained in oblivion till, after nearly 100 years, an Arab historian Baladhuri covered this event in his book, *Kitab Futuh al-Buldan*. The same operation has been covered in greater details in *Chachnama*; a Persian historical account which was written about 400 years after the expedition [6]. Geopolitically, Muhammad bin Qasim's military campaign in Sindh laid the imprinted foundation of Hindu-Muslim conflict in the sub-continent; a thread which the British exploited to the fullest to cause fragmentation among the indigenous polity. They did not take the Muslims in Kerala (Malabar) into consideration due to two solid reasons. Firstly, Hindu-Muslim fraternity overwhelmed the abrasive sentiments among them which is, of course, a natural phenomenon. Secondly, Sindh fell within a region of "Border Lands" which the British strategists had already decided to separate from the rest of India in order to create a geographic cum demographic defensive line with the objective of defending the sub-continent from the anticipated Russian invasion.

### The Dogma of "Two Nation Theory"

Since the arrival of Islam in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century in India, there was no rhetoric of "Two Nation Theory" in any fringe of the sub-continent till this issue erupted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century during the British rule. In this particular context, it is crucially important to read the most authoritative historian on the partition of the Indian sub-continent Professor Ian Talbot who ascertained that the "Two Nation Theory" is a postulation contested by Indian Muslim ruling class which claim to culturally and historically distinct from the Hindu community [7]. It must not be ignored that it proved to be a great source encouragement for Hindu nationalists which graded Muslims as foreigners who should either be expelled from India or, be reconverted to Hinduism. There exists an undeniable reality that "Two Nation Theory" at that crucial time proved to be devastating for Muslims among which erupted an unending debate on the issue exposing unbridgeable differences within the community. This scenario gave impetus to religious sectarianism augmented by the political differences. The most ruinous aspect that brought about Muslims' vulnerability was their sheer lack of unity and cohesion. All India Muslim League was squarely outperformed by the regional parties with intimate support by the religious elements of the areas; especially in the provinces of Punjab and East Bengal [8]. However, during the Elections-1937, the Congress National contested on just 58

seat out of the 482 allocated Muslim seats; merely 12% of supposedly representation of the Muslim community. They secured win on 26 seats; 5.3%. This Particular phenomenon exposed that Congress could not claim its genuine representation of the Muslim adult franchise. In addition, post-election developments in Muslim majority created highly disturbing environments for the Muslim population [8].

This environment of confrontation coupled with sporadic violence between Hind-Muslim communities was compounded by the beginning of World War II when Congress fiercely protested and resigned from Government slots while All India Muslim League supported the British Government and rendered wholehearted support in the War. Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy of India, after assessing the conduct of Congress during their administrative rule and subsequently their attitude towards the British Government with regard to geopolitical developments, characterized Congress as the "Hindu Organisation" [8]. Concurrently, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah ascertained that Hindu and Muslim communities were incongruously variant "monolithic religious communities" to an extent that no conciliation could be materialized with the objective of accommodating each other's aspirations. This scenario led to the creation of a separate homeland for Muslims; known as Pakistan. Although, there are a number of factors elaborated by historians based on their assessments that led to this particular situation heralding an imminent partition of India, but mainly it was All India Muslim Leagues principled political stance that made it popular making them the genuine representative of the Muslim community [9]. The same scenario was acknowledged by Acharya Kripalani, the President of Congress who envisioned the partition of India as an imminent necessity amidst irreconcilable differences soaked in blood [10]. This is how Pakistan came into existence. But, the most horrendous factor was the "Islamic Sectarianism" which fragmented the Muslim society; a menace that has polarised Muslims in South Asia, especially in Pakistan which was created on the name of Islam. The Muslim religious cadre was divided into two distinct religious-political groups; either pro-Pakistan or otherwise.

### Deepening the Religious Divide among the Muslim Community on Political Grounds

In this regard, there were a very large number of well-acknowledged religious personalities who either supported the creation of Pakistan or opposed its emergence based on their political judgments. The most prominent institution in this context was "Darul Uloom Deoband"<sup>3</sup> whose top

<sup>3</sup> One of the most famous Islamic seminary in India is known as "Darul Uloom Deoband" which was established by noted Indian Muslim

hierarchy divided itself which proved to be devastating for Muslims in South Asia. One of the most notable personalities was Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanvi (19th August 1863-20th July 1943) who supported the creation of Pakistan (Naeem, 2009). His two renowned disciples Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani and Maulana Zafar Ahmad Usmani rendered invaluable services in the struggle for Pakistan. There was wide spread polarization among the religious cadre of Muslims which escalated the religio-political sectarianism which complicated already existing sectarian environments (Sargana, Ahmed, & Rizvi, 2015).

### An Unbridgeable Widening Gulf among Communities in India

Despite the fact that a keen reader of the history of South Asia especially the Pakistan Movement would remain inquisitive to learn more about the subject which has thoroughly fragmented South Asia on religious grounds sans exception, however this brief study leads the readers to following conclusions:

- Prior to the arrival of British colonialists, there was no noticeable religious divide in South Asia especially between Hindu and Muslims. In the meantime, this fact can also not be denied that there could be differences on the religious grounds but they remained under the control of the administration and community leaders. The differences of opinion among as well as within communities are a very common phenomenon which has existed since the time immemorial [13,14].
- Prior to 1923 as the documented history of South Asia reveals, there was no existence of “Two Nation Theory” among the communities which co-existed in the Indian

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theologians of the time on 30th May 1866 (157 years ago) after the debacle of War of Independence (Mutiny) in 1857; an episode that abolished the Mughal Empire leading to socio-politico-economic muddle for the Muslim community in South Asia. The mission of this Madrassah (religious school) was to reform and refine the Muslim society on traditional lines envisaged by Prophet Muhammad PBUH, and to preserve the Muslim culture from the influence imposed by Christianity, Hinduism and modernism. This institution is situated in Deoband, a tehsil of Saharanpur district, Uttar Pradesh; 150 kilometres from the capital of India; Delhi. The institution is a staunch advocate of highly innovative management, administrative, organizational and structural strategies which are related to the general public. The institution has its financial base among the common masses since its inception. It does not rely on “the elitist social segment”. It organizes the multifaceted curricula, wide-ranging academic structure and administrative paraphernalia that replicates the British bureaucratic model, while implementing Urdu language as students’ medium of learning / instructions. These measures proved to be unprecedented in the educational history of the Muslim community in the whole South Asia. The most pronounced contribution of Darul Uloom Deoband is the adoption of pedagogical strategies which launched a refined academic, educational and literary cultural regime that distinctly alienated itself from ultra-orthodox monopoly of the inflexible religious elites which stressed the necessity of Arabic and Persian languages. The Institution indoctrinated common Muslim community to seek religious knowledge; promote Urdu language and to develop it in regions to embrace more Muslims.

sub-continent since millennia. However, the British Indian government accorded patronage to the theory that created a religious division among and even within the Hindu and Muslim communities. These trends served the British colonialists’ strategic interests in South Asia.

- The most devastating phenomenon caused by “Two Nation Theory” was the fragmentation of indigenous polity into two distinct factions; hardliners (fanatically inflexible) and soft-liners (accommodative and flexible). In this regard, the Indian National Congress suffered the maximum at the hands of hardliners in the party who played the most prominent role in widening the gulf between the communities. On one side it was the Hindu-Muslim divide while on the other hand it was the Upper Caste-Lower Caste division in India. This scenario forced Dr Ambedkar to pursue a separate representation for the low-caste Hindu community. After a number of abortive attempts, on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1956, he along with his 365,000 followers chose to covert Buddhism [15,16].
- In the similar manner, the Muslim community of India also divided itself into two prominent segments; pro-Two Nation Theory faction and anti-Theory group. The most devastating situation emerged when the religious cadres of different schools of Islamic jurisprudence divided themselves into a number of splinter groups which further weakened the Muslim community which was already in a state of virtual depletion.
- Amidst this highly depressing scenario, the Muslim community being un-educated and poor, thus inferior to other communities especially Hindu community drastically lacked the political vision

Educational and literary cultural regime that distinctly alienated itself from ultra-orthodox monopoly of the inflexible religious elites which stressed the necessity of Arabic and Persian languages. The Institution indoctrinated common Muslim community to seek religious knowledge; promote Urdu language and to develop it in regions to embrace more Muslims [17].

Which could assist in keeping them aware of political affairs impacting their future? They always looked towards their elite class which took decisions in their personal and their masters’ favour. This phenomenon is still in vogue even after the creation of Pakistan.

### Conclusion

After the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the state fell prey to an innumerable conspiracies hatched by the elite to maintain their control over the state affairs as already predicted by a number of thinkers in India especially the Muslim class. Most horrendously, the religiously-indoctrinated zealots emerged as the most powerful segment in the ruling hierarchy despite

their least representation in the legislature but their influence in seeking favourable decisions there is unchallenged. There is no ambiguity that the religious fundamentalism is reigning supreme as usual even after 75 years of country's emergence, thus upholding the vision of Sir William Patrick Andrew who anticipated the Border Lands as a separate sovereign state ruled by "Bigoted Fanatics" to serve the west in South Asia.

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