

Origins

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Few countries have emerged with as many disadvantages as Pakistan. It was divided by over 1000 miles of India; it had to cope with eight million refugees; there was no integrated economy; transport, communications and trade had been thoroughly disrupted by Partition; raw materials were separated from manufacturers, suppliers from customers, hinterlands from ports. There was little homogeneity among the people. They spoke Bengali, Punjabi, Sindhi, Urdu, Pushtu and Baluchi, and had little history of working together; history was more likely to confirm their differences, such as superior attitudes adopted by people of north-western India towards others, or the nascent nationalisms of Sindhis and Pathans. State security seemed constantly in danger. There was Kashmir; there was the hostility of many Indians to the existence of Pakistan; there was a strategic position of great potential weakness. There was no government machine accustomed to ruling the country as a unit, merely a set of provincial governments which had traditionally looked to Delhi. There was no great nationalist party, no equivalent of the Indian National Congress, firmly rooted in each province, organized down to town and village level, long involved in local causes, and manned by politicians with much experience

both in reconciling differences and in subordinating them to their party's higher purpose. Indeed, in all the areas that went to make this new country, there was no sustained adherence of more than a year or two to the Muslim political identity assumed by Pakistan, and even that was often questionable.

In this chapter, we set out to explain the unpropitious birth of Pakistan by developing the following three propositions:

- A. The Muslim political identity in Indian politics was primarily a phenomenon of the minority provinces, in particular, the United Provinces (UP).
- B. The Muslim identity comes to have a significance at the centre of Indian politics in the years 1937-47 which has little to do with the apparent political desires of the Muslims of the majority provinces.
- C. In not one of the majority provinces which came to form Pakistan, except possibly East Bengal, was there well-rooted support for Pakistan in either widespread and positive identification with a Muslim/Pakistan political identity or in the development of political institutions to sustain an identity of this kind.

PROPOSITION A

There is nothing new in the assertion that the Muslim political identity in the subcontinent was a phenomenon of the minority provinces. We shall rehearse the main arguments for it briefly, in order to indicate how strongly rooted Muslim separatist politics were in the fabric of UP, that great region which stretches across the Gangetic heartland from Delhi to Benares.

One significant element was the changing position of the north Indian Muslim service elite from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. In trying to explain how earlier ideologies and institutions contributed to social formations of the British period in India, C.A. Bayly has argued that the commercialization of royal power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries helped to bring about the development of a rooted Muslim service gentry and a unified merchant class. These were distinct social formations, expressing

themselves in different cultural idioms and operating in sharply differentiated economic contexts: one was to become increasingly the sustainer of an Islamic high culture, the other of a Hindu high culture; they were, according to Bayly, the most significant social formations to emerge from the decline of the Mughal empire.

The Islamic service gentry perpetuated its sense of identity and its economic domination through the institution of the rural 'qasbah' town. The largely Hindu merchant class, although formally divided by caste and by function, expressed common interests and values through the organization of markets, systems of credit, and the Hindu and Jain religions, all of which transcended their ascriptive and functional divisions. This class and its culture flourished in market towns which were often known as 'ganjs'. In the eighteenth century these two forms of town grew and prospered along parallel tracks. From the early nineteenth century, however, their fortunes began to diverge: the impact of British rule brought economic decline to the qasbah, while the commercialization of agriculture and the growth of long-distance and local trade brought continuing prosperity to the Hindu ganj¹.

The people of the qasbah and the people of the ganj—these two distinct social formations of Muslim service gentry and Hindu merchant class have much to do with how Muslim and Congress politics developed along different lines in north India. The ideologues and leaders of Muslim separatism, the men of Aligarh College and the All-India Muslim League, were deeply rooted in the qasbah world. Much of the leadership and much of the support for the Congress in northern India came from the ganjs as well as larger trading centres, where an assertive Hindu revivalism, carried into national politics from 1915 by the Hindu Mahasabha, was never far away.

Some of the social and economic reasons for Muslim separatism may be found way back in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. We should not, for instance, in trying to explain the actions of this class, be satisfied just with setting out the increasingly strong threats in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to their good position in government service, important though these were in sustaining their support for Muslim separatism. At the level of the distinctively different worlds of the north Indian qasbah and ganj, there was some material substance in Jinnah's two-nation theory.

A second important element was Muslim revivalism². It has been argued that, in the late nineteenth century, under the pressure of Hindu and Muslim revivalist movements and the need to defend their interests, north Indian Muslims 'broke away' to emphasize what differentiated them from Hindus³. At the back of this argument there seems to be an assumption that Hindus and Muslims belonged to some seamless fabric of Indian society which was at this particular moment beginning to tear apart. At one level there is truth in this; as the 1860s became the 1870s the efforts of Saiyid Ahmad Khan, pre-eminent leader of Muslim revivalism, did shift from working primarily for the interests of a Hindu-Muslim Urdu-speaking elite to working primarily for those of Urdu-speaking Muslims⁴. Moreover, the Aligarh movement, which he launched in the 1870s, was the source of several modern organizations of separate Muslim activity. But to suggest it was only in the late nineteenth century that Muslims began to emphasize what differentiated them from the rest of Indian society, would be to ignore the long history of the Muslim revivalist movement and its separatist tendencies. If there is a real starting point for this revival it may be at the height of Mughal power in the late sixteenth century, when Islamic scholars and mystics, concerned about the compromises made by the Mughals with the Hindu world in which they ruled, began to emphasize the study of the 'Hadiths' and to oppose pantheistic thought⁵. This strand of Indian Islam began to gain significant numbers of supporters in the eighteenth century as Muslims developed strategies to cope with their declining power. It meant an assertive sense of difference from things Indian. As Shah Wali Allah, the outstanding leader of the eighteenth century revival in India, declared: 'We are an Arab people whose fathers have fallen in exile in the country of Hindustan, and Arabic genealogy and Arabic language are our pride'⁶. His nineteenth century successor Saiyid Ahmad Bareilvi declared: 'We must repudiate all those Indian, Persian and Roman customs which are contrary to the Prophet's teaching'⁷.

The early nineteenth century saw a determined attempt to give this revivalist movement a broader base. The feeling was that now that there was no state power to support Islamic revelation in this world, Islamic knowledge must be spread as widely as possible through the Muslim community so that Muslims could know more clearly themselves how to behave as Muslims: the *Quran* and

many other religious works were translated into Urdu, all of which were published large-scale on the recently introduced lithographic printing press; public lectures were introduced to instruct Muslims in correct behaviour; sufi teaching increasingly came to be one long lesson in the practice of the Prophet. At the same time, for many Muslims moved by revivalism, there developed an emphasis on personal responsibility in belief, which engendered intense concern and many bitter quarrels over definitions of correct behaviour. These concerns were entangled with a Perso-Islamic cultural tradition which always tried to live in the Islamic world beyond India, and to refuse anything specifically Indian as a source of literary inspiration. They kept company with the prejudices of the Islamic qasbah gentry class, which liked to stress its origins outside India and the idea that it was to power born. Inevitably, this had the effect of emphasizing the distinctions between the Muslim and the Hindu worlds.

Out of this milieu sprang most of the movements which aimed (and still aim) to give the Indo-Muslim world spirit and direction as it faces the challenges of modern times: the Bareilvis, the Deobandis, the Ahl-i Hadiths, the Jamaati Islami, the Tablighi Jamaatis and the Islamic Modernists. Of these the most important in Indian politics were the Modernists—followers of Saiyid Ahmad Khan, of the Aligarh Movement, of the All-India Muslim League and ultimately of Muhammad Iqbal and Muhammad Ali Jinnah. As Christian Troll has said, the Modernist drive and some of its vision has its roots as deep in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century movements of revival and reform as that of its 'orthodox' opponents, the Deobandis and the Ahl-i Hadiths. The atmosphere of Saiyid Ahmad's family was redolent with the spirit of revival and reform. His life's mission, like that of so many other leaders of revivalist movements, was to find the best way forward for Islam in a world in which Muslims had little power and were threatened by other civilizations. He was a deeply religious man for whom Islam could never be an instrument, only the best path along which men could progress. He used similar techniques as his predecessors in the Wali Allah tradition, going back to the *Quran* and the Hadiths for guidance; he used the same legal principle as they did—'ijtihad'. He may be seen less as leading a Muslim breakaway than as participating in an already established trajectory which he came further to elaborate in ideas, actions and institutions.⁸

A third element in explaining the development of Muslim separatism in northern India concerns political values. Farzana Shaikh has argued that the values which the north Indian Muslim elite derived in large part from their Islamic background, were profoundly opposed to those of Western liberalism. The Muslim concept was distinguished from the Western liberal concept of representation by its emphasis on the community, as opposed to the individual as the prime building block of political society. The Muslim community had been created by God's revelation to man; it was only by living in it that a man's life became significant; it was by doing so that men walked the path towards salvation. Muslims therefore tended to focus on the communal group as the basic unit of representation, rather than the individual who only had rights within the framework of the Muslim community. There was a feeling that only Muslims could represent Muslims, that religion and politics—however secular the light in which the latter were perceived—should not be divided. This was in stark contrast to the Western liberal view, which was coming to have a horror of associating political commitment and religious affiliation. There was also a sense that representative bodies should consist of an evenly balanced arrangement of the ascriptive communal groups which made up society, rather than the relatively fluid associations of individuals that could form majorities which might tyrannize minorities.

Regardless of the weight of factors like the interests of particular Muslim groups or the moulding influences of imperial policies, such political values were bound to make it difficult for Muslims to join the Indian nationalist movement. They were likely to prefer some form of separate representation as opposed to seeing their identity absorbed within a great Indian political community. They were likely to believe that only Muslims could truly represent Muslims, which meant that they found it difficult to imagine that a heterogeneous Indian National Congress could fully represent their interests. Moreover, they were unlikely to feel comfortable with a devolution of power from the British, which, at the all-India level and that of the Muslim minority provinces, promised the subordination of a Muslim minority to a Hindu majority. Ultimately such values are seen as underpinning the Muslim League's two-nation theory and its demand that, although representing a

minority of India's population, it should have equal standing with the Congress at the centre of India's federal political system.⁹

A fourth element concerns the impact of Hindu revivalism and Hindu communalism. If north Indian Muslims chose to emphasize their Muslim identity, it was partly because from the late nineteenth century they were confronted by an increasingly vigorous Hindu revivalism, which made specific demands such as for the abandonment of cow slaughter or imposition of the Devanagari script on the government machine or for conversion of Muslims back to Hinduism. They were faced with constant pressure to raise the values and culture of the *ganj* over those of the *qasbah*. If north Indian Muslims failed to join the Indian nationalist movement in significant numbers, it was because the Congress was frequently associated with Hindu revivalism; it never truly developed a secular ethos; its symbols, its idiom, its inspiration were all Hindu. They knew the meaning of the cult of Shivaji fostered by Bal Gangadhar Tilak. They heard the communal and anti-Muslim language spoken by the Arya Samaj. And, even if some came to have a deep affection for Mahatma Gandhi, many were as suspicious of him as they were doubtful about the value of the forms of behaviour he imposed on the Congress. In the same way, if the All-India Muslim League and the Congress found it increasingly difficult to reach compromises over the future structure of power (they managed to do so in 1916 but could not do so afterwards), it was because of the influence of Hindu communalists in the nationalist movement. Nowhere is this clearer than in the negotiations between League and Congress over the proposals for India's constitutional future enshrined in the Nehru Report of 1928. These proposals ignored several Muslim demands, including separate electorates which they had long enjoyed: the League found the Congress, which was exposed to strong pressure from the Hindu Mahasabha, unwilling to make any concessions. Some historians regard the failure of compromise at this point in the late 1920s as 'the parting of the ways'.¹⁰

A final element is the impact of British imperialism. First there are the assumptions that the British made about Indian society, leading them to see it primarily in terms of religious groupings. In northern India, this meant that they were especially concerned about Muslims who were seen as the displaced ruling class; and a

disaffected one, yet also one of broad significance because of Britain's growing role as a ruler throughout the Muslim world. In consequence, there was delight when Saiyid Ahmad Khan came forward to build bridges between his community and the government; great support was given to his Aligarh College and all the enterprises which stemmed from it. Most important of these was the All-India Muslim League, which demanded separate electorates with special provisions for Muslims in those provinces where they were a minority (on account of their 'political importance'), and which won support for this demand from the British when the franchise for election to the provincial legislative councils was extended in the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909. These aspects of positive discrimination were so important to north Indian Muslims that they were able to make them the price which the Congress had to pay to make a joint proposal for further devolution of power at Lucknow in 1916. Thus, the Muslim political identity, with the support for a time at least of the nationalist movement and the British, was absorbed into the formal development of India's modern political system.¹¹

Secondly, the developing modern political system came of itself to have the effect of sustaining the Muslim identity. One aspect was separate representation for Muslims, with reserved numbers of seats. In the 1920s this helped the British to play the political system so that in large part they could ignore the Congress. So, if in the late 1920s, the Congress seemed to talk with the voice of the Hindu Mahasabha, and saw little point in achieving some compromise with the League over separate representation, it was because the political framework forced it to depend on Hindu communal elements. Another aspect was the way in which the development of British India's multi-level political system brought conflict between Muslim and Hindu to mingle with conflict between provincial and central levels of government. It meant that not just Muslims from provinces where they formed a minority but also Muslims from those where they formed a majority had an interest of a kind in the Muslim identity. In the discussions leading up to the Government of India Act of 1935, a powerful Muslim bloc in the Punjab headed by Fazli Husain came to dominate the Muslim point of view, working for arrangements in the reformed federal system which would give Muslims the possibility of controlling Punjab and Bengal while the British still controlled the centre. In

fact, by means of the Communal Award of 1932, in which the British overcame the failure of the Congress to win agreement from minorities by allocating seats through separate electorates to the different communities in each province, a situation was entrenched in the federal political system by which the most numerous Muslim forces in the land had an interest in either a British centre or a weak centre, while the Congress had an equally powerful interest in a strong and nationalist centre.¹²

All these elements—the social formations of the pre-colonial and colonial periods, the deeply-rooted movement of Muslim revival and reform, political values derived from the Islamic tradition, Hindu revivalism and the British system of political control—came together to make Muslims in UP the generators, developers, and major supporters of the Muslim identity in Indian politics. It is not to be denied that some of these elements can be seen to be at work from time to time in other areas of India, indeed, in the majority provinces themselves. It is important to note, for instance, as we have done, the impact of the new possibilities of the federal system on the Muslim politicians of the Punjab, or the vigour of the Arya Samajists in the towns and cities of the province with their aggressive Hindu consciousness which was so often communal and anti-Muslim. It is also important to note the considerable influence of Muslim revivalism in Bengal in the nineteenth century and the extent to which it came to be expressed in a Muslim self-consciousness in the twentieth. But in no group had these elements worked as deeply or for as long as amongst the Muslims of UP. The results of the 1937 elections reveal the continuing attraction of the Muslim political platform for Muslims in the province. They also reveal the possibilities of the platform in some other Muslim minority provinces. In the Muslim majority provinces, on the other hand, they seemed to offer no hope outside, perhaps, Bengal.

PROPOSITION B

Our next proposition is that the Muslim identity had a significance at the centre of Indian politics in the years 1937–47 which has little

to do with the apparent political desires of the Muslims of the majority provinces.

The 1937 elections were a major setback to those who hoped to use the Muslim platform in Indian politics. In the Punjab, most Muslims were absorbed in the dominant Unionist Party. In Bengal, the League had to play a part in a coalition led by Fazl Huq and his Krishak Praja Party. In Sind, Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah's grouping of independent barons had control. In the NWFP, embarrassment of embarrassments, there was the Congress ministry of Dr. Khan Sahib in command. Moreover in UP, where the League had collaborated with the Congress in fighting the elections, members of the League were told that they must leave their party and join the Congress if they wished to help form the provincial government. There seemed to be little future for the Muslim League. Yet, by 1945, not only was it a firm fixture at the centre of Indian politics, but everyone accepted that it would have to be consulted in any negotiations regarding the future of India. Clearly, it is a matter of importance to know how this crucial change in the standing of the League came about. The following considerations are worthy of notice.

There are the political possibilities opened up by the development of India's federal system after 1935 and by the fact the next devolution of power was to be at the centre. These offered to Muslims from the minority provinces the prospect of being able to compensate for their weakness at the provincial level by developing a significant position at the centre. To be able to make use of the federal possibilities of the system depended on the support of significant Muslim groups in the majority provinces. But, in fact, the party at the centre always had something to bargain with, even if it was only the promise not to interfere in the affairs of the provinces. And it was precisely this which Jinnah in October 1937, when he had absolutely nothing else to offer, bargained with Sikandar Hayat, premier of the Punjab, and Fazl Huq, premier of Bengal, in return for being allowed to represent them at the centre. The future balance of power in such an arrangement was clearly going to depend on political developments at the centre and in the individual provinces. That balance had evidently changed enough in August 1941 for Jinnah to be able to compel Sikandar to resign from the National Defence Council, and in March 1943 for the League to be able to oust Fazl Huq's ministry in Bengal. It is

also evident that once the League's Lahore Resolution of 1940 was established as League policy, with its demand for the establishment of 'Independent States' in the north-eastern and north-western zones of India, and once it was obvious that the League was accepted both by the British and by the Congress as representative of Muslim interests in the Independence negotiations, non-League Muslim politicians in the majority provinces had cause to concentrate their minds.

Then there were the needs of the British. Until September 1939, they had had little time for Jinnah and his League. The Government's declaration of war on Germany on 3 September, however, transformed the situation. A large part of the army was Muslim, much of the war effort was likely to rest on the two Muslim majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal. The following day, the Viceroy invited Jinnah for talks on an equal footing with Gandhi. As the Congress began to demand immediate independence, the Viceroy took to reassuring Jinnah that Muslim interests would be safeguarded in any constitutional change. Within a few months he was urging the League to declare a constructive policy for the future, which was of course presented in the Lahore Resolution. In their August 1940 offer, the British confirmed for the benefit of Muslims that power would not be transferred against the will of any significant element in Indian life. And much the same confirmation was given in the Cripps offer nearly two years later in the clause which, seeming to echo League policy, enabled provinces to opt out of any new constitutional arrangements that might emerge from the independence negotiations.

Throughout the years 1940 to 1945, the British made no public attempt to tease out the contradictions between the League's two-nation theory, which asserted that Hindus and Muslims came from two different civilizations and therefore were two different nations, and the Lahore Resolution, which demanded that 'Independent States' should be constituted from the Muslim majority provinces of the NE and NW, thereby suggesting that Indian Muslims formed not just one nation but two. When in 1944 the governors of Punjab and Bengal urged such a move on the Viceroy, Wavell ignored them, pressing ahead instead with his own plan for an all-India conference at Simla. The result was to confirm, as never before in the eyes of leading Muslims in the majority provinces, the standing of Jinnah and the League. Thus, because the

British found it convenient to take the League seriously, everyone else had to as well—Congressmen, Unionists, Bengalis and so on.

Then there were the errors of judgement of the Congress, most notably its failure to take seriously the threat presented by the League. On the first notable occasion, which was its refusal to include League members in its government in UP in 1937, the Congress can be excused. The League at that stage seemed no more than a party of feudal privilege and place-seekers, who had just badly lost an election and appeared unlikely to carry any political weight in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, this incident has long been seen as a significant moment along the road to Partition; Ayesha Jalal has termed it 'one of the gravest miscalculations by the Congress leadership in its long history'.¹³ Had major League leaders been involved in a UP ministry, their drive to acquire power at the centre may have been diminished. In later miscalculations, the Congress seemed blinded by its struggle with the British to the potential threat from its rival. The resignation of the Congress ministries in November 1939, after Linlithgow rejected the nationalist demand for immediate independence, took place just as the Viceroy was turning increasingly towards Jinnah and the League. The rejection of the Cripps offer in March 1942, because the British refused to allow any political advance at the centre during wartime, meant ignoring the opportunity presented by Cripps to reveal the underlying weaknesses of Jinnah's position. The Quit India movement of August 1942, which had the outcome of landing the Congress leadership and 60,000 of its membership in jail, gave Jinnah and the League a free hand for the duration of the War. Congress attitudes and actions seem calculated to allow the League to develop its base at the centre without challenge and to be in a position to undermine rival Muslim groups in the provinces.

Finally, there was the genius of Jinnah who so ably exploited the opportunities offered by the federal structure, by the British and by the Congress. Few at the time denied Jinnah's unusual capacities as a negotiator and political strategist, nor have many since. As his achievement has come to be studied in detail with the insights of official papers, those of the League and of the man himself, the magnitude of his achievement has only come to grow. Ayesha Jalal has revealed Jinnah's strategy and how he had to work to sustain it: the way, after his great defeat in the elections of 1937,

he used the federal structure to build a position of strength from which he could negotiate with the British and the Congress; the skill he displayed in using the new opportunities provided by the outbreak of World War II; the artful contrivance of the Lahore Resolution as a bargaining counter; and the manner in which its value as such a counter was maintained by his refusal to permit any further definition of the League's demand than had been given at Lahore. Of course, recent scholarship has also hinted that Jinnah's personal agenda was not necessarily the same as that of his followers. There was his desire to get the better of those leaders of the Congress who had slighted him. There was his personal ambition that Muslim claims should be met within a united India. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, whatever Jinnah personally intended, it was crucial to his plans that the Muslim League should be a significant voice at the centre of Indian politics. Without his gifts it is unlikely to have been so.¹⁴

PROPOSITION C

In not one of the majority provinces which came to form Pakistan, except perhaps Bengal, was there well-rooted support for Pakistan, in either widespread positive identification with a Muslim-Pakistan political identity, or in the development of political institutions to sustain an identity of this kind.

As Table 2.1 indicates, the League won a great victory in the elections held in the winter of 1945–46. The events of the months up to Partition in August 1947 are usually held to demonstrate the high level of support which the League had won for Pakistan in the majority provinces. On closer inspection this assumption requires substantial qualification.

NWFP

The League was a late-comer on the Frontier, and never strong. It had failed twice to develop an organization there in 1912 and 1934, and did not succeed in doing so until 1937. The politics of the area,

TABLE 2.1
Seats Won by the Muslim League in the 1945-46 Election

Provinces	Total Muslim seats ^a	Seats won
Bengal	117	110
Punjab	84	75
Sind	33	27
NWFP	36	17
UP	64	53
Bombay	29	29
Madras	28	28
Assam	34	31
Bihar	39	34
Orissa	4	4
Central Provinces	14	13
Total	482	421

Source: Harun-or Rashid, *The Foreshadowing of Bangladesh*, p. 236.

Note: a. Special seats, i.e., those for women, etc., excluded.

which were dominated by Pathans who formed two-fifths of the region's population, tended to follow the lines of factional struggles based on 'taburwali', competition amongst patrilineal cousins. The main lines of division seemed to be between the large Khans, who played key roles in the British system of political control and later came to support the Muslim League, and the smaller Khans, members of the cadet branches of the big families, whose traditional concern was to overthrow their better favoured cousins. The smaller Khan families had a long tradition of cooperation with the Congress, in which they saw an ally in their competition with the large Khans and their British allies. This association, which began in the Khilafat movement, was continued in the alliance between Abdul Ghaffar Khan's Afghan Jirga and the Congress during the civil disobedience movement of 1930, and was taken yet further in the activities of Abdul Ghaffar Khan's Khudai Khidmatgars. From 1937-39 this group formed a Congress government in the province under Dr. Khan Sahib. By this time, it was clear that they were benefiting from the decline in the authority of the large Khans, in part as a result of the economic depression of the 1930s.

The League lost the elections of February 1946 to the Congress. They had been fought against the background of Aurangzeb Khan's League ministry in the province from 1943 to 1946 which had been

a monument of corruption. Large Khans had flocked to it to compensate for their losses under Congress rule; there had been notable partiality in the management of wartime rationing. On the other hand, Dr. Khan Sahib and the Khudai Khidmatgars had spent the latter part of the war in jail. There was no League organization worth the name in the districts of the province. Indeed, the development of such organization was felt likely to threaten vested interests. Provincial committees were in the hands of Aurangzeb Khan's men. During the campaign, League workers from the Punjab and Aligarh had tried to introduce the issue of Hindu domination and to brand the Khudai Khidmatgars as tools of the Hindus. But this had not impressed the Pathans who saw little to worry them in the odd Hindu who came their way. The election, in fact, was fought on the basis of the continuing rivalry between the large and small Khans. That the Congress won 19 out of the 36 seats reserved for Muslims (30 out of 50 overall) was a reflection of the continuing decline in the authority of the large Khans. In many constituencies they had lost to members of cadet branches standing against them.

In the referendum of 17 July 1947 to decide on the future of the NWFP, however, the population voted by a massive majority for inclusion in Pakistan, 289,244 votes to 2,874. It would seem that at the very last moment the people of the Frontier had come to identify with Pakistan. Events of recent months had given them cause for the first time to consider the meaning of developments elsewhere in India. The Cabinet Mission proposals of May 1946, although unsuccessful, brought home the choice before them; it was between joining a Muslim League-dominated Sind and Punjab and a Congress-Hindu-dominated grouping further away—a choice whose reality was rubbed home by Nehru's unfortunate visit to the tribal areas in October 1946. Thoughts were concentrated by news of communal violence elsewhere in India, which the League exploited to win new supporters. They were concentrated further as the League used direct action and communal violence on the Frontier itself. As the pattern of the future became clearer, substantial figures began to defect to the League, among them a former president of the Frontier Congress. By early June 1947, Frontier Muslims knew that Partition was inevitable.

Yet the meaning of this last minute change of heart needs to be read with care. Because of a Congress boycott, only half of those

eligible (50.49 per cent) voted in the referendum, and the turnout was 15 per cent less than in the 1946 elections. The League's success was derived in the main from the temporary subordination of provincial politics to those of the centre from which communal political identities were projected onto the Frontier. It meant no deep-felt adherence to the Pakistan ideal. It reflected no significant organizational development in the region; indeed, the organization of the opposition Frontier Congress was much more fully developed. Moreover, there was the likelihood that the Pakthunistan issue, the vision of a separate Pathan state on the Frontier which the Congress had raised in its opposition to the referendum, would have some life in it once the region's politics again focused primarily on the rivalries of the large Khans and their cadet branches.¹⁵

Sind

In Sind, the Muslim League was at the mercy of the struggle for power and resources amongst various factions of Sindhi landlords. Such factions, by and large, were much more interested in competing with each other than in wider issues of League policy. As in the Frontier province, the fact that Sind politics were primarily those of large landlords owed much to British policy. When the British came to Sind in the 1840s, they found its people firmly in the hands of elites—Mirs, descendants of the Baluchi rulers who preceded them, Saiyids, who claimed descent from thirteenth century migrants to the land, a few native Sindhis, Bhuttos, Sumros etc., plus a substantial group of pirs, the successors of sufi saints. British rule was built on the shoulders of these powerful men. Such was their authority that in the 1940s the League feared it would take years to outflank them and build up political consciousness amongst the ordinary Muslims of the province. Beyond these landed elites there was a wealthy Hindu business and service class, as well as a Muslim business class of Memons, Khojas and Bohras. Members of this last group were amongst the first to be interested in the League. Nevertheless, in the years up to 1937 the organization made little impact upon the area, in which the two great Muslim issues had been the Khilafat movement of the early 1920s, and its demand to be separated from the Bombay Presidency which was eventually achieved in 1937. In the first issue the League was not

involved. In the second it was, but more with the aim of using the issue for the purposes of the minority provinces than out of solidarity with Sind. Ultimately the running was made by the Sindhis themselves through their Sind Azad Conference.

During the years between 1937 and 1946, the League did not do a great deal more to entrench itself in the province. In the 1937 elections it was not able to win a single seat. In the years 1937–40, it concentrated on trying to build up a League party from the Muslim members of the provincial assembly, but by 1940 what seemed a promising edifice was blown apart by factionalism. From 1940 to 1942 the League took part in a coalition government, and then from 1942 to 1946 formed its own government. There are some organizational developments on paper at least; in 1944 the provincial League claimed 547 branches with nearly 180,000 members. But the period was typified by absorption in local issues with scant regard for the requirements of the All-India League. In April 1940, for instance, the provincial League ministers denied almost everything the League stood for by promoting a bill to introduce joint electorates in Sind's local boards. By autumn 1945 the Sind League was split into two with separate organizations and separate office-bearers, one led by the provincial premier, Hidayat-ullah, the other by the president of the League, G.M. Syed. The latter was, moreover, challenging the All-India League's policy directly by talking in terms of self-determination for Sind and by not accepting any outside interference. Such ill-discipline could only be met with expulsion, which took place just before the elections in January 1946. Not surprisingly, the elections were a disaster for the League. Instead of winning the firm League majority which its strategy required, it found that its number of 28 seats (out of 60) was matched by a coalition of Congress and G.M. Syed's supporters, with a few independents holding the balance. It was the governor, Sir Francis Mudie's, decision that the League and not the coalition should form a government.

Little in this suggests well-rooted support in Sind for Pakistan. The politics of the province were those of landlords; outside the few urban areas the people at large voted as their landlords bade them. When stalemate in the Assembly brought fresh elections in December 1946, the struggle was between G.M. Syed on his Sindhi particularist platform and the League. The outcome was firmly in favour of the latter, in part because of the impact of the

Bihar massacres but in the main because major figures in the Syed camp came over to the League. Sind finally made a strong entry into the League camp not because of highly developed League organization, nor because of a widespread attraction to the Pakistan idea, but because of reactions to events elsewhere in India and because of landlords who wished to be on the winning side when Independence came.¹⁶

Punjab

The Punjab was of great importance to the League because of its wealth, its strategic position, and its 55 per cent Muslim majority. Jinnah called it the 'cornerstone of Pakistan'. Yet here the League faced an enormously well-entrenched foe in the Unionist Party. It was a party of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh landlords, one of the most successful outcomes of British attempts to create a system of provincial political control. Its origins lay in determined British attempts from the late nineteenth century to win those with power on the land to their side with low tax demands, land grants in the canal colonies and titles. When their alliances with these men, not to mention stability more generally, came to be threatened by the incursion of urban money into the countryside, the British passed the Alienation of Land Act (1900), the founding charter of the Unionist party, which divided the population into agriculturalist and non-agriculturalist tribes, forbidding the latter to own rural property for any length of time. The principles of this Act were enshrined in the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919, which permitted only members of the 'agricultural tribes' to stand for rural constituencies. The formation of the Unionist party followed quite naturally in 1923, and of course it used its considerable influence in the Punjab assembly further to advance landed interests. During the negotiations over the Government of India Act of 1935, it fought successfully at the centre to protect its interests while Punjab officials made sure that the alliance between Government and the Unionist party could continue happily under provincial autonomy; only a quarter of the new electorate came from the non-agriculturalist tribes. It was hardly surprising that the weak and urban-based Muslim League should have been so humiliated in the elections of 1937, gaining only one of the 85 seats reserved for Muslims.

Between 1937 and 1947 the League's position in relation to the Unionists was transformed. But it was a transformation that took place rather late in the day: in its ultimate element almost too late. At the beginning the Unionists firmly shut the League out of the province by means of the Jinnah-Sikandar pact of October 1937, bringing to an end the League's organizational drive started immediately after the elections. This situation lasted until spring 1944 when Jinnah felt strong enough, in the face of declining Unionist popularity as a result of the problems of wartime administration and of his own all-India status, to repudiate the pact with Sikandar and to expel from the League the current premier, Khizr Hayat Tiwana. The League immediately launched a campaign of organizational development which achieved, by May 1945, 150,000 League members. By the end of this year large numbers of Unionists had defected to the League. Moreover, significant numbers of pirs in particular, those representatives of saints dating from the Chishti revival of the eighteenth century, also declared for the League. The campaign for the 1946 elections saw substantial religious rhetoric for Pakistan used by students and substantial religious persuasion by pirs. The outcome was that the League won 75 out of 86 Muslim seats, winning all 11 urban and 64 out of 75 rural constituencies: the power of the Unionists was broken. Nevertheless, such was the determination of other groups in the Punjab to keep the League out of power that the Unionist rump was able to form a government which stayed in power until it was destroyed by the League's direct action in early March 1947.¹⁷

It would seem, on the face of it, that the growth of the League organization from 1944 and the religious symbolism of Pakistan may have played a significant role in the League's electoral victory of 1946. As far as organization is concerned, however, 150,000 members was no great number in an electorate of nearly three million, even assuming that these numbers were actually entitled to vote and were won in the rural rather than in the urban areas. Moreover, where the League did develop in the countryside it did not represent the growth of an independent political force but rather the growth of one which was entirely dependent on landlord power. For instance, it grew well where landlords put their weight behind it as in Jhelum, Ferozepur and Multan districts. Elsewhere its development might express local factional rivalry as in Shahpur district where two Leagues were formed, or Muzaffargarh where the Unionism of one group automatically drew another into the

League camp, or it might express the political canniness of great families as in the case of the Tiwanas and Daultanas where sons supported the League while fathers led the Unionists.¹⁸

As far as the appeal of religion is concerned, there is no doubting the ambition of the Punjab Muslim League's manifesto of November 1944 to create a new Pakistani society based on a single Islamic identity rather than on divisions between agriculturalists and non-agriculturalists, biradari and non-biradari, town and country etc. There is no doubting the idealism of the Punjab Muslim Students Federation whose members were inspired by Iqbal, some of whom looked towards creating a 'Khilafat-i Pakistan', and who toured the villages of the countryside in the months before the election explaining Pakistan as a religious commitment in the words both of Iqbal and the *Quran*. There is no doubting the fact that many, although not all, of the pirs threw their weight behind the League campaign instructing their disciples that support for Pakistan was a religious requirement. But of these religious appeals only the last was significant, and it was significant because the pirs, often great landlords themselves, were the accepted religious leaders of the rural world. They used an Islamic idiom which was understood, and they did so in a way which supported rather than undermined the rural structure of power.¹⁹

It is clear that the landed structure of power, so long developed and sustained by the British, remained dominant in the Punjab. It is this which channelled the process of League organizational growth. It is this which ensured that the only religious appeal to have real effect in the countryside was one which recognized its constraints. Not surprisingly, the political decisions of landholders rather than the popular will of Punjabi Muslims decided that the League should rise and the Unionists decline. The prime concern of the landholders was that they should continue to have access to state patronage and continue to be able to protect local interests. The rise of the Muslim League at the centre during the War raised doubts about the capacity of the Unionist party to serve these purposes. The breakdown of the Jinnah-Khizr talks in April 1944, which heralded the League's determination to re-enter the Punjab, made these doubts more pressing. By the end of 1944 Unionist defections had led to the emergence in the provincial assembly of a Muslim League party of 27. But what turned a dribble of defections into a torrent was the Simla Conference of June-July 1945;

this left Punjabi politicians in little doubt that high office in future was likely to depend on collaboration with the Muslim League rather than with the British. The Conference, moreover, was decisive not just for many leading Unionists, but also for many pirs, who also changed their allegiance at this time. The conduct of the 1945-46 election campaign suggests that little had changed in the province; all testify to the central role of landed power in deciding how Muslims voted. It was by operating in precisely the same way as the Unionists that the League won its victory in 1946. And this was to be expected because the League was in large part the Unionist party in new guise.²⁰

Bengal

In Bengal the situation was rather different from that in the three provinces of the north-west. Here, in the province's population of 33 million Muslims, nearly 55 per cent of the provincial total and one in three of the Muslim population of India, it is possible to discern a considerable basis for the development of a conscious Muslim identity. There was, for instance, a distinctive social formation to support it. While there was a small Urdu-speaking landed class in the east of the province, represented by families such as that of the Nawabs of Dacca, and while there were mainly small Urdu-speaking business, professional and immigrant-worker groups in Calcutta and the west of the province, the vast majority of the Muslim population were tenants and labourers living in the north and east.

They were a product, in the same way that the Unionist party was of the Land Alienation Act, of British attempts to mould the agrarian economy. In this case the legislation concerned was the Permanent Settlement of Bengal in 1793, which stripped Muslim cultivators of their customary rights, and gave the largely Hindu zamindars proprietary rights to the lands the Muslims tilled. The subsequent development of these Muslim cultivators as a potential class took place because during the nineteenth century they became greatly indebted to Hindu moneylenders and zamindars. Muslim cultivators remained, however, in a 'symbiotic relationship' with their Hindu moneylenders until the long and deep economic depression of the 1930s. This destroyed the capacity of the Hindus

to provide credit, and laid bare the exploitative nature of the relationship, which was forever broken. Thus agrarian relations bred a Muslim class and the central themes of Muslim politics in the 1930s and 1940s were demands for the abolition of the Permanent Settlement and the curbing of zamindari power.²¹

Side by side with this distinctive economic and social formation there had also been an important process of religious change. Nineteenth century Bengal had been a major arena for movements of religious revival and reform; those of Haji Shariat Allah, Titu Mir and Karamat Ali Jaunpuri, all of which had the effect of developing Muslim self-consciousness and of emphasizing more sharply the divide between Muslim and non-Muslim. Rafiuddin Ahmad has noted the continuing impact of these movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in an Islamising of the Muslim Bengali world. Bengali Muslims no longer invoked God as 'Sri Sri Iswar' or as 'Sri Sri Karim' but as 'Allaho Akbar'; they dropped Hindu surnames (Chand, Pal, Dutt) and adopted Muslim ones (Siddiqi, Yusufzai, Qureshi); they stopped giving their newspapers Bengali names and began to give them Arabic or Persian ones; 'Sir,' a Bengali villager told an official, 'only Muslims live in this village. There are no Bengalis here'. Significant religious change intermingled with the process of class and community formation.²²

There is a second area in which Bengal differs from the three provinces of the north-west, and that is in the levels of organization of the League. By 1945, Abul Hashim, the dynamic secretary of the Bengal Provincial Muslim League, claimed to have built up the most effective League organization in India. He had reorganized the district leagues in East Bengal, rubbing out the opposition of local vested interests to their development, and in 1944 recruited over half a million new members, 100,000 in Dacca district alone. At the same time he worked for greater democracy in the central organization of the League, making the working committee a more representative body and giving districts more say in the League Council. By the elections of 1946 the Bengal League seems to have begun to take on the characteristics of a mass movement. Poor peasants and day labourers were involved in the organization; camps were established for training in mass contact; 20,000 students were involved in the election campaign; half a million attended the inaugural meeting of the election campaign in Calcutta; 300,000

members had been recruited in Bakarganj district, the home of the League's most feared opponent, Fazl Huq. So effectively had the League's organization grown that, according to a recent student of its development, 'the name of the Muslim League and its creed of Pakistan reached every household in Bengal'.²³ Whether this was true or not, there is no doubt that the League had a mass character in Bengal.

The League's history in Bengal during the last decade of British rule also sets it apart from the provincial leagues of the north-west; it is a story of much success as an organization. In the 1937 elections it was the most successful Muslim party in the province with 39 out of the 82 Muslim seats contested. From 1937 to 1941 it shared power in Fazl Huq's coalition government, very much at the expense of the chief minister and his Krishak Praja party. Between 1941 to 1943 it succeeded in breaking Huq's attempts to create a cross-communal coalition government which for a time included the Hindu Mahasabha leader, Shyama Prasad Mukerjee, and ruled once more from 1943 to 1945. Over the years from 1941 it had steadily soaked up members of Huq's Krishak Praja party, in part because of Huq's dealings with the Mahasabha but largely because of the message delivered by the Simla Conference. Then, of course, its victory in the 1946 elections was overwhelming, winning 110 out of 117 (special seats, women's etc. . . . excluded) Muslim seats, 95 per cent of the urban Muslim vote and 84 per cent of the rural Muslim vote. As the governor of the province said, the score was 2,013,000 votes polled for Pakistan and only 232,134 . . . against'.²⁴ All the evidence would suggest that developments at the centre were not crucial for the success of the League in Bengal, nor was the trimming of interest groups; indeed, there was real support for Pakistan from below.

This simple conclusion, however, requires rather more careful investigation. It is useful, for instance, to see how the idea of Pakistan was put across. What did Muslim cultivators think they were voting for when they voted for Pakistan? The answer is straightforward. Pakistan for the majority of Muslims, according to the Governor Casey, meant that they and not the Hindus would own the stores and businesses. The economic emphasis in the League's campaign posters speaks for itself; 'Land Belongs to the Plough', 'Labourers Will be Owners', 'Pakistan for Peasants And Labourers'.²⁵ As H.S. Suhrawardy said at a League meeting in Calcutta in December

1945; '[Pakistan] will mean raising the standards of living for the poor, the oppressed and the neglected; more food, wealth, resources, work, better living conditions and more joy and happiness for the common [people]; opportunities for all and the establishment of the reign of truth and justice, of toleration and fairplay'²⁶ Pakistan was no religious ideal, an economic and social revolution. It was supposed to be the bringing to an end of a system of exploitation set up alongside British rule 150 years before.

It is also instructive to examine what many of the Bengal Muslim League leaders thought they were fighting for. There is strong evidence to suggest that what they were really after was to establish an independent greater Bengal in north-eastern India. The Lahore Resolution in referring to the formation of areas in the north-eastern and north-western zones of India which 'should be grouped to constitute Independent States in which the constituent units shall be autonomous and sovereign' gave them good reason to think thus. And it was not many months after the Resolution before Maulana Akram Khan was actually doing so. In 1942, Muslim intellectuals in Calcutta founded the East Pakistan Renaissance Society to promote the idea, and two years later Abul Hashim and H. S. Suhrawardy were known to favour the idea. Indeed, in drafting a manifesto for the Bengal Muslim League in the following year, Hashim was straightforward about it; 'In the Lahore Resolution, I saw my complete independence as a Muslim and as a Bengali'.²⁷ Of course, at the Muslim Legislators Convention in Delhi, April 1946, they appeared to accept, under protest, Jinnah's insistence that the plural 'States' in the Lahore Resolution was a typographical error. But it is arguable that they were waiting their moment, which came in April 1947 when the Bengal Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha began agitation for the Partition of the province. This gave Suhrawardy and Hashim the opening they sought to pursue their long-term aim, and the idea ran for a few weeks with the support of Mahatma Gandhi, of Congressmen Sarat Bose and K.S. Roy, the governor Burrows, and it would seem Jinnah too, until it was crushed on 27 May when the Congress High Command said that it would only agree to a United Bengal if it remained within the Indian Union.²⁸

Partition, in fact, turned the Bengal Muslim League's victory of

1946 into defeat. Instead of the radical middle class Bengali-minded leadership of West Bengal, the Muslim cultivators of East Bengal got the Urdu-speaking landed Nawabs of Dacca, representatives of a new exploitative force in the West. Instead of a United Independent Bengal, the Bengal Muslim League leaders got a 'colonial' East Pakistan in which they had no power base. Such were the bitter ramifications of the federal system.

CONCLUSION

Two great benefits in the political development of new states during the mid-twentieth century were a widely accepted political identity on the symbols of which the leadership were able to draw as society went through the stresses of 'development' and 'nation-building', and a well-rooted political organization, reasonably widely trusted, skilled in the resolution of conflict and able to reach deep into society. Our argument has been concerned to explain how and why the state of Pakistan came to be formed with neither of these benefits. Instead, in the west, the Pakistan state inherited the structures of political control which the British had designed precisely to prevent such an identity developing. Alongside this structure Pakistan also inherited a series of regional identities, notably in the NWFP and Sind, which had developed in the process of resisting it. In the east, the Pakistan state found itself in the position of overlordship once occupied by the Hindus and the British. It was confronted by a people to whom the Pakistan millenium had brought little that they had hoped for and who had the makings of a powerful Bengali regional identity to pose against the Muslim-Islamic one it had assumed.