

Title—From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition
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Year—2007

Categories: Colonialism, India, Religion, Decolonization, Culture

Place: Indian Subcontinent (India & Pakistan)

Time: 1920s-1960s

Argument Synopsis:

This is an essay collection focused on the long process of decolonization in both India and Pakistan. Chakrabarty, Majumdar, and Sartori reveal that most studies on the 1947 independence focus either on the leadup to independence or its immediate aftermath—this collection aims to look at the wider historical period before and after independence. They also contend that the majority of studies tend to focus on either India or Pakistan, which leads to a focus on concerns internal to specific nations. However, the authors do note that this collection only deals with India and Pakistan. The collection aims to bring to light some of the historical complications involved in nations born under colonial rule evolving into postcolonial polities. Although many of the contributors have connections to the countries of India and Pakistan, all, except one, work in institutions outside of the region. The authors also note that all the contributors, with the exception of three, are historians by training. The collection is organized into six sections: questions of democracy; minority imagining; class, caste, & nation; law, capital, and subject formation; regions; and wider perspectives. The collection is not attempting to present any one thesis/view, but rather to convey the complexity and unpredictability of the processes through which the entangled histories of Britain and South Asia occurred.

Faisal Devji's "The Minority as Political Form" is focused on Jinnah and his Muslim League ideology. Devji argues that the Muslim League's notion of an unprecedented beginning referred to the notion of faith, not in the religious sense but more of an Islam as an ideal. For Jinnah, Muslim politics was not based on sentiments, but on the fact that Muslims were too numerous and too distinct constitutionally to exist merely as a religious group. He argues that Jinnah's rejection of religious politics was not spurred by a general advocacy of secularism. For the Muslim League, politics defined as faith meant precisely uprooting oneself from the fragments of popular religiosity that were already given to Muslims, and that only served to make them backward. He reveals that faith was important because of Indian Muslims dispersal throughout the region meant that they could only be united on the basis of faith.

Barbara Metcalf's "Observant Muslims, Secular Indians: The Political Vision of Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani, 1938-57" explores the ideology of Madani in the period surrounding 1947 independence. He was a traditionally educated Islamic scholar who lived from 1879 to 1957. Madani's ideology was espoused in opposition to both the secular Muslim state of Pakistan and the Islamist ideology. He imagined a free nation made up of religious communities, largely self-governing in terms of education and law, in which ulama would serve as key leaders to work cooperatively with leaders of other religious groups in a central government with limited power. He argued that Muslims must not dwell on their minority status or lack of power. Metcalf argues that his ideology continues to inform the behavior of Muslims in independent India.

Key Themes and Concepts:

- Historical transition from a colonial order to a postcolonial one was not a matter of the colonized shedding, once and for all, the multiple ways in which they are dominated by the colonizer
- The colonized and the colonizer are often engaged in a hybridizing encounter
- Need to complicate the absolutism which imbues the idea of decolonization