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# Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative

DAVID GILMARTIN

**F**EW EVENTS HAVE BEEN MORE IMPORTANT to the history of modern South Asia than the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan in 1947. The coming of partition has cast a powerful shadow on historical reconstructions of the decades before 1947, while the ramifications of partition have continued to leave their mark on subcontinental politics fifty years after the event.

Yet, neither scholars of British India nor scholars of Indian nationalism have been able to find a compelling place for partition within their larger historical narratives (Pandey 1994, 204–5). For many British empire historians, partition has been treated as an illustration of the failure of the “modernizing” impact of colonial rule, an unpleasant blip on the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial worlds. For many nationalist Indian historians, it resulted from the distorting impact of colonialism itself on the transition to nationalism and modernity, “the unfortunate outcome of sectarian and separatist politics,” and “a tragic accompaniment to the exhilaration and promise of a freedom fought for with courage and valour” (Menon and Bhasin 1998, 3).

Surprisingly, partition occupies an uncertain place in historical narrative even for historians of Pakistan. Though the creation of Pakistan occupies, of course, a central and positive place in the narrative of Pakistani history, its continuity with the history preceding and following it has been open to serious question. While some Pakistani historians have argued for a direct narrative line from the arrival of Muslims in India to the creation of Pakistan, the fact that the creation of Pakistan marked a partition not simply of the subcontinent, but of the Indian Muslim community itself, has made the fitting of the creation of Pakistan into any simple narrative of Muslim community extremely problematic (Hardy 1972). The emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 made this all the more difficult. While the creation of a Muslim state in 1947 is generally

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celebrated in Pakistani historiography, the actual partition of the subcontinent often has about it an air of betrayal.

For historians, the roots of the problem lie in the marked disjunction in the historical literature between the story of the "high politics" of partition, the negotiations between the British, the Congress, and the Muslim League that led to the creation of Pakistan, and the narrative of popular history, of "history from below." The "high politics" of partition has, in fact, long been a staple for historians. The drama of partition has focused on the tragic story of a few men (or, nowadays, of a few men and Lady Mountbatten<sup>1</sup>) deciding the fates of voiceless millions. "Never before in South Asian history," Mushirul Hasan writes, "did so few divide so many . . ." (Hasan 1994, 43). Here we have, usually, a story of almost incomparably high-stakes intrigue against the backdrop of a swirling sea of violence-prone humanity. Recent scholarship has greatly complicated this story, showing us the complexity of the issues that drove the negotiations (Brasted and Bridge 1994). But the scholarship on the "high politics" of partition has nevertheless tended to posit a realm of political negotiation relatively uninfluenced by the everyday politics of local life.

Fiction, on the other hand, has provided an intense window on the personal experiences of 1947, dramatizing graphically the impact of partition on everyday lives. Recent years have witnessed the publication of a number of anthologies of partition stories, and historians have begun to make increasing reference to this work (for a review, see Francisco 1996). But fiction has, ironically, proved a far more powerful vehicle for describing the influence of partition on the common man and woman than for describing the influence of the common people on partition. "There is a single, common note which informs nearly all the stories written about the Partition and the horror it unleashed," Alok Bhalla writes, "a note of utter bewilderment" (Bhalla 1994, ix). Indeed, the disconnection between the rarefied decisions leading to partition, and the searing consequences on individual lives, remains one of the most powerful tropes that has been carried from partition fiction into the work of historians.<sup>2</sup>

Some historians, of course, have incorporated fiction and personal histories into their work in ways that have highlighted the distinctive impact of partition on the lives of different classes and genders. Such work has proved fruitful in illustrating how different groups of people have in retrospect made sense (or failed to make sense) of the partition experience, and in highlighting how the new states created in 1947 attempted to forge their own national identities through efforts to deal with the aftermath of partition's violence. Recent analysis of efforts to construct meanings out of partition's violence has focused, for example, on the resettlement of refugees and the "recovery" of abducted women. In the best of these works, the tensions between the experiences of individuals, and the attempts of the new states to give "national" meaning to the events of partition (by attempting to restore a patriarchal moral order in their wake), have helped to define the contours of a narrative of memory about partition (Menon and Bhasin 1998; Khudaisya 1995; Major 1995; Butalia 1993).

But the violence of partition itself has resisted effective integration with the political narrative of partition's causes. Historians can interpret how the stories of

<sup>1</sup>For a recent interpretation emphasizing the influence on partition of Nehru's affair with Lady Mountbatten, see Ahmed 1997, 143–60.

<sup>2</sup>In a recent essay, for example, Ian Talbot sees this literature as providing insight into the "human impact" of partition: "the searing reality of the agony" of partition violence, "the complexity of human emotions" in the face of loss, and the "sense of uprootedness" brought about by the partition migrations. But there is virtually no attempt to integrate these perspectives into a larger narrative of the politics of partition. See Talbot 1996, 105, 144–45.

partition are told and how they are given meaning, but the place of the violence in the larger historical narrative has continued to prove elusive. Some historians have wondered whether “the language of historical discourse” is in the end capable of capturing the meaning of violence for those who experienced it (Pandey 1994, 221). Others have been more categorical. Peter van der Veer, after analyzing the narrativization of communal violence, concludes that “there is no true story of violence. . . . Something terrible has happened and there is no plot, no narrative, only traces that lead nowhere” (van der Veer 1996, 269). The disjunction between the narrative of high politics and the personal experience of violence is here raised to a principle—suggesting, by implication, the impossibility of creating a meaningful narrative of the partition story.

Is the story of partition, then, to remain outside history? The question of defining a narrative of partition must inevitably lead back to central questions about the role of narrative in history more generally. As Hayden White has suggested, the construction of historical narratives almost inevitably implies the “emplotment” of events to convey moral meaning (White 1987, ch. 1). But in most modern history, it has been the vicissitudes of the nation that have most prominently shaped these meanings. “As we know,” van der Veer writes, “history is the grand narrative of the modern nation-state” (van der Veer 1996, 250). Yet partition presents a story that cannot easily be narrativized simply within the frame of the territorial nation-state’s history. Nor, with civil violence at its heart, is the story easy to assimilate to the search for a narrative history linking a ‘history from below’ with a larger state-oriented narrative. For all the concern by historians to bridge the dividing line of 1947, partition has generally eluded effective incorporation into larger narratives. It dramatizes more than most events the tension between the idea of an “objective” narrative history centered on the state and the multiple identities (and multiple narratives) constructed on the margins (Pandey 1992, 50).

But the very problems in making narrative sense of 1947 should perhaps push historians toward rethinking some of the key concepts that have defined the story. Its very intractability should perhaps lead us to new questions about the relationship between high politics and popular violence, between state authority and moral community, and about the relationship of these oppositions to the meaning of the nation. Most important, these problems should push us towards a narrative that places the tension between multiple realities and the production of shared moral meaning at the very heart of the partition story. Rather than aim for a “master narrative” of partition whose moral meaning will transcend the multiple and sometimes inchoate stories produced by the violence of partition, we need to understand the ways that the tension between multiple constructions of identity and the search for moral community *itself* defined the partition event. Indeed, it is only by putting this tension at the center of the story that we can begin to define a narrative line that will encompass the divide of 1947—a narrative that will link the causes of partition to its results, and at the same time incorporate, while not being subsumed by, the story of the nation.

### The “High Politics” of Partition

The search for a narrative framework to contain the story of partition must begin with the search for a narrative of the high politics of Pakistan’s creation that at least

provides room for an understanding of the ways that everyday lives influenced the decisions made in Delhi and London. One of the most fruitful openings for such a perspective is provided by the work of Ayesha Jalal on Muhammad Ali Jinnah's quest to gain recognition during the Pakistan movement as "sole spokesman" of the "Muslim community" (Jalal 1985). To focus initially on Jinnah is not to suggest, of course, that only the history of Muslims—much less of the elite Muslim leadership—matters in the partition story. Rather, it is to suggest that the actions and agency of Muslims, which were in their varied contexts central to the genesis of the demand for Pakistan, must be at the heart of the underlying "plot" of the partition narrative.

Jalal's firm focus on Jinnah, as the leader of the Muslim League and "father" of Pakistan, has in fact been strongly criticized by some. Gyanendra Pandey, for example, accuses Jalal of portraying Jinnah simply as a rational "great man," acting in the midst of "a sea of disorderly, irrational forces" (Pandey 1994, 209–10). Paying relatively little attention to the dynamics of local level politics, Jalal's emphasis on high politics, he implies, offers little direct analysis of the "grassroots" concerns of most Muslims themselves.

Much of this criticism is well founded. But Jalal's book is nevertheless important for the development of a broader narrative precisely because it forces us to dissolve the easy categories—Muslim League, Congress, and British—that have long organized the narrative of high politics. Though these categories remain important for Jalal, her analysis also brings to center stage the divisions within these categories, and particularly within the Muslim community. In this sense, Jalal's work is most important for providing us with a narrative framework for asking questions about the relationship between "Muslim" identity, construed as the moral foundation for the Pakistan demand, and the myriad particularistic and fragmentary identities and interests that shaped the lives and experiences of India's Muslims. Like others, Jalal portrays Jinnah as driven throughout the partition negotiations by a single-minded commitment to Pakistan. But this commitment derived not primarily, in her account, from a desire for a separate Muslim state, but from a desire to gain recognition as "sole spokesman" for India's Muslims. At the root of Jinnah's obsession, of course, was the fact that he was *not*, in reality, the sole political voice of Muslims in the 1940s—far from it. The idea of Pakistan, a Muslim state, provided Jinnah symbolic capital as he sought to identify himself with an image of Muslim unity. The real struggle of the Pakistan movement, in this telling, was not so much to create a territorial homeland for India's Muslims, as it was to *create* a Muslim political community, to define a symbolic center to give moral and political meaning to the concept of a united "Muslim community" in India.

In much commentary, the implications of Jalal's arguments for an understanding of Muslim identities have been subordinated to a discussion of how her story relates to the apportioning of "responsibility" for the events of 1947. Jalal herself in fact focuses considerable attention on the question of whether Jinnah ever really wanted the creation of a separate Muslim state (and thus partition), or whether the actual partition of India was forced by the leaders of the Congress, who found it more convenient to give Jinnah a "truncated, moth-eaten" Pakistan than to give him the political position he wanted in a united India. This in turn has led to discussion about whether Jinnah or the Congress were really to "blame" for partition. Some have seen Jalal's arguments as calling into question Pakistan's pedigree as a national Muslim state. If Pakistan was just a "bargaining counter," or a ploy to try to engineer a fragile Muslim unity in Indian politics among deeply divided Muslims, and if the actual partition was a product of Congress manipulation, then what justified Pakistan's

creation as the embodiment of a Muslim nation? As Asim Roy has written, Jalal's "revisionism on Jinnah's role in the creation of Pakistan questions the very legitimacy of the state brought into existence by the *Quaid-i Azam* as the universally acknowledged 'father of Pakistan'" (Roy 1990, 408).

But such concerns miss the most significant point. Critical to developing a historical narrative is understanding how Muslims themselves understood the Pakistan idea. Central to any account that links "high politics" with everyday life, therefore, must be an analysis of the relationship between the reality of pervasive political division among Indian Muslims in the decades leading to 1947 and the vision of symbolic unity embodied in the Pakistan concept (and in Jinnah's claim to be "sole spokesman"). On one level, Jalal's account provides us with this. Her analysis of Jinnah's tense relations with the leaders of provincial politics in Bengal, Punjab, and elsewhere makes clear the importance of division and conflict to the Pakistan story.<sup>3</sup> But on another level, she tells us little of what the notion of a "sole spokesman" may have actually meant to India's Muslims. Her work is in fact weakest in exploring the meaning of "Muslim community" either on the level of symbolic actions or in terms of Muslim intellectual history. Criticizing Jalal for this—and for an overly instrumental view of the role of Islam—Farzana Shaikh has tried to remedy this failing, contextualizing the Pakistan demand in the history of modern intellectual debates about the normative meaning of "Muslim community." Supplementing Jalal, Shaikh thus provides an intellectual background against which we can begin to discuss how literate Muslim *ashraf* elites "imagined" a unitary Muslim community in India during these years (Shaikh 1989).

But adding Shaikh's account to that of Jalal is still not enough to link the high political story of partition to popular politics, or to contextualize the violence that occurred. Shaikh's account focuses on the literate *ashraf* elites, important players no doubt, but hardly the entire Muslim community. What is needed, in addition, is an analysis of how the idea of Pakistan took on significance in counterpoint to the politics of local conflict and local division that continued to shape the lives of most Muslims. As Jalal makes clear, tension in the constitution of the categories that defined partition was central to the event.<sup>4</sup> Divisions among Muslims, in her telling, not only complicated the story—but in critical respects *drove* the story. To push these implications a bit further than Jalal does, one could plausibly argue that had Muslims been without division (a counterfactual impossibility, but one useful to highlight the argument), there might well have been no Pakistan, no partition at all.

What, then, did "Muslim nationalism" mean in this context? Jalal, in the end, offers us little foundation for understanding this. An account of the *dynamics* of identity formation—of how the symbolic concept of Pakistan in fact fed off the divisions in Muslim politics, and of the role violence played in this process—is largely

<sup>3</sup>Jalal's work suggests the critical importance of the further integration of provincial studies into our understanding of the creation of Pakistan. See Talbot 1988 and Low 1991. It is critical also to bring into the narrative the British devolution of power to the provinces in the period after 1919, a process that had as much influence on the dynamics of the debates leading to partition as did an earlier British policy of "divide and rule" tied to religion.

<sup>4</sup>Though the emphasis here is on Muslims, such tensions were of course critical to the Congress and to Hindus as well. The relationship between the categories "untouchable" and "Hindu" is a good example. The politics of partition crystallized debate on the local meanings of these categories (in Bengal, for example) as the Muslim League made direct efforts to "count" scheduled castes on their side of the ledger. In this sense the meaning of "Hindu community" was also implicated in the debates about partition.

missing from her narrative. But her reading of the partition debate nevertheless offers us a framework in which we can begin to ask these questions.

## Communalism and the Construction of Muslim Identities

For serious analysis of *processes* of identity formation, and of the creative tension between unity and division, we must turn not to existing histories of the “high politics” of partition, but to the literature on the history of communalism in colonial India. Scholarly literature on the nature of communalism and “religious nationalism” is now so large and so complex that it is difficult to characterize. Most useful, however, in providing a necessary counterweight to the story of partition’s “high politics,” is historical work analyzing communalism from the bottom up, focusing on *local* communities and their relationship to larger Muslim identities during the colonial period. An initial focus on the locality has provided insights largely missing in the larger literature on the politics of partition.

One of the best examples of such an approach is provided by Gyanendra Pandey’s analysis of the parameters of Muslim identity in the nineteenth-century *qasba* of Mubarakpur (Pandey 1984; Pandey 1990, 109–57). Mubarakpur was a small town in the United Provinces that was dominated by Muslim elites, but also marked by significant class cleavages within the Muslim population. Pandey examines a “history” of the community produced in the late nineteenth century by one of its leading Muslim citizens. In analyzing this history, Pandey shows that notions of “Muslim” identity were closely bound up with larger ideas about moral order. But identification with a larger Muslim community was inseparably intertwined with the *particular* identity of the *local* community (and with the authority of the *sharif* Muslims who saw their status and position as central to local order). As Pandey shows, the poorer Muslim weavers of Mubarakpur often had a tense relationship with these *sharif* leaders, and their own vision of community was, in critical respects, quite different. But the vessel of Islamic moral order in this story was the local community itself, with its own distinctive structures of authority, subordination, and conflict.

Pandey’s account suggests two vital features of identity, critical for understanding the later Pakistan movement. First, Muslim identities in India were almost always embedded in a range of *particular* social and political orders. If Islam shaped notions of legitimate moral order, it did so in relation to local configurations of power and community, configurations in which distinctions of status, hierarchy, and interest among Muslims were critical, and in which Hindus and Muslims were sometimes intimately joined. And following from this, Pandey’s analysis suggests implicitly that the identities of Muslims were nested and in tension. Even as the author of the local history asserted the importance of Muslim identity (and Islamic moral order), he was asserting at the same time the importance of his own *sharif* identity, which marked him off from lower-class Muslim weavers. A transcendent Islamic identity *and* a distinctive class identity were asserted in the same breath. Though the language of community definition was Islamic and rooted in the idea of an encompassing Islamic moral order, Muslim community and Muslim division emerged in the same process.

Understanding this is critical to understanding larger processes of identity formation. Viewed from the locality, the distinction between a dispositive normative Islamic order on the one hand (such as is asserted by Farzana Shaikh), and the notion

of Muslim elites manipulating Islam for their own instrumental purposes on the other (such as Jalal seems to suggest), begins to dissolve.<sup>5</sup> But what was the process within which this tension between unity and division, between status hierarchy and an all-encompassing moral order, was played out?

Perhaps the best work that tackles the *dynamics* of identity formation in this context is Sandria Freitag's discussion of the emergence of communalism in north India, a work that also begins with the analysis of community at the local level. Freitag argues that the key to the meaning of community in the towns of colonial north India was the "public arena," the arena of public performance and of "collective activities in public spaces" (Freitag 1989, xii). It was through public, collective activities that local community (that is, a sense of collectivity, or identity), was expressed. "Community," as enacted in such public arenas, was never fixed or static. Public arena performances (such as Muharram or Ram Lila) did not simply "enact" community, they were a central part of the process by which a sense of moral order was created. On one level, of course, these festivals evoked symbols of moral order drawn from distinctively Hindu or Muslim repertoires. But on another level, their meaning was intimately connected to the distinctive particularities of local place, and thus to local structures of relationships and traditions of performance that Hindus and Muslims shared. Central, in fact, to the significance of these festivals was that they were arenas of competition (in both patronage and performance) for status conflicts of all kinds. A focus on "public arenas" thus suggests how conflicts rooted in everyday life, which crosscut the distinction between Hindus and Muslims, were central to the process by which larger notions of moral order were expressed and created.

Freitag in fact draws on the terminology of Victor Turner to suggest how division and collectivity were interrelated. Public arena performances were enacted in a realm of special time, in which a sense of commonality (or "communitas") developed that transcended everyday structure (even though such performances had, of course, their own structures). Much public ceremonial was conducted in a realm of "sacred time," in which the individual confronted the moral order of the whole (Freitag 1989, 137). And yet this "communitas" gained meaning only in juxtaposition to the structures of power, status, and division marking everyday life. It did not replace such division; it represented a form of identity operating on a different plane of time. It was no accident, Freitag argues, that religious riots often grew out of the tensions that arose during these public arena activities; indeed, riots were in some respects an extension of the contestation that marked public arena performances. Violent conflict was both a manifestation of the contested character of collective identity (which upset any effort by the state to fix and stabilize local communities) and an attempt to protect and reassert the existence of a larger moral order (and of membership in a larger community) as protection for the individual within a local world marked by hierarchy, domination, and uncertainty. As Freitag notes of many riots, they were often as much a product of everyday conflicts and contests *among* Muslims or *among* Hindus as they were of longstanding conflicts between them, even though symbolic violence frequently took Hindu-Muslim form. Pressures over status in the face of changing socioeconomic circumstances helped to produce new public and ceremonial reforms

<sup>5</sup>The opposition between these two poles of interpretation was crystallized almost twenty years ago in a debate between Paul Brass and Francis Robinson. Brass argued that competition among elites drove them to manipulate Islamic language in order to mobilize popular support. Robinson argued against this emphasis on instrumental manipulation, stressing instead the normative power of Islamic ideas in shaping elite action. See Taylor and Yapp 1979, 35–112.



by both Hindu and Muslim leaders, which in turn helped often to provoke violent conflict with a symbolic “other” as the local bonds of community were renegotiated.

To understand more fully the relation between these processes and the emergence of Muslim communalism, however, another element must be introduced into this picture, and that is the role of the colonial state. While many have written of the ways that the British colonial state created new definitions of religious community through the census and other bureaucratic processes (fixing community definitions and a structure of representation for the colonial state), another aspect of the colonial state is far more important to Freitag’s model. Seeing itself as a mediator standing outside the structure of society, the British government withdrew in the nineteenth century from any direct role in the operation of local public arenas. Though it sought to regulate these, and at times to intervene in the interest of order, the British (unlike earlier states) played no role as cultural patrons in these arenas, a stance which, as Rosalind O’Hanlon has put it, “opened the way for a great expansion in numbers of new patrons, often merchant and new Hindu service people, who competed among themselves and with older state elites to sponsor public ritual.”<sup>6</sup> Changing economic fortunes, changing patterns of education, and expanding print communications all shaped shifts in power in particular localities (as for example between *ashraf* elites and other groups) that were played out in contestations for status and precedence within the public arena. Similarly, class identities were often asserted within the moral framework of religious contestation.<sup>7</sup> In this respect the British state helped to shape patterns of community redefinition and conflict, even as it stood in self-definition apart from these processes.

Though structurally embedded in colonial rule, public arenas thus defined a realm for cultural self-definition that was largely autonomous of the colonial state. And for this reason their structure exerted a powerful influence in the late nineteenth century on the emerging realm of print and public debate also—the realm in which late-nineteenth-century communalism emerged. This was a new, translocal site for cultural self-definition, but one whose structure in critical respects paralleled that of local public arenas—for it was a realm embedded also in the structure of colonial rule, and yet, like public arenas, (relatively) autonomous of the direct patronage of the colonial state. The changes associated with new technologies of communication, with the extension of access to property and to the British legal system, and—perhaps most important—with the development of education and a commercial press, defined a realm increasingly marked by what Benedict Anderson has called “print capitalism.” Yet, if the structure of this realm was in critical respects a product of late-nineteenth-century capitalist transformations, the forms in which “community” was constructed (or “imagined”) reflected also the structure of cultural competition and patronage that had long ordered local public arenas. This new “public realm” in fact grew in colonial India, in contrast to Anderson’s model, from a fusing of the realm of letters with the autonomous public arena of cultural performance and religious ceremonial—a central reason, perhaps, why the language of religion and moral order came to play so central a role in it.

It was within this realm that some politicians sought increasingly in the twentieth century to mobilize broad religious categories of identity and opposition. The colonial state’s own use of such categories of course influenced significantly this development.

<sup>6</sup>O’Hanlon here is drawing on the work of Katherine Prior (O’Hanlon 1993, 251).

<sup>7</sup>Scholarship on Bengal has tended to put particular emphasis on the role of class conflicts in shaping these processes; see, for example, Das 1991 and Hashmi 1992.

But tensions harking back to local processes of identity formation were also deeply ingrained in communal rhetoric, for they were intrinsic to the structure of the public realm itself. Although the language of communalist self-assertion in this realm was charged with a concern for unity and a search for moral order, the images of unity that were created were often in tension with the structure of a realm that was a site primarily for competition and debate. The old “moral city” of mosques, courts, schools, and market, to use Faisal Devji’s terms, had been displaced by the realm of print and public meetings as a “stage” for the representation of the Muslim “moral collectivity” (Devji 1991, 149). Men with claims to communal leadership in this realm (such as the Ali brothers, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, Muhammad Iqbal, and, ultimately, Jinnah) came to depend far less on established religious credentials than on their ability to successfully deploy the language of moral community in public controversy, as they appealed for the support of autonomous individuals through print and the public platform. Even as their language created an image of communal unity (sometimes in opposition to a Hindu “other”), it was most commonly deployed in the context of public controversy among Muslims themselves.

Continuities between local processes and those in the public realm were thus critical for framing the emergence of twentieth-century communalism, not just as the expression of an imagined opposition between large religious communities, but as a reflection also of the ongoing tension between local, regional, and other particular identities on the one hand, and the claims of moral order on the other. The new public realm was a site not only for communal self-definition, but also for the simultaneous generation of other new forms of public identity—sectarian, linguistic, regional, and *biradari* identities, sometimes linking Hindus and Muslims.<sup>8</sup> Without an ordering political foundation for the moral realm, it was only the competitive *language* of moral self-definition that in the public realm defined larger moral collectivities. And yet this language was always shifting, appealed to in the name of legitimation and moral purpose by many, and yet manipulated also by leaders with powerful local and regional, class and *biradari* interests, each competing for status, power, and position.

## Reform, Devotion, and Muslim Nationalism

Tensions between moral community and structures of local power and status in fact suffused the language of communal self-definition among Indian Muslims in the first half of the twentieth century. The rhetorics of reform and devotion, each in its own way central to the public imagining of Muslim community in twentieth-century India, illustrate this—and point toward the critical tensions that shaped an emerging “Muslim nationalism.”

The idiom of “reform” (*tajdid*) had in fact long played a central role in the discursive articulation of Muslim moral community. Focused on personal behavior—and on the tension between rational moral ideals and the psychological pull of everyday needs—“reformism” offered a critical rhetorical strategy for defining an image of moral community independent of the structure of colonial authority. Since much of the language of religious reform in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries hinged

<sup>8</sup>For an example of the development of “public” *biradari* identities in the Punjab, in their relationship both to local organization and to the public construction of Muslim identity, see Gilmartin 1994. For a discussion of the relationship between religious rhetoric and the simultaneous development of linguistic identities, see essays in Jones 1992.

on the internalization of religious authority, the rhetoric of “reform” allowed Muslims to assert simultaneously in the public realm *both* the autonomy of the individual *and* the normative unity of the community.

Among the most important fields for reformist rhetoric was debate about the position of women. Yet debates on women, which bitterly divided Muslims, highlighted in particularly dramatic fashion the contradictions inherent in the definition of moral community through open public debate. For some, including some women, the education of women, and the recognition of women’s rights under Islamic law, were linked to the moral realization of the community. The individual struggle to internalize reform, to bring the self under the control of moral rationality (a concern central to women’s education), paralleled in critical respects the struggle to bring the diffuse world of local custom and competition among Muslims under the control of broader principles of moral community (Metcalf 1982). In this respect, the rhetoric of women’s education and family reform potentially challenged local status hierarchies: by appealing to a larger moral order, reformist writers promised to expand the scope of individual autonomy at the expense of local particularism (even while defining the idealized Muslim family as a critical site for the production of Muslim identity).<sup>9</sup>

Yet, at the same time—and more importantly—women’s reform was also a distinctively class-based project. Through an emphasis on women’s education—and the moral reform of the family—literate *sharif* leaders sought to establish themselves as rational, independent, morally responsible spokesmen for the Muslim community as a whole. Their aim in this context was to reinforce existing local status hierarchies of honor and authority, even while underscoring the moral standing of *sharif* leaders to act as community spokesmen in the new public realm (Devji 1991; Metcalf 1990; Minault 1997; Maskiell 1984; Rouse 1996).

Reformist social debates on women thus suggested the critical importance of class and status competition in driving debates on the meaning of moral community, even as the language of debate helped to create the public image of a unitary moral touchstone of Muslim identity. The very publicness of the debate illustrated how the most mundane problems of family organization—problems of potential concern to Muslims of every class—could be vitally related to the moral and political definition of the community as a whole. And yet, even as these debates evoked a language of normative unity, they also suggested the critical tension between moral unity and self-interested competition (which paralleled the internalized struggle between moral knowledge and selfish instinct) in defining the community within the public realm.

Similar in this regard was the language of personal devotionism. Peter van der Veer has stressed the role of devotionism in religious nationalism more broadly (van der Veer 1994, 43–53). But devotionism, like reform, gained particular political significance in the context of the emerging public realm, where the “love” by autonomous individuals for Muslim symbols came to define new constructions of community that transcended concrete divisions of interest and status. Such was the case, for example, in the increasingly popular emphasis on love of the Prophet (as enacted in public ceremonial such as the Prophet’s birthday) and in new forms of Sufi

<sup>9</sup>A good example of this is provided by the debates concerning legislation on the *shari’at* in the 1930s, which hinged, at least in part, on securing rights of inheritance for women who had formerly been denied such rights under customary law. The *shari’at* was for many a symbol of the larger moral community, and the appeal to *shari’at* rules of inheritance was for some (particularly in the Punjab) a way to challenge in the name of individual rights local hierarchies of status rooted in *biradari* organization. Of course, for others it had different meanings.

devotionalism linking an emphasis on mass printing with love of the *shaiikh* (Sanyal 1996; Buehler 1998). Most dramatic, however, were the public agitations in the twentieth century that mobilized devotion to and protection of Muslim symbols, such as the Khilafat, or the “martyred” Kanpur and Shahidganj mosques, or the holy Prophet, whose honor was defended during the “Rangila Rasul” agitation of the 1920s (Minault 1982; Burke and Lapidus 1988, 115–68; Thursby 1975, 40–47). These agitations linked widespread public demonstrations with a language of personal sacrifice and devotion to create an image of moral unity that transcended everyday political conflict. With the state no longer defining the moral parameters of the community or its political form, individuals remade the community in the public realm by attaching their hearts to Muslim symbols and making these inner hearts public in open contestation.

By constructing community in a realm of individual affect, expressions of public devotionalism thus transcended many of the internalized tensions that marked the rationalist realm of “reformist” debate.<sup>10</sup> But at the same time, the personalistic language of devotional community also contained its own ambiguities. Calls for devotion and sacrifice in defense of symbols of community often drew heavily on the gendered language of male “honor,” an idiom that evoked not only the universalism of patriarchy but also the particularistic (and highly competitive) loyalties attached to “tribe,” family, and other kinship-based identities. Moreover, the language of devotionalism, by its very nature, required public enactment, and its expression thus tended to be ephemeral.<sup>11</sup> Its power derived precisely from the tension between an autonomous realm of affect, emotion, and personal sacrifice, on the one hand, and an everyday structure of political interest and local competition, on the other.

Tension between images of moral unity and the divisions and hierarchies of everyday life, embodied in the language of reform and devotion alike, thus epitomized the twentieth-century public realm. And such tensions were only heightened in the 1920s and 1930s by the gap between urban politics, where the public realm was most developed, and the reality of patronage-based politics in the rural areas, where the majority of India’s Muslims (particularly in the Muslim-majority provinces) lived. In reorganizing the Muslim League in the 1930s, it was Jinnah’s aim to develop a fixed organizational structure with the capacity to transcend these divisions.

But it was the state itself, in the end, which provided the political structures necessary for the League’s efforts. Critical to the League’s political imagining of an encompassing Muslim community was the gradual introduction into twentieth-century India of elected legislatures, of arenas of electoral contestation that were, like other public arenas, autonomous of the state’s direct cultural patronage, but which the British had demarcated to conform directly to the state’s administrative structure.

<sup>10</sup>For some contrast of these “reformist” and “devotional” constructions of community, see Gilmartin 1991.

<sup>11</sup>There were, of course, organizations that grew out of such symbolic agitations, from the Khilafat committees of the 1920s to the Movement for the Finality of the Prophethood that emerged from anti-Ahmadi agitations in the 1930s. Some organizations, such as Maulana Zafar Ali Khan’s Ittihad-i-Millat, formed during the Shahidganj mosque agitation in the 1930s, later contested elections. But on the whole, such organizations had little organized staying power, dependent as they were on the ephemeral symbolic dramatization of devotion to Muslim symbols. The political squabbling that succeeded such agitations often engendered breast-beating about the problems of community “division.” But it is significant that the very language of “division” hinged on its juxtaposition with the image of moral unity that these agitations evoked.

Elections played an increasingly important role in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s as a new kind of public realm linking society and state. This was a realm, of course, that was largely focused at the regional level, as the British had begun for their own reasons after 1920 to devolve authority to the provinces. But in spite of this—and the still restricted character of the electoral franchise—elections offered a structure that subsumed in critical ways the tension between an image of overarching Muslim unity and the reality of conflict and competition that had marked the public realm of Muslim debate.<sup>12</sup>

At the heart of this was the British definition of separate electorates, which after 1920 provided the frame for nearly all Muslim elections. The significance of separate electorates lay in the fact that they offered a structural definition of Muslim community far different from that emerging from reformist or devotional politics. In contrast to the shifting ambiguities found in public debates about the meaning of Muslim community, separate electorates rested on a flat, homogenous definition of Muslim community in which descent was primary—a definition drawn from the British Indian census. Separate electorates thus provided a bureaucratically fixed frame for Muslim community definition that had little reference to ongoing public debates relating to reformed behavior or to matters of the heart. At the same time, however, separate electorates subsumed the competitive structure of the electoral process itself, where rival Muslim candidates mobilized their opposing networks of personal, kin and class-based support in sometimes bitter competition. Separate electorates thus embodied, *simultaneously*, the image of a common Muslim community, fixed by state definition, and the reality of deep provincial and local divisions.

What separate electorates did not do, of course, with their roots in flat, census definitions, was to define a moral language of Muslim unity. It was no accident, in this context, that the Muslim vote in the 1920s and 1930s was in practice highly fragmented, focused on localized influence. Within the new provincial legislatures, regionally-based coalitions emerged that drew on a range of class, communal and provincially-based rhetorics. In critical respects, the devolution of power in the last decades of British rule only increased cultural fragmentation. But elections nevertheless offered a structural framework within which the public language of moral community eventually took on new meaning.

Indeed, the structural framework offered by separate electorates provides us a critical backdrop for understanding the Muslim League's adoption in 1940 of the demand for Pakistan. It was in response both to the electoral successes of the Congress in 1937 and to the growing sense of fragmentation among Muslims themselves that the Muslim League linked its identity to the demand for a separate state as a symbol of the community's *moral* unity.<sup>13</sup> Tension between an image of moral unity and the competitive structuring of politics had of course long shaped Muslim rhetoric within the public realm. But now the League sought to frame this realm of competition with a fixed image of unity—an image tied at once to census definitions and to the moral

<sup>12</sup>In the Punjab, for example, approximately 24 percent of the adult population (and a larger proportion of the adult male population) gained the vote in Assembly elections after 1935 (Yadav 1987, 19).

<sup>13</sup>Mushirul Hasan has analyzed perhaps most clearly the pressures created by the 1937 Congress ministries, including the interaction between class and communal tensions, in influencing the timing of the emergence of the Pakistan demand. For an overview, see Hasan 1994, 3–26. There is little doubt that the emergence of a language of *Hindu* moral unity within the public realm—which strongly influenced a wing of the Congress—also played a role in League perceptions of the Congress, and thus on the timing of the Pakistan demand.

authority associated with the image of a Muslim state. It was this that drove the League's attachment not only to the idea of Pakistan but also to the vision of Jinnah as "sole spokesman." And it was no accident that elections played a critical role in Jinnah's efforts to substantiate this vision, for it was through the structure of elections that Jinnah appealed for local support while still maintaining a symbolic vision of transcendent unity. In mobilizing support within the context of the 1946 provincial elections, Jinnah sought to tap into the most particularistic forms of influence. In the Punjab and Sind, for example, Jinnah and the leaders of the League took careful account of local identities based on caste, tribe, *biradari*, and family connection in organizing their 1946 candidate lists. Had they not done so, it is unlikely that they could have swept the majority of the Muslim seats and defeated powerful regional parties such as the Punjab Unionists.

But at the same time Jinnah's claim to moral leadership and moral unity rested on the League's mobilization of an image of Pakistan configured in sharp *moral* opposition to this world of conflict and division. Here Jinnah drew on the tension between images of unity and division long marking reformist and devotional rhetoric. While the League appealed strongly in its 1946 election campaign to fears of "Hindu domination," it linked these fears repeatedly to the dangers presented by division within the Muslim community itself. Nothing, after all, was more morally threatening to the ordering of civic life than *fitna*, moral disorder, whose specter had long been invoked by Muslim states in legitimizing their authority. By invoking the danger of *fitna*, the Muslim League thus underscored the importance of a symbolic definition of Muslim unity and community—the state of Pakistan—as the key to the moral definition of a distinctively Muslim public realm. And yet, as in the structuring of local public arenas, the symbolic appeal to Muslim unity gained moral meaning only in juxtaposition to structures of conflict, competition, and division. Central, of course, to the "objective" definition of the community was its homogenous definition in census enumeration. But ironically, it was the fact that Muslims were in reality *divided*—indeed, that the Muslim League's own electoral organization reflected this—that made the image of Pakistan as a symbol of *moral* unity, and of Jinnah as "sole spokesman," so widely compelling, even for many who were wary of the idea of a unified and centralized Pakistan (Gilmartin 1998).

An examination of the dynamics of local identity formation, and of its relationship to the emerging public realm, thus returns us here to the dynamics driving the "high politics" of partition described by Ayesha Jalal—and to the meaning of nationalism. Though the particular structures of Muslim politics and of support for the Muslim League undoubtedly varied from province to province, from locality to locality, and from class to class, it was precisely these differences, these multiple realities, that gave the symbol of Pakistan moral meaning. The very existence of multiple stories (and conflicting interests) defined, in a sense, the moral meaning of Muslim nationalism. Whether "imagined" (à la Benedict Anderson) or a product of the transformations of modernity (à la Ernest Gellner), nationalism, as a form of moral community, gained meaning only in relationship to the ongoing production and operation of the more particular identities that structured politics and everyday life. Though configured morally as transcending local status divisions and distinctions, nationalism cannot be portrayed as something standing apart from them. As historians of communalism have shown, arenas of local cultural competition produced *simultaneously* deep status divisions and a vision of moral community. This pattern marked the emergence of nationalism in the public realm as well. Defined in part by the operation of local-level public arenas, in part by the competitive structure of the emerging public realm in India, and in part by the bureaucratically structured electoral competition of

colonial rule in the provinces, the search for a symbolic definition of Muslim community emerged into the “high politics” of India’s public realm as the symbolic demand for Pakistan, a Muslim state.

But to begin to discuss the unprecedented violence accompanying partition, we must look also at the critical contradictions within the Pakistan concept. By appealing to the symbolism of a Muslim state, the Muslim League invoked an image of community unity and moral sovereignty, juxtaposed against a world marked by far more complex patterns of social division and local interest. Yet Pakistan came ultimately to represent also a demand for territory, and thus for the territorial partition of the Indian subcontinent. The burden of the argument here is that Jinnah’s negotiating strategy for Pakistan was based far more on the first than the second. But it was the second meaning of Pakistan that came to have the most bloody consequences.

### The Creation of Pakistan: State, Place, and Territory

How the notion of Pakistan developed into a separate territorial claim has been frequently discussed but rarely explained. The linking of Pakistan to a definite territory dates back, of course, to Muhammad Iqbal’s 1930 address suggesting a territorial Muslim state in northwest India (though Iqbal did not at that point use the word “Pakistan”). Subsequently, Muslim leaders put forth a variety of “Pakistan” plans, often with maps suggesting various territorial configurations. But as many have noted, Jinnah was extraordinarily vague in his calls for Pakistan as a clearly demarcated territorial state. Though Jinnah suggested vaguely that Pakistan would be located where Muslims were in a majority, the “two-nation theory” embodied a fundamentally nonterritorial vision of nationality. Even while squarely linking his claim to be “sole spokesman” to the Pakistan demand, Jinnah generally avoided any clear territorial definition of Pakistan.

The literature on communalism also provides little help in suggesting the roots of the demand for a partition of territory. Though critical in helping us to understand the dynamics of identity formation developing out of the localities, this literature has offered very little to explain the transformation of communalism into the specifically *territorial* demand for India’s partition.<sup>14</sup>

To find the roots of the demand for territory, we must look in fact not primarily to communalism, but to the increasing engagement of Indian nationalists and Jinnah alike in the 1930s with the modern, internationalist discourse of territorial nationalism. Many Indian nationalists, led by Nehru, were horrified by communal violence in the 1920s and 1930s, and increasingly came to view communalism largely as a sort of prepolitical aberration, a throwback to irrational, primordial values—a

<sup>14</sup>Sandria Freitag, for example, notes the movement toward territorial separation of Muslim and Hindu neighborhoods following riots in some north Indian cities in the 1930s as prefiguring territorial separation (Freitag 1989, 248). But her narrative stops short of partition. Joya Chatterji traces the largely *bbadralok* demand for the provincial partition of Bengal, but does little to frame this within the larger transformation of the Pakistan demand itself into a demand for territory, or in the cultural transformations in the *meaning* of community that this implied (Chatterji 1994).

fundamental measure, in other words, of what nationalism was not. Communalism's political importance, in Nehru's view, arose largely from the colonial state's ability to manipulate such primordial sentiments in opposition to nationalism for its own benefit. Nehru's vision of the Indian nation thus owed relatively little to the popular processes of identity formation within India's public arenas, both local and extralocal, where autonomous voices contested to define new forms of larger, public identities independent of the colonial state. Under Nehru's leadership, Congress nationalism came instead to be identified in the 1930s and 1940s with a sort of rationalist statism tied to science, modernity, and the individual ethics championed by Gandhi. Relying little on the religious language of moral order and unity as a framework for local contestations among competing interests, Nehru saw national identity as linked instead to individual citizenship. Territorially defined citizenship emerged as the foundation for an alternative definition of the overarching community.<sup>15</sup>

Jinnah's vision of Pakistan was, of course, in some respects far different from this, and yet Jinnah also was strongly influenced by the modern discourse of the nation, with all the assumptions and meanings that implied. The very fact that the Congress increasingly offered a territorial vision of nationhood pushed the Muslim League in the same direction, particularly in the face of Congress attempts to label it as simply "communalist." It was in fact critical to Jinnah's message and strategy that the Muslim League was *not* "communalist," and this was embodied in his symbolic invocation of Pakistan as a "nation." In the last decade before 1947, the Muslim League mobilized a range of symbols that appealed to the "national" ideal, including the flag, an anthem, and the mobilizing of Muslim League National Guards. Ian Talbot has argued persuasively about how the Muslim League National Guards adopted trappings symbolically associated with the state, helping thus to define the Muslim League, like a state, as "both the expression and guarantor of the cultural identity of the Indian Muslims." He describes the symbolism of the public flag-hoisting session at one of the Muslim League's annual sessions (at Patna) as "intended to affirm the Muslim League's claim on the loyalties of individual Muslims as a result of the Pakistan 'national' ideology. Those who saluted the flag," he suggests, "demonstrated their 'citizenship' of Pakistan, although the Muslim state had yet to achieve its fulfillment" (Talbot 1996, 70–74). Similar commitments were shown by the many Muslim students who supported the Pakistan cause, responding to the Pakistan appeal not only with devotion, but with self-discipline and tireless work on its behalf. These students, like the urban Muslim women who publicly marched for Pakistan during 1946 and 1947, transcended normal political and familial norms in expressing direct individual commitment to Pakistan as a "national" ideal.<sup>16</sup> They offered simultaneous evidence of their own autonomy and of powerful personal attachment to symbols that stood for Muslim statehood and "nationality."

But their relationship to the symbols of territory was far more problematic. "A nation," Jinnah said on more than one occasion, "must have a territory" (quoted in

<sup>15</sup>This point is made clearly by Gyanendra Pandey. It is not to deny, however, that the Congress, like the League, continued to mobilize on the basis of localized group identities and deployed locally powerful images of moral (Hindu) community. Pandey's suggestion that, "by its denial of subjecthood to the people of India—the local communities, castes and classes—nationalism was forced into the kind of statist perspective that colonialism had favoured and promoted for its own reasons," somewhat overstates the case (Pandey 1990, 253). But the notion of territorial citizenship was clearly central to Nehru's view of the world.

<sup>16</sup>Not all women who participated, of course, challenged familial norms; see Willmer 1996 and Jalal 1991, 83–85. See also Mirza 1969, and on students, Zaman 1978 and Mirza 1988–89.



Metcalf forthcoming), thus echoing in abstract terms the language of modernity necessary to stake his claim as a true nationalist. Yet even though the term “Pakistan” was coined to link together into a single territorial reference the names of the provinces of northwestern India, there was little in the rhetoric of the Pakistan movement to suggest that attachment to a *particular* piece of territory was of critical importance to the idea’s popular meaning. The very uncertainty as to *which* land was to be that of Pakistan was reflected in the variety of possibilities appearing in various proposals before 1947. That few Muslims saw the appeal for Pakistan in specifically territorial terms was suggested powerfully by the patterns of support that developed for the Muslim League in the years and months before the actual partition plan was announced in June 1947. Bengal, though not even configured into the original list of territories that defined the Pakistan acronym, became ultimately a bastion of Pakistan support. It has often been noted that the Pakistan movement received widespread support among Muslims in areas that had little conceivable prospect of being incorporated into a territorially bounded Muslim state, while Muslims in the Punjab and N.W.F.P., subsequent heartlands of Pakistan, were among the last to register widespread support for the concept. Such patterns are explicable only if we assume that for most Muslims the meaning of Pakistan did not hinge primarily on its association with a specific territory.

Perhaps most suggestive of the contradictions in Pakistan’s association with a fixed territory was the widespread support of the concept among India’s most prominent Sufi *shaikhs*. Sufi authority in India was intimately associated with its localized manifestations; indeed, the influence of Sufism was rooted precisely in the placement of Sufis at the intersection of the particular and the universal. While deriving *barakat* (blessedness) from sacred ancestry and from their evocation of the pristine community of the Prophet and his successors, the actual exercise of most Sufi influence in India was preeminently local, linked specifically to the particularities of genealogy, and often bound to particular localities through the blessing attached to Sufi tombs. Sufi authority in fact dramatized the ways in which participation in a larger moral community also entailed, inevitably, the mediation of the local and the particular. Though some Sufis and Sufi shrines had reputations that extended well beyond particular localities—and which had been enhanced by the emergence of printing and the public realm (Buehler 1998, 190–273)—the very structure of Sufi authority suggested the ways that territory gained blessedness through the operation of sacred genealogy and through the distribution of sites of charisma that transcended any fixed territorial boundaries. There is little way to make sense of Sufi support for Pakistan if we were to imagine that Sufis foresaw Pakistan in terms of the partition of India’s territory. How, after all, could Pakpattan be more blessed than Ajmer, or Golra more blessed than Gulbarga?

Indeed, the tensions that the notion of territory engendered in the Pakistan movement are clearest if we contrast the notion of territory with the notion of *place*. As Gyanendra Pandey’s article on Mubarakpur suggested, the idea of place had long been central to the conception of moral community for most Muslims in India, for it was the local community that was the vessel through which most Muslims participated in a larger moral order. Muslims, of course, also participated in wider arenas, which were critical in shaping the larger discourse of moral community that framed the local community, and within which the demand for Pakistan was made. Indeed, the moral definition of this public realm was at the heart of the Pakistan demand. But the very *particularity* of place remained central to the popular meaning of moral community, for it was this particularity that allowed the notion of place to

subsume and define the networks of personal, genealogical, familial, and status relationships—and the local divisions—in relation to which moral community was experienced and enacted in everyday life.<sup>17</sup>

As a symbol defining the moral sovereignty of the Muslim community within the public realm, Pakistan represented no challenge to this vision of place; one might argue that it represented this notion of place writ large. If there was a tension between an idealized image of Pakistan as a place and the realities of everyday life, then this was a tension that simply shaped the capacity for striving that lay at the heart of Muslim identity. And yet it was as the name of a bounded territory that Pakistan increasingly came to figure in the negotiations of the Congress, the British, and the Muslim League in 1946–47—a result in part of the assumptions and policies of Congress and the British, but also of the inherent contradictions in Jinnah’s own position. The 1946 Cabinet Mission plan represented the last serious attempt to reconcile the notion of Pakistan as territory (with direct moral claims on individual citizens) with the notion of Pakistan as a symbolic marker of the larger community’s sovereignty over Muslims’ embedded communal lives. With its failure, Pakistan’s realization as a territorial state became inescapable. And with that the disjuncture between place and territory began to take its violent toll.

Perhaps the most poignant partition accounts came from those who saw the idea as a sort of moral seal on the local world of conflict and cooperation that defined the essence of Muslim culture, only to find that the territorial reality of partition had destroyed the essential cultural meaning of that sense of place. As Barbara Metcalf has written in describing the autobiographical reminiscences of the Muslim hadith scholar, Maulana Muhammad Zakariyya, Pakistan as a specific place could offer nothing that could compete with the places that had already been sanctified in the Ganges-Jamuna doab by the blessedness (*barakat*) of the community’s pious forebears. But the true nightmare of partition for Zakariyya was that Pakistan’s territorial reality disrupted that world of “dense and elaborate interdependencies and reciprocities” that gave moral meaning to such a sense of place. Watching in horror as fleeing parents abandoned their children (saying “with complete lack of feeling, that if they got to Pakistan safely more children would be born there”), his account stressed his own struggle to maintain “through honor, respect, kindnesses and obligations,” a moral world that depended on proper relationships with the living and with “the dead whose *baraka* illumines the Doab” (Metcalf 1996). This desperate attempt to maintain the linking of place, ancestry, sanctity, and moral order was cast against the backdrop of a fixed partition of territory that had symbolically torn these linkages asunder.

No work of literature encapsulates this more dramatically than Saadat Hasan Manto’s Urdu short story, “Toba Tek Singh,” among the best known works of fiction about the events of partition. Manto’s story focuses on the exchange of the insane following the partition, when Muslim lunatics were consolidated in Pakistani insane asylums and Hindu and Sikh lunatics were transferred to asylums in India. But Manto’s story is fundamentally about the *dislocation* of place. The main character is a Sikh inmate named Bishan Singh, known to all as Toba Tek Singh, after the canal colony market town and tahsil headquarters in Lyallpur District from which he came, a town itself named, as the British gazetteer tells us, “after a *chaprasi* who turned *faqir* and made a tank there” (Punjab Government 1907, 152). Manto’s conflation of Bishan Singh with the place is not accidental; it suggests the central importance of

<sup>17</sup>And, one might add, it was only through the vessel of community that one could participate in the timeless models of moral order represented by the experience of the Prophet.

“locatedness” in defining Bishan Singh’s identity and humanity. Humanity lies in the bonds of family and connection that are strongly associated in the story with the particularity of Toba Tek Singh as a place, most notably in the scene in which Bishan Singh is visited by a Muslim friend from Toba Tek Singh, who evokes the everyday bonds of local community and attempts to reassure him about the fate of his family. But if Toba Tek Singh stands for the human bonds of local community, this vision of place is repeatedly played off in the story against the division of territory represented by partition. “Where is Toba Tek Singh?” Bishan Singh asks his fellow inmates. “Is it in India or Pakistan?” But no one can provide a clear answer: “Those who had tried to solve this mystery had become utterly confused when told that Sialkot, which used to be in India, was now in Pakistan. It was anybody’s guess what was going to happen to Lahore, which was currently in Pakistan, but could slide into India at any moment.” The partition of territory, in this telling, becomes the antithesis of place, of community, and ultimately of humanity. The opposition of place and bounded territory is in fact powerfully dramatized at the story’s end, when, as he is transferred to India, Toba Tek Singh collapses in the no man’s land lying between the partitioned territories of India and Pakistan (Manto 1994, 396–402).

Such tensions shaped the nature of much of the violence marking partition in 1946–47. On one level, of course, this violence, like Jinnah’s quest to be “sole spokesman,” had roots in the tensions between everyday division and the search for moral community that had long marked symbolic politics at the local level. The period preceding partition, the years of World War II, was a time of significant economic and social change in northern India, producing new forms of class tension and of elite competition in many areas. Local conflicts for precedence, either in the face of challenges from below or as a product of new claims to status, such as those made by the thousands of newly demobilized soldiers, undoubtedly helped to fuel communal violence, even when (or, sometimes, most particularly when) Muslims, Hindus, or Sikhs each competed among themselves for status.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, such conflicts were increasingly framed in the postwar period by assertions of moral community tied to nationalism and to the demand for Pakistan. The appeals for mobilization that led to violence in Calcutta in August 1946, for example, suggested how elite leaders sought to mobilize local violence, not simply in the interest of renegotiating status at the local level, but in the interest also of establishing their position in larger debates (often in conflict with rivals *within* the League and *within* the Congress) at the all-India level.<sup>19</sup>

But what is most noteworthy about the violence that shaped the run-up to partition was its widespread departure in kind from earlier forms of violence—a departure rooted in the disjunction between the framework of place and the attempted redefinition of moral community in territorial terms. The Pakistan demand had raised,

<sup>18</sup>In Bihar, for example, class conflicts during the 1940s had sharpened contestations in the countryside. In part, elites made use of the framework of communal competition to defuse agrarian challenges, even as the rhetoric of communal competition appealed at the same time to old, local status divisions based on caste (Damodaran 1995, 169–76).

<sup>19</sup>For a discussion of the “Great Calcutta Killing” of August 1946, see Das 1991, 161–92. Muslim and Hindu leaders alike used the violence to gain leverage in the all-India debates that had critical implications for the fate of Bengal. Joya Chatterji quotes a local leader stating this directly: “Suhrawardy organised the riot ruthlessly to show that . . . [the Muslims] will retain Calcutta. On the Hindu side it was part of the campaign for the partition of Bengal” (Chatterji 1994, 232). There is little doubt that a key part of the audience for the riot was in New Delhi.

at the most fundamental level, the question of the relationship between local community and a larger moral collectivity. Yet once the Pakistan idea was fixed onto a particular piece of territory, the moral meaning of the politics of place was undone. It was not simply that many Hindus and Muslims were left on the wrong sides of the lines that partitioned India's territory. It was rather that local communities had, in a sense, to be symbolically and morally reconstituted (as the relations between individuals and moral symbols were themselves transformed) in order to find a place in the larger territories of which they were now a part. And violence, long an instrument of moral negotiation in the local context, became in many instances the chief instrument by which this process was carried out.

Historical work on the violence of 1946 and 1947 is still too fragmentary to permit clear generalizations on its meaning. But certain patterns are suggestive of the transformations that occurred. From late 1946 there is evidence that violence was often aimed not at renegotiating status and power within the symbolic framework of a local order, but rather at "cleansing" the local community to reground it symbolically in the territorial frameworks promised by partition. This is suggested, for example, in accounts of much of the violence in Noakhali/Tipperā in Bengal in October 1946 when large-scale attempts were made both to force Hindu conversions to Islam, and to drive Hindus from the district. What is noteworthy is that these had a strongly organized character, and were conducted in many ways like a campaign to take control of territory (Das 1991, 192–203). Similar elements characterized the violence against Muslims in October 1946 in Bihar.

Such patterns were clearest, however, in the violence that swept the Punjab, beginning in March 1947 after the resignation of the intercommunal, Unionist-led Khizr Hyat Khan Tiwana ministry, but reaching its horrific pinnacle in August 1947 at the time of partition. As Swarna Aiyar has noted, much of this violence was carried out with "systematic organisation" and a "high degree of planning." "The violence at this time was not so much a matter of 'crowds' or 'collective action'," as it was of "campaigns conducted in a military style." A prominent reason for this, Aiyar argues, was the "highly militarised nature" of Punjabi society, the result of decades of extremely heavy army recruiting (Aiyar 1995, 25, 27). But the patterns of violence were shaped by more than the simple presence of a large pool of demobilized soldiers in the Punjab. If we assume that the organized bands of Muslims and Sikhs that perpetrated a major part of the slaughter operated with some sense of legitimacy, then their wielding of violence (itself a sign, after all, of state authority<sup>20</sup>) can perhaps be read as an attempt, through violence, to lay moral claim to the new territories carved out by partition.

Purificatory violence in a sense symbolically sealed the relationship between territory and a new vision of moral community that was promised by the partition decision. The widespread rape and abduction of women may also have had roots, at least in part, in this phenomenon. As Andrew Major observes in describing this violence, "in situations of civil war, where nearly every man is a soldier fighting for his homeland, women can come to be seen as 'territory' to be 'occupied'" (Major 1995, 60). Forms of violence against women were of course too varied and awful to be easily categorized, particularly since, as Urvashi Butalia notes, women were often viewed as repositories of the essential culture and honor of the community (Butalia 1993, WS–16). But what is noteworthy of the partition violence was that it focused not just on

<sup>20</sup>Aiyar notes that many of the demobilized soldiers among the rioters even continued to wear their military uniforms (Aiyar 1995, 32–33).

the humiliation of women as a sign of domination over another community, but on murder, abduction, conversion, and forced migration as signs of the moral appropriation and purification of territory for incorporation into a new state.

This is not to deny, of course, the many continuities between the partition violence and the history of local “public arena” competition, in which symbolic religious idioms provided the framework for the sometimes violent negotiation of status.<sup>21</sup> Nor is it to suggest that the patterns of violence associated with partition were identical across northern India. The scale of violence at the time of partition in Punjab far surpassed that experienced elsewhere. Whatever the distinctive forces shaping this violence (such as the presence of numerous ex-soldiers, or the distinctive position of the Sikhs), one could also argue that the dislocation of place prompted by territorial partition was far more intense in Punjab than elsewhere for reasons relating to the role of regional identity in mediating (or failing to mediate) between the moral politics of territorial partition and local structures of power and community.

Punjab witnessed in 1947 the almost complete collapse of a mediatory political framework previously linking local communities culturally to a sense of regional collectivity. If there was a provincial “party of the soil” in the Punjab before partition, grounding local communities and their leaders in a provincial vision of territorial collectivity, it was the Unionist Party. Openly “Punjabi” in its cultural (if not linguistic) orientation, the Unionist Party had also seen itself as the provincial protector of local and “tribal” networks of identity and influence. But the Unionist Party—and the principles it stood for—were anathematized by the Muslim League in the mid-1940s, and Punjabi identity (including the regional “tribal” and *biradari* associations that helped to produce it) discredited as yet another form of amoral particularism (Gilmartin 1994). Defeated by the League in the 1946 elections, the Unionist Party’s collapse in early 1947 (after a brief period of coalition rule) marked *directly* the start of partition-era violence in the province. Unmediated by regional identity (that might have defined a moral frame within which Muslims and Sikhs could have renegotiated their positions), the symbolic reconstitution of the bonds between local hierarchies and new territorial identities in the Punjab took particularly violent form.

In Bengal, on the other hand, the situation in 1947 was somewhat different. The territorial partition of Bengal also implied, of course, a moral reconstitution of the relationship between territory and community, with all the potential for violence that that implied. But facing no adversary such as the Unionists in 1946, the Muslim League in Bengal did not define itself in cultural opposition to the politics of regional identity in quite the same way as in Punjab. In the years after 1943 the Bengal Muslim League had absorbed not only the social base, but also much of the ideological orientation of the old Krishak Proja Party. The concept of Pakistan as an overarching moral and national community was thus far more readily linked in Bengal to a

<sup>21</sup>One continuity lay in the power of “riot time” to shape, in Turnerian terms, a direct identification between the individual and a larger moral community, transcending the sociology of local structure. The local forms of “*communitas*” often associated with communal riots (which arose precisely because one’s very survival in a riot hinged not on any narrow sociological attributes but on identification with a large religious category) were in some respects activated across large areas (see Kakar 1996). As Swarna Aiyar notes, in 1947 one can use the categories “Hindu,” “Sikh,” and “Muslim” in describing the partition violence, “not because intra-community divisions did not exist, but because in moments of violence during the course of the partition massacres each community perceived itself and was perceived by others as being homogenous” (Aiyar 1995, 17).

simultaneous recognition of regional identity as an ongoing frame for the definition of local communities and the particularities of place. This was a frame closely associated also with the interests of the Bengali agricultural community.<sup>22</sup> These associations probably shaped the more limited scale of violence in 1947. To what degree they were a product primarily of distinctive structures of Bengali provincial party politics, and to what degree a product of cultural influences that had, in Bengal far more than Punjab, historically linked an image of Islamic moral community to the soil, is an open question. A close comparative study of the popular rhetoric of the Muslim League in Punjab and Bengal, and of the popular meanings attached to Pakistan, might help to elucidate this.<sup>23</sup>

But whatever the regional differences between Punjab and Bengal in patterns of violence, there were commonalities of form that also marked much of the partition-era violence all across north India. If less dramatic than Punjab's violence in August 1947, Bengal's violence during the partition era was also unprecedented. And in both Punjab and Bengal, as in many other parts of north India as well, the psychological impact of the violence associated with partition was profound.

Indeed, if the violence of 1947 was in many areas a marker of the collapse of the connection between moral order and place that had defined Muslim politics in the years leading to the Pakistan demand, partition-era violence also represented a critical instrument through which the territorial transformation of the meaning of Pakistan was impressed onto popular consciousness. The very horror of the violence of 1946–47 demonstrated graphically that the connection between religious community and fixed territorial boundaries *mattered*.<sup>24</sup> Nothing dramatized the connection between individual Muslim identity and the new Pakistan state more clearly than the connections established in these years between boundaries and physical survival. Just as particularly severe communal riots had sometimes led to increasing residential segregation in “mini-Pakistans” in the 1930s, the severity of the violence in 1946–47 burned into popular consciousness the importance of boundaries mapped on the land.

Though the symbolic meanings attached to the new boundaries no doubt varied from region to region, the potential symbolic power of these new boundaries in the Punjab at least was suggested by the recollections of one Muslim refugee from Jullundur district in eastern Punjab about her feelings on reaching the Pakistan

<sup>22</sup>Harun-or-Rashid 1987, 344; Hashmi 1992. Harun-or-Rashid argues, by implication, that the populist economic orientation of the Bengal Muslim League, under the influence of Abul Hashem in the 1940s, was linked to the assertion of a distinctive Bengali agricultural identity. The slogan “*dal-bhat*” called forth an image of well-being linked to productive rice agriculture, and also, as some authors have argued, to a distinctively Bengali Muslim identity linked to the soil. For historical and anthropological background on this, see Eaton 1993 and Thorp 1978. This might be contrasted with Punjab, where the provincial Muslim League also offered an increasingly progressive and propeasant economic program in the mid-1940s, but where this program (which was offered in opposition to the proagriculturist, if largely landlord-led, Unionist Party) had far less resonance with a distinctively Punjabi agricultural identity.

<sup>23</sup>It would be interesting, for example, to know whether the term *desb* was used by the Bengal Muslim League in 1946 and 1947 in its evocation of Pakistan as a nation. In Bengali, as John Thorp has noted, it is a term redolent simultaneously of local identity, regional identity, and territorial nationhood (Thorp 1978, 78).

<sup>24</sup>This was of course more dramatically the case in Punjab, but that it was true in Bengal as well is suggested by Suranjan Das's observation that the idea of territorial partition only began to be taken seriously in Bengal after the violence of August 1946 in Calcutta and of October 1946 in Noakhali/Tippera (Das 1991, 213).

border. After witnessing the murders of many members of her family, the connection of flag, territory, and Muslim identity took on a meaning that they could not possibly have had previously: "At last, somehow or other, after crossing the sea of fire and blood, we stopped on the lovely land of Pakistan. The slogans 'Long live Pakistan', 'Long live Islam', echoed from every corner. . . . I had lost everything, forty people of our (extended) family were martyred, but the happiness I found when I saw the Pakistani flag flying at the Pakistan border, is still living in every cell of my body." Such recollections, recorded many years after the fact, may themselves have been shaped to fit the new meanings appropriate to Pakistan as a new, territorial nation-state. But they nevertheless suggest also the critical role of violence and migration in this transformative process (quoted in Talbot 1996, 200).

## Conclusion

No historian, of course, can ever capture all the personal meanings attached to a cataclysm such as the partition of India in 1947. But to admit this is not to deny the importance of the attempt to construct a historical narrative that can put the event in a longer historical context. Caught in the violence of 1947, many viewed the partition almost as a calamity of nature. But an examination of the events of partition in fact points us toward the critical ways that the structures of high politics and of everyday life in India were intimately related. The tensions between India's diversity and divisions on the one hand, and the search for moral unity on the other, shaped the dynamics of the demand for Pakistan and the movement toward partition. Whatever the role of the colonial state in fixing and defining communities, the construction of community in India had long hinged on processes that simultaneously constructed both particularistic identities and participation in larger moral communities. These processes had played out repeatedly at the local and regional levels in India. With the transformations of nineteenth- and twentieth-century politics, they shaped also the politics of the public realm in India, where the demand for Pakistan was hatched and debated. Yet, it was as a territorial nation-state that the idea reached fruition, a result that suggested the power of global processes in Indian politics. With all its violence, partition dramatized, ironically, both the tenuousness and, ultimately, the power of the idea of the territorial nation-state in South Asia.

Though historians can argue whether it was Nehru or Jinnah who insisted, finally, on the territorial resolution of the Pakistan demand, it is important that for *both* India and Pakistan, it was partition, far more than independence from Britain, that irrevocably fixed the territorial definition of the nation-state as the colonial era ended. Territoriality implied for both Nehru and Jinnah a particular notion of citizenship, rooted not in embedded community, but in the relation of the individual to the state, a concept that Jinnah emphasized strongly immediately before partition in speaking to the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. Appealing directly to the model of England, Jinnah declared that Pakistan should be a state in which everyone, "no matter to what community he belongs, . . . no matter what is his colour, caste or creed, is first, second and last a citizen of this State with equal rights, privileges and obligations. . . ." <sup>25</sup> As

<sup>25</sup>Jinnah held up the history of England as an international model of the evolutionary transcendence of religious sectarianism in the name of equal citizenship in the nation. "Now, I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state" (Ahmad 1947, 399–405).

an ideal, this, of course, implied also a distinctive relationship of the state to the public realm. As an arena of political and cultural contestation among citizens, the public realm was by definition bounded by the territorial contours of the nation-state itself. In the case of Pakistan, the state itself defined symbolically the clearly Muslim character of this public realm. But it remained, theoretically, an arena in which equal citizens could engage in open political and cultural debate, redefining their own particularistic class, interest-based, and cultural identities, even as they redefined *by the same process* the culture of the nation. “The idea was that we should have a State in which we could live and breathe as free men,” Jinnah declared, “and which we could develop according to our own lights and culture and where principles of Islamic justice could find free play” (Ahmad 1947, 415).

But, as the Pakistan movement had itself illustrated, the practical ambiguities in the new definition of the nation-state were many. While the violence of 1947 had given powerful meaning to the territorial Pakistan state as a symbol of moral community, the historical backdrop to partition suggested the ambiguities in the process. Whatever the disruptions accompanying partition, those dense networks of interrelationships that defined the particularities of place continued to be the vessels through which most Indians and Pakistanis alike understood the meaning of participation in larger moral communities. It is perhaps in this context that we can interpret the efforts of the Indian and Pakistani states to cope with the violent disruptions of partition by symbolically reemphasizing, in their policies toward the recovery of abducted women for example, the morality of patriarchal and familial authority. In stressing the gendering of authority, the new nation-states defined their own claims to moral authority in a language that carried powerful resonance in the competition for status and honor at the most local level.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, early literature about the partition experience often sought to portray the disruptions surrounding partition as the antithesis of an “authentic” world of community rooted in the reciprocities of local life—a world whose idealized social harmony could be reclaimed through memory as a foundation for the cultures of new nation-states.<sup>27</sup>

But most critical to the histories of the new nation-states was the reconstitution of the public realm as an arena *both* for the cultural production of the individual citizen and for competition among particularisms. Though the complexities of Pakistan’s history since 1947 preclude easy generalizations, one can see in Pakistan’s history the playing out of many of the contradictions embodied in the territorial

<sup>26</sup>Menon and Bhasin 1998. The emphasis on gender of course also created tension in the meaning of individual citizenship. As Ayesha Jalal has argued with respect to Pakistan, attitudes toward the “recovery” of women after partition were also contradictory. Though state support for the rehabilitation of abducted women symbolized the state’s defining commitment to Islamic morality in terms linked to the authority of the family, it also highlighted the failure of the effective exercise of family control over women at partition, thus potentially calling into question the principles of gender hierarchy on which authority rested. The Pakistan state, she argues, was in fact less forthcoming in supporting “recovery” than that in India (Jalal 1991, 87–88).

<sup>27</sup>A good example of such literature is Khushwant Singh’s novel, *Train to Pakistan*, which presents a prepartition world of local social harmony (if not of communal equality), in which the meaning of religious community is intimately tied to local life. Partition is portrayed as a product of outside influences that disrupt this seemingly more authentic Indian world. For an analysis of the ways that partition literature in India often lyrically invoked such social harmony, largely in order to define a conservative, while still “modern,” vision of the Indian nation, see Tharu 1994. For the politics of this nostalgia in partition memories, see also Chakrabarty 1995.



transformation of the Pakistan demand. While Pakistan had stood during the 1940s as a symbol of moral order, transcending the divisions among Muslims, the Pakistan state that emerged in 1947 generally saw its task not as one of integrating diversity, but rather one of imprinting its authority onto a *new* and *intractable* territory. The elites who dominated the new state came quickly to mistrust the particularisms of Pakistani society as a threat to the state's own moral sovereignty. The public realm of print and public action was in fact a limited one in much of Pakistan, and the *sharif* elites who migrated questioned the local and regional forms of moral community that were enacted in much of Bengal and the Indus Basin (Waseem 1997). Punjabi urban elites generally mirrored these attitudes in their view of Pakistan's "illiterate" rural Muslim majority. Additionally, landlords in Sind and Punjab had little interest in expanding a public realm that might threaten their own local power. Linked together, these elites set the new state's course.<sup>28</sup> Instead of defining a framework of local and regional arenas for local contestation linked to the framework of the nation, they repeatedly sought to limit the operation of such arenas, seeking legitimation independently of their connections to Pakistani society, either by relying on the military, with its external sources of support and sometime "developmentalist" ideology, or by appealing to the authority of the Islamic textual tradition. While the Pakistan state defined symbolically the moral community of the Pakistan nation, it thus tended to do so not in the interest of giving moral grounding to an expanding public realm, but rather in shaping the state as an *alternative* to that realm.

In the wake of partition, such contradictions were less immediately evident in India. In Nehru's India, far more than in Pakistan, a commitment to the material betterment of society and to "development" defined the theoretical nexus linking the state and the individual citizen. At the same time, the processes of electoral democracy, long attenuated in Pakistan, defined a political framework in which the particularities of local status and precedence were expressed within a structural framework linked directly to the policy of the "developmental" state. Drawing confidence from the structure of its own patronage organization, the Congress supported the emergence of a public realm in which local and regional arenas of cultural contestation served at the same time to define particularities of cultural identity and to shape a sense of national purpose. The linguistic reorganization of the states, a sharp contrast to policy in Pakistan, suggested this clearly.

But the moral definition of the public realm nevertheless remained in India also a matter of contestation. Direct attempts by the state to reconcile the moral power of particularistic forms of community with the operation of individual citizenship were not without serious contradictions.<sup>29</sup> Faced with increasing challenges in the 1970s

<sup>28</sup>The importance of the provincial partitions of Punjab and Bengal should also be noted here, for these, by disrupting the structures by which local power had been integrated into provincial politics, seriously undercut the possibility of the emergence of provincial realms that simultaneously expressed distinct provincial identities and identification with Pakistan. This seriously undermined the ability of provincial elites to mobilize provincial identities and at the same time to exert legitimate influence in Pakistan's politics.

<sup>29</sup>Partha Chatterjee has charted the importance of these contradictions in shaping India's ideology of planning and development (Chatterjee 1993, 200–19). One aspect of this has been the state's policy of job reservations and special treatment in matters of personal law for legal categories of protected individuals (such as scheduled castes, OBCs, and Muslims). This policy's legalistic form (operating on the individual as the locus of identity) aimed to reconcile individual citizenship with particularistic identities. But it has nevertheless sparked heated debate on the state's ability to transcend particularism in the name of an ideology of territorial citizenship.

and 1980s to the state's Nehruvian "development" ideology, the public realm was marked by increasing resort in the 1980s and 1990s to the competitive language of moral self-definition. Hindu nationalists attempted to morally redefine the public realm itself as a site, independent of the state, that could transcend particularism and express symbolically a moral collectivity. Widespread communal violence in the 1980s and 1990s suggested the powerful connections between this vision of the public realm and ongoing local negotiations for status and power, rooted in the particularities of place. How much this movement owed to the history of partition itself at the nation-state's founding moment is an open question. But, as in the time of the Pakistan movement, Hindu nationalism has been shaped by deep and ongoing fears of social instability and internal division. "Identity," Sudhir Kakar notes, "is not an achievement but a process constantly threatened with rupture by forces from within and without" (Kakar 1996, 158). Fear of division has been compounded by the global reach of the realm of Indian cultural contestation. And in the public realm the appeal to the language of moral unity has itself provoked, as it did during the Pakistan movement, its own division and controversy.

The tension between the operation of a wide range of particularistic identities and the appeal to a larger moral unity has thus nowhere been fully resolved by partition. But the grounding of partition in a longer narrative context is critical to the telling of this ongoing story. Despite the power of the territorial nation-state in both India and Pakistan, there are no "national" communities in South Asia, "imagined" or otherwise, that do not continue to feed both on the reinforcing relationships between particularistic identities and the moral order of the whole, and on the tensions between them. These continue to be played out at the nexus between high politics and everyday life. If partition is not to be viewed as the end of South Asia's history, after which only the histories of separate nation-states have mattered, then historians must continue the search for a narrative of partition that defines it not just as a product of a deal between the Congress, the British, and the Muslim League, but as a key moment in a much longer and ongoing history linking the state and the arenas of everyday conflict.

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